Nicola Giacomo Ibba

Queer Posthumous Writing: a Comparative Study of E.M.Forster's *Maurice* and Umberto Saba's *Ernesto*

PhD in Comparative Literature
University College London

2015

I, Nicola Giacomo Ibba confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

My thesis is a comparative study of Edward Morgan Forster's *Maurice* (written in 1913-14 and published in 1971) and Umberto Saba's *Ernesto* (written in 1953, left unfinished and published in 1975). This work aims to propose a reading of queerness in relation to their posthumous publication.

Most specifically, I call queer posthumous writing a sub-genre that reflects a specific authorial choice to keep separate the queer text from the rest of the *oeuvre*. I look at the hybrid space occupied by Saba and Forster – between mainstream literary acclamation and exclusion through queerness – to understand how the two authors negotiate their position. The solution both find is to locate the "unpublishable" novels in the future, thus creating a textual afterlife where oeuvre and queer writing can be reunited.
In order to understand this negotiation, I look at how cultural and social discourse on sexuality and queerness were expressed when Forster and Saba were writing. I argue that *Maurice* is political in trying to present a specific model of the homosexual as an "average" man who is unfairly denied his rights by society and thus needs to find an alternative viable way to exist as a subject. In the same way, I study the Italian context, and I analyse the *questione sessuale* after the unification (1861) to see where Saba formed his ideas about sexuality and how he renegotiates them in *Ernesto*, where the focus is not on identity but on sexual activities.

Accordingly, this thesis is a comparative analysis of the novels as much as an investigation of the complex historical, social and cultural milieu that produced them. Primarily informed by queer theory, it proposes a reading of the novels and an historical and cultural account of discourses on sexuality that are necessary to contextualise them and their authors.

Contents

Introduction

In 1972, Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote a review of the first Italian edition of *Maurice* in which he accused Edward Morgan Forster (1879 -1970) of committing a moral error in not publishing the novel during his life and blamed English society for pushing him not to.[1] Pasolini continues by focusing on the body of Alec – the gamekeeper with whom Maurice has a relationship in the second part of the novel – and reads Alec as the embodiment of the working class male and Maurice as a middle class man who is characterized by a distance from the body. He then considers how sex symbolizes the possibility of breaking social conventions and the class system.[2] In his review of Marc Daniel and André Baudry's *Gli Omosessuali* (1971),[3] Pasolini returns to *Maurice* and compares it to Umberto Saba's *Ernesto*[4] – at that time still unpublished – to argue for the political value of a sexual attraction to young boys of a lower social class as a refusal of the bourgeois system of integration and assimilation:

> Il 'momento politico' dell'omosessualità va ricercato altrove, e non importa se ai margini, ai margini estremi della vita pubblica. Ricorrerò all'esempio dell'amore tra Maurice e Alec, nello stupendo romanzo di Forster del 1914 e all'amore tra l'operaio e lo studentino in un altrettanto stupendo (ma inedito) racconto di Saba. Nel primo caso, un uomo dell'alta borghesia inglese, vive, nell'amore del 'corpo' di Alec, che è un servo, un'esperienza eccezionale: la 'conoscenza' dell'altra classe sociale. E cosí, rovesciando i rapporti, l'operaio nello studentello triestino.[5]

> (The 'political moment' of homosexuality needs to be sought elsewhere, even if at the margins, at the extreme margins of public life. I will give the example of the love between Maurice and Alec, in Forster's marvellous novel of 1914 and of the love between a labourer and a young student in Saba's equally marvellous (but unpublished) short story. In the former, an English man of the upper middle-class lives, in the love of the 'body' of Alec, who is a servant, an exceptional experience: 'knowledge' of the other social class. And

[1] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Edward Morgan Forster, *Maurice*", in Walter Siti and Silvia de Laude, eds., *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte,* Milano: Mondadori, 1999, Vol. 2, 1688.
[2] Pasolini, "*Maurice*", 1688.
[3] Marc Daniel and André Baudry, *Gli omosessuali*, Firenze: Vallecchi, 1971.
[4] Umberto Saba (1883–1957) was born Umberto Poli and chose his *nom de plum* Saba in 1910.
[5] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*, Milano: Garzanti, 1975, 261.

in the same way, reversing the roles, the labourer in the young student from Trieste).

The parallel drawn by Pasolini struck me for the contraposition between centrality and marginality, and the relation he establishes between the political value of homosexuality and social order.

Pasolini's comments about Forster's moral error and the body as a means to knowledge resonated in my mind. Despite not being entirely convinced by Pasolini's essentialist eroticization of poverty and the lower class, nevertheless I was intrigued by the comparison between *Maurice* and *Ernesto*, and by the association between the novels and the rejection of the social system. I wondered if, and how, Forster and Saba wanted to offer this mapping of homosexuality as marginal. The dichotomy between the marginal and the central offered by Pasolini was not satisfactory to explain the complexity of the two novels that the authors considered unpublishable, but the link revealed a possible space for research. Were Forster and Saba trying to present a case for sexuality through a political narrative of homosexuality? And, if so, how did they dramatize it in fiction? I soon became interested in investigating the similarities and differences between the two novels which, at first sight, seem easily comparable: both depict two characters who form queer subjectivities, both were written by acclaimed authors, and both were unpublished during their lifetimes.

Both *Maurice* and *Ernesto* are considered canonical novels about same-sex desire,[6] and they have the potential to reveal much about the society in which they were written. Hence my decision to focus mainly on only these two novels and to explore how they are linked to the social and cultural contexts in which they were written and also to explore how they are linked to their respective social and cultural contexts and settings.[7] *Maurice* was written between 1913 and 1914 but published posthumously in 1971, a year after Forster's death. In the meantime, Forster, who had shown the manuscript to specially selected readers, constantly revised the novel occasionally following

[6] Gregory Woods includes both novels in his *A History of Gay Literature*: *The Male Tradition*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. See p 218 and 219 on *Maurice,* and 321 on *Ernesto*.

[7] *Maurice*, written in 1914, is set at the end of the nineteenth century whereas *Ernesto* written in 1953 is set at the end of nineteenth century.

advice by his readers'.[8] Saba wrote *Ernesto* in 1953 and left it unfinished for reasons that, as he explained in numerous letters, were linked to tiredness and his age.

When they started writing these two novels both Forster and Saba were acclaimed authors: Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Howards End* (1910) had been successful, and Saba had published different editions of *Il Canzoniere* (1900-1921)*, Il Canzoniere* (1900-1945). They were public figures and I will argue, this position in society played a role in their decision not to publish two works in which, albeit differently, there are characters that experience same-sex desire. The *oeuvre* for which they were acclaimed, seemed to be threatened by the presence of these queer novels, hence the reluctance about publication. I will investigate how, and to what extent, the presence of same-sex desire is enough to justify the authors' decision and what possibilities for publication Forster and Saba had. An important issue that emerged from the reading of Forster and Saba's letters and diaries was that the intention of not publishing the novels was already present in the writing process.[9] However, they revised their work and developed a very personal attachment to the characters. These two novels meant a great deal to Forster and Saba who found a way to guarantee their existence without allowing them to become a threat to their oeuvre. *Maurice* and *Ernesto*, as I will suggest, form a specific sub-genre that is destined for an afterlife space, a specific writing that by authorial decision will be published only after the authors' death, to be reunited with their oeuvre. The major contribution of my research to the field of Sabian studies and Forster criticism will be precisely the analysis of the relations between queer writing and their existence in this afterlife queer space that Forster and Saba create.

Furthermore, by offering a close reading of the novels through a queer theory approach, I hope to develop the scarce queer readings of Forster and Saba. The representation of sexuality in *Maurice* has often been criticized for

[8] The manuscripts of *Maurice* held at the Archive Centre of King's College, Cambridge give evidence of two major revisions in 1932 and 1959. I will come back to this issue in more detail in chapter 8.

[9] Apart for the published material, I did part of my research in the Modern Archive Centre at King's College, Cambridge where Forster's manuscripts are held. I also consulted Saba's letter held at "Centro di ricerca sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei", University of Pavia.

being too tame and normative. David Halperin found in *Maurice* the precursor of the representation of "the straight-acting and appearing gay male"[10] a concept that queer theory has always criticized for its homophobic implications. I argue for the possibility of considering *Maurice* as a queer novel, as the viable model to live homosexuality is indeed queer in its rejection of social order. It is this queerness that made Forster uncomfortable with publication in life and led him to find the solution of a queer posthumous existence. The criticism of *Ernesto* has focused mainly on its relation with Saba's poetry. However, there are no close readings of the queer sexual acts and activities that *Ernesto* engages with; I wish to show where these readings are.

I have decided to divide this thesis into two parts and to keep a simple specular structure for Forster and Saba in order to give a greater internal cohesion. The first chapter will establish the methodology and the theoretical approach I will use. Chapters two, three and four will primarily deal with *Maurice*, whereas chapters five, six and seven will look at *Ernesto*. Chapter eight consolidates both authors and novels, and draws some conclusions.

Chapter one offers an overview of the main currents of queer theory between its origins and the present. I start with my analysis of the methodologies and theories that I will draw upon in my thesis. I explain the legacy of Michel Foucault for queer theory and my use of his understanding of sexuality as a cultural and social construct. I then move on to explain my use of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's anti-homophobic enquiry and her repositioning of sexuality to understand each aspect of modern society, even those that at first sight might not seem related to sexuality and the intersections between sex/gender/sexuality. I introduce the antisocial thesis in queer theory developed by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman following a more psychoanalytic approach – mainly by Jacques Lacan – and explain its position in comparison with previous theories. I explain how Bersani argues for an opposition between queerness and society, and how Edelman proposes to embrace the death drive and negativity against the imposition of a narrative of futurity by mainstream society. To this rejection of futurity, José Esteban Muñoz replies by positioning

[10] See David Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and other essays on Greek Love*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 9.

queerness in the horizon where the full potentiality of queerness can find its space. I conclude the chapter with an investigation of the specificity of the Italian context in terms of its understanding of sexuality and I argue that only by taking all these differences into account can we appreciate *Ernesto*.

Insisting too much on the specificity of the terms as carrying one single meaning can have the effect of essentializing subjectivities that are in fact less rigid and monolithic. Nevertheless, I also believe that in the field of sex/sexuality/gender no term is neutral and it comes with ideological, political and cultural implications. Therefore, a note on terminology is essential to clarify my use of vocabulary when referring to relations between male individuals of the same sex on which this thesis is focused.

I use the term homosexuality when talking about a specific historical, social and cultural construct and mainly in relation to *Maurice* where Forster uses it to talk about the main character's "condition". The term homosexuality carries a specific connotation that derives from its medicalization at the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the time I use same-sex desire when the main focus of the relation is indeed desire and not sexuality. I use queerness and queer when I want to refer to an aspect of sexuality that does not conform to heterosexuality and heteronormativity, but does not necessary imply desire. "Heteronormative" and "heteronormativity" are used following Michael Warner's theorization in 1991.[11] I refer to the regulatory social and cultural system based on the idea that individuals belong to natural categories of sex, sexuality and gender and that heterosexuality is the model, the only norm from which all other possibilities derive as deviant. Warner develops the notion from Adrienne Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality", by which she means imposition from the political, social and cultural system of heterosexuality as the only viable sexuality for women.[12] Warner combines this theory with Gayle Rubin's analysis of the "sex/gender system",[13] the system in which through a cultural, political and social mechanism everyone is assigned a gender that derives from chromosomal sex. This constitutes the theoretical framework of my thesis.

---

[11] Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet" in *Social Text*, 29 (1991): 3-17.
[12] Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" Women: Sex and Sexuality, *Sign* 5 4, (1980): 631-660.
[13] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex", in Reiter, ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* 157-210.

In chapter two, I look at the origins of sexology in Germany and the way it entered British cultural discourses on same-sex theorisation, focusing on its transformation from one country to another. Then I focus on more cultural and non-sexological debates that did not explicitly refer to same-sex desire, but paved the way for or influenced the understanding of it, especially the debates about Hellenism and the revival of ancient Greece in the Victorian age. I trace the origins of such a development since the early nineteenth century up to the Aesthetic Movement and I consider more closely the works of John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter who were direct influences on Forster, including their reading of Walt Whitman on which they construct an ideal of a homosexual relationship based on comradeship. In the final section of the chapter I conclude by analysing the impact of the Wilde trials in the perception of male-male bonds and same-sex desire.

Chapter three looks at criticism on *Maurice*, trying to trace an evolution based on the development of different literary and cultural studies. I mainly follow a chronological order of publication trying to highlight thematic trends when relevant. After its publication in 1971, I show that some influential critics proposed a heterocentric reading of the novel, focusing on its value compared to Forster's previous works. The early contributions used literary tools of analysis that did not allow a full understanding of *Maurice* and that tended to dismiss it as a piece of minor fiction. Forster studies saw a substantial change in the 1980s when gay studies started to gain some space in academia. Most of the articles and books published under this approach tried to reassess *Maurice* by investigating its political aspect and analyzing the novel as an important contribution to the writing about same-sex desire and homosexuality. I show how the 1990s ushered in new developments in the analysis of *Maurice* and how some of the articles focused on issues of masculinity as forming the way in which Forster portrays homosexuality. In the 1990s, queer theory and its critique of normative categories also corresponded to a new way of approaching the novel and Forster as an author, as well as the complex relation between them. I conclude this chapter by looking at the publications since the late 1990s.

In chapter four, I present my reading of *Maurice* and isolate the most significant episodes of the novel that show how Forster's ideas on same-sex desire and homosexuality were formed and how the ending justifies a queer

reading for its rejection of social order. The first section focuses on how Forster constructs the eponymous character around ordinariness and masculinity in order to claim that homosexuality could be anyone's problem. I argue that Forster wants to present how different subjects understand ways of living same-sex desire and sexuality in a heteronormative society. In *Maurice*, the Hellenic and Platonic model of sexuality is scrutinized through Clive and rejected as a false guide. Finally, I explore the issue of the rejection of class barriers, and the legacy of the concept of comradeship by Carpenter and Symonds in the love affair between Maurice and Alec that Forster presents as the viable alternative to a physical expression of same-sex desire.

The topic of chapter five is the debates about sexuality, sex and homosexuality circulating in Italy after 1861, the year of the unification. I show how different states and kingdoms had distinctive regulations, and how this affected notions of sexuality as well. Because Saba was born and grew up in Trieste when the town was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, I show the legacy of this belonging and the close cultural relation between Trieste and Vienna. Psychoanalysis was widespread in Trieste in the early 1900s and Saba himself was deeply interested in Freud. This interest also included a Freudian theorization of sexuality to which, therefore, part of this chapter is dedicated. I then give an overview of the debates on sexuality during Fascism, and the way in which notions of sexuality, masculinity and virility were forged by it. I conclude by looking at the evolution of these debates after the end of the Second World War, up to when *Ernesto* was written, in 1953.

Chapter six presents the existing critical interpretation of *Ernesto* since its publication in 1975. The majority of studies analysed deal with same-sex desire and issues linked to its non-publication. I follow a chronological order and show how the first publications were principally concerned to connect the novel to Saba's poetry and to trace the autobiographical presence in both. After a long gap in the 1990s, *Ernesto* attracted critical interest again in the 2000s, when a few publications focusing on sexuality and same-sex desire came to light.

In chapter seven I propose my analysis of *Ernesto* as a queer novel and suggest that it is precisely the presence of sexual acts in the eponymous character that makes the novel queer. I investigate the way in which Saba presents difference – of age and of class between Ernesto and the man with

whom he has a sexual affair – as an essential part of the depiction of sexual desire. I also focus on the issue of the active and passive sexual roles in the relationship to explain the legacy of the Greek concept of pederasty. I argue that the novel resists identity categories and that we need to look at sexual acts and activities to appreciate it.

The final chapter eight is focused on the issue of non-publication and draws a conclusion by analyzing together *Ernesto* and *Maurice*. I expand on the relation between Saba and Forster with their queer novels and develop the notion of queer posthumous writing to analyse them. I will draw on the concept of queerness as existing only in the future, in the horizon, as analysed by José Esteban Muñoz.[14] Muñoz proposes the existence of queerness as a possibility on the horizon and I argue that the specific queer space is where Forster and Saba wanted their queer writing to exist.

I explain that this writing is the result of Forster and Saba's negotiations between their oeuvre and their desire to express queerness in writing. Before starting the writing process of *Maurice* and *Ernesto* both Forster and Saba were preoccupied with literary success and how to fit them in their production. Saba left *Ernesto* unfinished and gave different justifications for his inability to complete it and publish it. Forster revised *Maurice* several times between 1914 and 1969 but he had no intention to publish it during his lifetime. I conclude by arguing that Forster and Saba finally took the decision to place their queer novels in a posthumous queer space where they could rejoin their oeuvre.

A final note on quotations and translations. Being a comparative study between English and Italian literature I have kept quotations from Italian in the original whereas all other quotations will be translated into English.

[14] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.

CHAPTER 1
Theoretical approach and methodology

1.1 Introduction

One of the aims of my project is to analyse the issue of sexuality and same-sex desire as portrayed in E. M. Forster's *Maurice* and Umberto Saba's *Ernesto*, and how the discourses on sexuality of their times influenced the writing of both novels. The homophobic environments in which Forster and Saba wrote their works played a significant role in the authors' choice of non-publication thus problematizing the relation between the novels and their authors' lives. The critical approach of queer theory is particularly relevant to this project, as it helps to examine the multifaceted and unstable category of sexuality and to appreciate its essence of overlapping categories of knowledge, as I will explain in detail in the following pages.

Alongside queer theory, my methodology includes sociological and cultural theory, an analysis of sexological discourses and cultural issues such as masculinity and manliness that can help us to understand the intersections between fictional and historical contexts. Dealing with two different contexts such as early twentieth-century England and the Italian Fifties also means that one has to deal with distinctive cultural histories. While the cultural debates on sexuality that started at the end of the nineteenth century in the British context were particularly prolific and part of the public domain,[1] in Italy these debates started later, and they circulated only within restricted circles.[2] Furthermore, Italian historians have paid less attention to the relevance of sexuality in Italian nineteenth-century and twentieth-century cultural history, which has resulted in fewer publications on this subject. The fact that queer theory developed in an Anglo-American context and has not become part of the theoretical methodologies in Italy contributes to the difference between the two contexts of research.

---

[1] See Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford,* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994; Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990. See also Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorian and Ancient Greece*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980; Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment,* London and New York: Cassell, 1994. I will discuss this in chapter 2.

[2] See chapter 5.

In this chapter I will examine the origins and the evolution of queer theory since its birth at the beginning of 1990s, explaining how different theorists have used the term. I will explain my understanding of the main strands of queer theory and will then investigate the legacy of Michel Foucault especially for the first wave of queer theory. After presenting the names credited with queer theory at the beginning, the chapter will look at how it developed into anti-social theory. In the last two sections my attention will turn to more recent evolutions and to the use of queer theory when applied to the Italian context.

1.2 Queer theory/queer theories: origins and evolution

Due to the proliferation of publications on queer theory and of studies that claim to use it in diverse contexts and with varying results, before embarking on any discussion of the theory itself, it is necessary to delimit a space of action and to clarify *which* queer theory I am referring to. Some critics, including Donald E. Hall, have chosen to refer to "theories", in the plural[3] in order to respect the multiplicity of voices that intervened in the theoretical debates about queer. While Hall's choice is comprehensible, I nevertheless think that we can track down common traits or at least a shared approach to analysis in queer theory.

Queer theory as an academic strand of thought[4] arose within post-structuralism, with which it shares a rejection of binary structures. Indebted to the work of, for example, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan, queer theory's analysis seeks to overturn mainstream dichotomies that govern society to reveal the hierarchies that sustain them, and therefore to propose an alternative reading of social, political and cultural understandings of sexuality that dismantle the linear correspondences between gender, sex and sexual desire.

The expression "queer theory" is credited to Teresa de Lauretis, intentionally provoking a scandal in the (academic) audience.[5] Activists had used "queer" as a reaction against the gay and lesbian groups that, in the eighties, had become part of the establishment. Thus the use of "queer" as a

[3] See Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories,* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
[4] It is not my intention in this context to discuss queer activism.
[5] See Wiegman Robyn, "Introduction: Mapping the Lesbian Post-modern", in Laura Doan, ed., *The Lesbian Postmodern,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 1-20; David Halperin, "The Normalizing of Queer Theory", *Journal of Homosexuality* 45 2-4 (2003): 339-343.

theory within the academic field meant a rejection of gay and lesbian studies – as stated by de Lauretis in the same conference – because of their belonging to the white, male, middle-class mainstream.[6] In the words of David Halperin, she aimed to "make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexist underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for "theory" in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure)".[7] De Lauretis also edited a special issue of the journal *differences: A journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* entitled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities",[8] where she expanded on the potential challenge of queer theory to current gay and lesbian studies, especially for the novelty of considering homosexuality as "marginal with regard to a dominant, stable form of sexuality (heterosexuality) against which it would be defined either by opposition or homology".[9] De Lauretis's project was to question the notion of naturalized homosexuality and to underline the problematic intersections of the rubric gay and lesbian – and identity – with race and gender. She was critical of the way in which gay and lesbian identity movements attempted to move from a marginal position to the centre of society therefore perpetrating the domination model which is based on the exclusion of certain groups and individuals.

In 1994 the same journal published an issue with an introduction by Judith Butler[10] – later to be considered one of the founders of queer theory – in which the term "queer" is used throughout the articles, often as a substitute for the category of gay and lesbian,[11] therefore losing the disrupting force de Lauretis had hoped for. As a consequence, de Lauretis decided to reject it as soon as it became a "conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry".[12]

---

[6] Halperin, "Normalizing", 339.
[7] Halperin, "Normalizing", 340.
[8] Teresa de Lauretis, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991): iii-xviii.
[9] de Lauretis, "Queer Theory": iii.
[10] Judith Butler, "More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory", *differences: A journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 6.2–3 (1994): 1.26.
[11] On this account see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996, 128.
[12] de Lauretis, "Queer Theory": iii.

While de Lauretis is credited with the origin of the term "queer theory", the two texts that are considered the foundation of queer theory are Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*,[13] both published in 1990, before the expression came into use. This is because both books challenge the natural and essentialist notion of sexuality and gender, thus questioning – and rejecting – the idea that sexuality, gender and desire are stable categories.

The problematization of the notion of heterosexuality as central to the understanding of supposedly marginal other sexualities, together with the challenge of what Michael Warner in a special issue of *Social Text* published in 1991 calls the "invisible heteronormativity"[14] – the social norms that present heterosexuality as the natural condition and understand gender roles as being natural – are among the main theoretical achievements of the first wave of queer theory in the early nineties. Warner argues that the "effect of this new 'queer theory' wave has been to show in ever more telling detail how pervasive the issues of lesbian and gay struggles have been in modern culture, and how various they have been over time".[15] Warner emphasizes the plurality and the variety of issues linked to sexuality and points out the lack of theoretical underpinning that had characterized lesbian and gay politics. Queers who define themselves as such and who experience any kind of stigmatization are well aware, in Warner's analysis, that such sexual stigmatization overlaps and crosses with other issues such as gender, family, desire, nation, class identity etc., in an everyday life that he understands as queer practice. On these grounds, Warner praises Sedgwick's *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet* for proposing a need for "reconceptualizations, where gay politics would be the starting-point rather than exception, and where it would not be limited to manifestly sex-specific problems".[16] Sedgwick's analysis of how homosociality is created by certain forms of power and domination and by repudiating erotic

[13] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, [1990] 1999; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
[14] Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet", *Social Text* 29, (1991): 3. Warner draws upon Adrienne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality and develops it further. See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", *Sign* 5 4, (1980): 631-660.
[15] Warner, "Fear": 5.
[16] Warner, "Fear": 8.

male bonds, and her insight that an understanding of certain modern issues can only be made through an anti-homophobic inquiry constitute, in Warner's view, Sedgwick's revolutionary project. Sedgwick's use of sexuality as a category to understand cultural and social issues that at first sight do not seem sexuality-related is a desirable operation in Warner's view and has fruitful potential for bringing the same results of feminists' use of gender as a category to understand issues not initially gender-specific.

Judith Butler's understanding of history as the production of discourses, rather than a container of discourses, shifted the focus to the way power systems produce "bodies". She is interested in analysing sexualities – heterosexuality and homosexuality – as the complex intersections of discourses produced in particular historical and cultural contexts by certain systems of power for regulatory purposes. On these grounds in *Gender Trouble* Butler proposed a performative theory of gender in which gender is not an identity and it is certainly not innate or natural. Identity itself as a category is criticized as a cultural fiction and rejected; similarly, gender norms are nothing but regulatory fictions. In this illusionary system we perceive as an ontological being what is in fact a repetition of acts that give us the illusion of stability and natural categories. Sedgwick's proposal to use sexuality as a category to understand the modern world, and Judith Butler's critique and rejection of the heteronormative model of identity, in which gender follows from biological sex, constitute the revolutionary innovation of queer theory.

Another strand of queer theory, generally referred to as the antisocial thesis,[17] and associated with Leo Bersani's and Lee Edelman's works,[18] is a radical position that proposes an alternative path for queers and non-normative sexualities in contrast with heteronormative society. It is primarily informed by psychoanalysis in understanding the complexity of sexuality in terms of psychology rather than as a cultural and social construct.

Other works on queer theory in the 2000s have shown an interest in the use of categories of race or ethnicity to understand social or political legibility,

[17] See also Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean, "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory", *PMLA* 121. 3 (2006): 819-828.
[18] The most influential books are: Leo Bersani, *Homos,* Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995; Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004. I will return to this in 1.4.

and have also interrogated the relation between queer theory and the question of nationality. Since its institutionalization – especially through its presence in syllabi in Western academia – queer theory has been criticized for representing the voice of White Middle Class Western Academic gay male scholars. In 2005, such debates were given a form in the special issue of *Social Text* "What's queer about queer studies now?"[19] in which the editors, David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, speculate about the ability of queer theory to challenge the normalizing mechanism of power in their present time. The collection of essays is a call for a renewed understanding of queer, to reject its assimilation by society and to address the meaning of categories such as democracy, immigration, family, and community in the light of new social crises and nodes of knowledge. Since then, many re-evaluations of queer theory have followed, giving diverse and at times dissonant answers including new perspectives from non-White and non-Western Anglo-American countries. Further diversification seems to have been the response to this call for renovation, together with an understanding of queer theory as not necessarily related to sex or sexuality but as able to investigate other domains of knowledge and culture. Given the specific domain in which queer theory was born – Anglo-American academia via French theory – the question about the national specificity is still at stake. In other words, how can models of same-sex desire and sexuality differ according to national specificity? This is particularly relevant to my work in the Italian context where queer theory seems not to have a solid ground.

Some thinkers have tried to restructure queer theory and propose alternative solutions to the identity model. In 2009, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr,[20] for example, edited a volume that combines queer theory with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory where, according to the spirit of the contributions in the volume, the question of homosexuality is addressed through the notion of becoming. In other words, the emphasis shifts from performativity as the expression of an action to a subject and more an emphasis on the possibility of theory and the understanding of a world beyond the signifier. They

[19] See David Eng, Judith Halberstam and Jose Esteban Muñoz, eds., *What's Queer about Queer Studies Now*?, spec. issue of *Social Text* 23. 3-4 84-85 (2005).
[20] Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr eds., *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

are critical of the Butlerian necessity of the subject to exist and they propose to focus on the act itself. Nigianni and Storr challenge Butler's notion of the subject as linked to language and performativity, and the idea that the subject is formed through repetitions of performative acts. Sexuality could therefore be read as different potentialities. Queer politics according to this reading would not insist on the self but on desires understood as virtual series. In simple terms, the emphasis shifts from identity to desire as the main core of sexuality.

More recent publications on queer theory have tried to make sense of what is at stake and to structure, explain and map works on sexuality in the field of cultural studies. In 2011 Janet Halley and Andrew Parker edited a collection on "after-ness", sex/sexuality linked to queer theory.[21] The volume is an interrogation about what queer theory means and how it could be used as a tool of analysis. It includes diverse responses and essays whose main concern is not necessarily with sex or sexuality but with understanding queer theory as relevant to other cultural domains such as race and ethnicity. Most of the debate about queer theory is precisely posited in these terms: can it be used only to explore domains of sex/gender/sexuality, or should/could it be used to reveal other cultural and social realms? It is also an account on how some scholars who started queer theory have now moved from it or changed their position in the course of the years.

In 2013 the publication of a Routledge reader of queer theory that maps the evolution of queer theory since its birth marks the institutionalization of queer theory as a tool of analysis and at the same time gives an overview of the most influential publications on the subject.[22]

After giving a brief – and therefore limited – overview of queer theory, I want to clarify what is my understanding of it and then present the texts and authors I draw upon in my thesis. Much as I appreciate the importance of using queer theory as a theoretical tool to analyse diverse aspects of modern culture, I do believe that in order to be powerful and productive of meaning (and critical of heteronormative structures) queer theory has to be connected, in one way or

[21] Janet Halley and Andrew Parker eds., *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory,* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.
[22] Donald E. Hall and Annamarie Jagose, with Andrea Bebell and Susan Potter, *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, Abingdon and Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

another, with issues of sex, sexuality or gender. I agree with Carla Freccero when she says that "however generative 'queer' may be […] it isn't, it seems to me, the name for every wrenching that may occur, for every denormativizing project possible"[23] for which there are other names and other tools of analysis. The focus of queer theory should be on the implications of identity as imposed by heteronormativity. Freccero also argues for a "return to questions of subjectivity and desire, to a postqueer theoretical critical analysis of subjectivity that brings together, rather than once again solidifying the divide between psychoanalysis and other analytics and object of study".[24]

This is exactly my perception of queer theory, a combination of queer theories that allow the texts I am analyzing, and their authors, to reveal their understanding of sexuality, sexual desire and their relationship with heteronormative society that defines – or tries to define – the terms and boundaries of sexuality. In the following pages, I will firstly outline the influence of Foucault on the post-structuralist understanding of sexuality and on queer theory, and then focus on other theoretical and critical studies that my research is indebted to.

1.3 Michel Foucault's legacy for queer theory

One of the main influences on queer theory is undoubtedly the work of Michel Foucault, and in particular his *History of Sexuality*,[25] which understands sexuality as a social and cultural construction. Sexuality is therefore strictly connected to the domains of power and knowledge in specific historical and social contexts: sexual categories are not natural categories but social discourses, intended as institutionalized possibilities to talk about certain topics whose terms were set by a relationship between power and knowledge. It is power that determines the transmission of knowledge and the tools, the vehicles and the receivers of this transmission: power is an instrument through which the state exerts its control over the citizen.

Foucault expresses his perplexity about the 'repressive hypothesis' according to which the result of this control has been, since the seventeenth

[23] Carla Freccero, "Queer Times" in Halley and Parker eds., *After Sex?*, 22.
[24] Freccero, "Queer Times", 23.
[25] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1.*

century, an absence of discourses about sex and sexuality and maintains that, in fact, in the eighteenth century:

> there was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex-specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward. Here I am thinking not so much of the probable increase in "illicit" discourses, that is, discourses of infraction that crudely named sex by way of insult or mockery of the new code of decency; the tightening up of the rules of decorum likely did produce, as a countereffect, a valorization and intensification of indecent speech.[26]

Repression is therefore productive of a range of discourses and the perception of sexuality is born from this silencing. At the same time, in what can be seen as a turning point in the way we perceive sex and sexuality, Foucault also reveals the incongruities of a hierarchical binary opposition of "presence versus absence" – of discourses on sex. In other words he questions the idea according to which the repression of sex discourse imposed by the system of power resulted in silencing such discourses. Instead, the eighteenth century is the time when, according to Foucault, there was an intensification of sex discourses with scientific approaches:

> Since the eighteenth century, sex has not ceased to provoke a kind of generalized discursive erethism. And these discourses on sex did not multiply apart from or against power, but in the very space and as the means of its exercise. […]
> Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms that, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized.[27]

The fundamental claim in this quotation is that the discourses on sexuality are not external to the system of power/knowledge: it is the very system that institutionalizes them through a taxonomy of medical, legal and

[26] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1,* 18.
[27] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1*, 33.

psychological discourses. In this context Foucault inserts the birth of the homosexual as a specific individual:

> We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized – Westphal's famous article of 1870 on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth'- less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.[28]

The homosexual becomes a species based on a gender inversion model and is produced, not only recognized, by society. According to Foucault, through a mechanism of power the aim of society is not to suppress homosexuality but rather to give it visibility in order to be able to control it, to diagnose it and therefore to cure it. This same process of medicalization produces the double effect of extending the area of control and, at the same time of opening up spaces for pleasure:

> […] since sexuality was a medical and medicalizable object, one had to try and detect it – as a lesion, a dysfunction, or a symptom – in the depths of the organism, or on the surface of the skin, or among all the signs of behavior. The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. There was undoubtedly an increase in effectiveness and an extension of the domain controlled; but also a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure.[29]

It has been worth quoting Foucault at length because his words clearly explain that sexuality is not a natural given, but a historical and cultural construction, and that categories like homosexuality – as well as heterosexuality – are produced by certain systems of power and knowledge in specific contexts. Furthermore, they bring up another important point relevant for the novels

[28] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1*, 45.
[29] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1*, 44.

studied here, about the central role of modern society with the discourses on sexuality. Given the centrality that Foucault attributes to discursive practices, his claim also implies the importance of understanding other languages and other discourses that shape the domain of knowledge.

I would like to refer to a final important aspect of Foucault's study, his focus on the relationship between 'truth' and 'sex' in the act of confession:

> For us, it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations. The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile […].[30]

Foucault's analysis of the act of confession and the implication of absolution is an essential tool of analysis of the main character's confession of his sexual act with a man to his mother in *Ernesto* to which I will return in chapter seven.

By problematizing the very concept of the stability and singularity of truth, Foucault is once again underlining the discursiveness of such acts that we continue to perceive as stable and unproblematic. Foucault's extensive study of sexuality is taken by queer theory as a starting point, as granted or 'axiomatic', to use Sedgwick's expression.[31] The Foucaldian concept of sexuality as a social and cultural construction and the problematizing of the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality are also a starting point for my methodological approach.

1.4 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and the centrality of the marginal

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* is one of the foundational texts of queer theory, and a fruitful starting point for any investigation of same-sex desire or sexuality. It argues that the definition of homosexual/heterosexual

[30] Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1*, 61-62.
[31] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 3.

has produced, since the late nineteenth century, a proliferation of discourses, often contradictory, that Sedgwick aims to scrutinize and use as a critical tool to understand twentieth-century modern culture. According to Sedgwick it is at the end of the nineteenth century that people were assigned a sexuality, a choice between heterosexuality and homosexuality according to the gender of the object choice. The first contradiction the book raises is:

> between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority (what I refer to as minoritizing view), and seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities (what I refer to as a universalizing view).[32]

In other words, Sedgwick posits the question in terms of its relevance to different people's lives and argues for the necessity to avoid choosing one or the other alternative. She thus underlines the centrality of issues that were then perceived as marginal.

The complex relations between sex, gender and power in a historical period like the end of the nineteenth century with different crises in different aspects of society – nationalism, imperialism – made the definition of sexuality a particularly blurred domain. Sedgwick agrees with Foucault that "Western culture has placed what it calls sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge", and that "it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know."[33] Sexuality becomes, in Sedgwick's reading, a way to shape and a tool to appreciate other languages as well as the way in which we understand. Consequently, what is around the closet, "the relations of the known and unknown, the explicit and the inexplicit around homo/heterosexual definition – have the potential for being revealing, in fact, about speech acts more generally".[34]

---

[32] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, I.
[33] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 3.
[34] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 3.

The metaphor of the closet is particularly relevant to explain the complicated relations between what is said and what is silenced around sexuality, proposing a total rejection of a binary opposition between the act of "coming out", or declaring one's own sexuality, and hiding it. Sedgwick calls for a pluralization of silences, questioning the notion of silence as a stable category. Indeed, one of the book's most effective lessons is the emphasis on the necessity to pluralize categories understood as stable, including ignorance, whose implications inform my research. I will therefore argue that even the silence of non-publication is not simply an act of self-censorship but a more complex choice.

The debt to deconstruction is explicitly admitted by the author insofar as she argues that:

> categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions – heterosexual/homosexual, in this case – actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous subsumption and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A.[35]

In other words, Sedgwick warns against the heteronormative assumption according to which homosexuality is the marginal derivation of the central heterosexuality. In reiterating the centrality of sexuality and the crisis of the definition of hetero/homosexuality, Sedgwick reads all the binarisms constructed in Western modern society as shaped by the matrix of this opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. What she suggests is an anti-homophobic practice. Sedgwick investigates the relations between gender and sexuality claiming that the latter is a domain "virtually impossible to situate on a map delimited by the feminist-defined sex/gender distinction"[36] because the gender of the object choice is not enough to explain all the acts, activities and pleasure.

[35] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 9-10.
[36] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 29.

Drawing on Gayle Rubin's explanation of how feminism cannot be the only theoretical tool to analyse sexuality,[37] Sedgwick problematizes the domain of sexuality, arguing that other axes of knowledge like class and race might be more relevant to determine/understand sexuality. This remark informs my research, in particular in relation to the sexuality of Forster's characters as the class issue seems to constitute a paradigm. Sedgwick questions the notion of the birth of modern homosexuality as presented by Foucault and denies instead that there may be a "defining essence of 'homosexuality' to be *known*".[38] She proposes to historicize the notions under scrutiny because different contexts produce different understandings. She rejects both the narrative of supersession proposed by Foucault's explanation of the birth of homosexuality in 1870 based on gender inversion and the intervening model presented by David Halperin's conceptualization of homosexuality in terms of gender intransitivity, according to which the gender inversion is only a phase that precedes homosexuality.[39] She argues that more than one model coexisted at the same time, a remark that is particularly important for my analysis of the modes in *Maurice* where Forster shows different possibilities of living sexuality and presents only one of them, Maurice's and Alec's, as a positive choice.[40]

Fundamental to *Epistemology* is a renegotiation of the relation between the closet – the metaphorical space around what is said/not said, known/unknown about sexuality – and culture. Sedgwick insists on the importance of secrecy and argues that the epistemology of the closet is a fundamental locus where gay identity and gay culture are constituted. In a rapid process at the end of nineteenth century, knowledge became "conceptually inseparable" [41] from sex, to the extent that knowledge became sexual knowledge.

In this thesis I want to investigate the implications of heteronormative society on the lives of E.M. Forster and Umberto Saba and their negotiations of

---

[37] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex," in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women,* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975, 157-210.
[38] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 44.
[39] See Lee Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and other essays on Greek Love*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
[40] See chapter 4.
[41] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 73.

such implications in their novels. The urgency of offering a model for homosexual identity Forster felt while developing Maurice is strictly connected to the emergence of the taxonomy and categories that Foucault has analysed. Saba is less interested in presenting a model of sexuality, and indeed *Ernesto* does not have a political component promoting one specific model of homosexuality over another, as in the case of *Maurice*. Both novels deal with the closet and the act of confession of some of the characters and this is why Foucault's and Sedgwick's ideas are particularly relevant. I am interested in understanding these acts of disclosure and the reaction of the characters to whom they are delivered.

In *Between Men*, Sedgwick had introduced the notion of homosociality to explain the way in which homosocial bonds between men are organized and the concept is expanded in *Epistemology*.[42] In specific spaces inhabited only by men certain modes of behaving and bonding are regulated, according to Sedgwick, through homophobia in a dynamic that she defines as homosexual panic. Within this domain of bonding, due to the blurred boundaries between social prescriptions and prohibited behaviour – namely homosexuality – "homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement"[43] with the subsequent privileges this condition would socially offer. Institutionalized relationships between men such as friendship and mentorship, regulated in England and North America since the eighteenth century, came with the threat to the security of social privileges that sexual desire would give. In other words, men knew they could lose these privileges had they overstepped the boundaries imposed by society that excluded any desire between men. In order to secure this status, heterosexual men used the mechanism of homosexual panic:

> The result of men's accession to this double bind is, first, the acute *manipulability,* through the fear of one's own "homosexuality," of acculturated men; and second, a reservoir of potential for *violence* caused by the self-ignorance that this regime constitutively enforces.[44]

[42] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
[43] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 185.
[44] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 186.

This is particularly relevant when analyzing spaces such as public schools or colleges where women are denied access and homosocial bonds are lived daily, as in the case of Maurice.

1.5 Antisocial thesis: Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman

As I have already mentioned the "antisocial thesis" in queer theory is primarily associated with Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. In 1995, Bersani published *Homos*, [45] where he investigates the implications of sexual identity and community in the life of gay men. Bersani enquires into the position of gay people in society and asks whether they should be outlaws, posing questions of citizenship and respectability linked to homosexuality. *Homos* elicits the power and the potential strength of homosexuality and its threat to heteronormative society:

> A man being penetrated by a man is certainly not without its subversive potential: nothing is more threatening to the culturally enforced boundaries between men and women than a man participating in the jouissance of real or fantasmatic female sexuality.[46]

Bersani argues that gay identity is imposed by heteronormative society, which also forges the way in which we desire. Desiring is therefore an inherently heterosexual activity, and the place to start from in order to question identity "[s]ince deconstructing an imposed identity will not erase the habit of desire, it might be more profitable to test the resistance of the identity from within the desire".[47]

But what is the specificity of gay desire and how is it related to society? Bersani prefers the notion of "homo-ness" to homosexuality as a more sexual and desire-related concept:

> Perhaps inherent in gay desire is a revolutionary inaptitude for heteroized sociality. This of course means sociality as we know it, and the most politically disruptive aspect of the homo-ness I will be exploring in gay desire is a redefinition of sociality so radical that it

[45] Leo Bersani, *Homos,* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
[46] Bersani, *Homos,* 121-122.
[47] Bersani, *Homos,* 6.

> may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself.[48]

Sexuality is the place where to focus analysis according to Bersani and the aim is the redefinition of the social order. In *Maurice* and *Ernesto* the association between non-normative sexuality and the condition of outlaws is presented or suggested – albeit in different modalities – by Forster and Saba, therefore the analysis offered by Bersani is a useful tool for investigation. I will therefore return to this in chapter four and in chapter seven.

Bersani also dedicates a part of *Homos* to the analysis of sexual acts and activities between two men, raising important issues connected to the cultural and social implications of sexual roles in such relationships. Power and desire, in his view, have complex relations. Looking back to the Greek model of pederasty, Bersani investigates them through the concept of activity and passivity, and phallic penetration, which is relevant for the reading of Ernesto's sexual relationship with an older man. Chapter eight will make use of Bersani's theory to explain these concepts present in *Ernesto*.

Influenced by Bersani in his understanding of sexuality as antisocial, Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*[49] expands the argument and proposes a queer model that is oppositional to social politics. In Edelman's analysis, heteronormativity is embodied in the figure of the "Child as the emblem of futurity's unquestioned value"[50] and he wants to "propose against it the impossible project of a queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such".[51] In this view, politics is the framework in which we experience social reality as a fantasy, as a place where identities are portrayed and perceived as natural and stable.

Drawing on the notion of the Lacanian symbolic – the system in which a speaking subject exists within and interacts with the order of the law – Edelman explains how the subject constantly tries to consolidate with the self in what is an impossible achievement. In this system, the death drive is associated with homosexuality in opposition to the perpetuation of futurity embodied by the

---

[48] Bersani, *Homos,* 7.
[49] Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
[50] Edelman, *No Future*, 4.
[51] Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

Child:

> The drive – more exactly, the death drive – holds a privileged place in this book. As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability.[52]

If the figure of the Child serves to regulate political discourse and to consecrate the image of the collective future, queerness and queer in the social stands for a negative force which prevents – according to Edelman, and rightly so – any social role or prospective of futurity. In other words as queers do not participate in this project of reproduction, they come to symbolize a threat to the social order, a threat that, according to Edelman, queers should embrace:

> the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a Symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself.[53]

To this "compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism"[54] queer opposes the death drive, a form of undoing narrative. Lacan's notion of "jouissance" helps explain Edelman's notion of queerness as a complex mobilization of desire and pleasure and its relationship with the illusion of identity:

> Queerness, therefore, is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather of *embodying* the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder, as Lacan describes it, is jouissance, sometimes translated as "enjoyment": a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law. This passage, toward which the pulsion of the drives continuously impels us, may have the effect, insofar as it gets attached to a particular object or end, of congealing identity around the fantasy of satisfaction or fulfillment by means of that object. At the same time, however, this jouissance dissolves such fetishistic investments, undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name.[55]

---

[52] Edelman, *No Future*, 9.
[53] Edelman, *No Future*, 18.
[54] Edelman, *No Future,* 21.
[55] Edelman, *No Future*, 25.

This long quotation gives the idea of how, in Edelman's queer theory, the Lacanian jouissance is at the base of the comprehension of the relations between a fiction of identity and the impossibility of satisfaction. The complex forces underneath jouissance break the boundaries between conventional structures of society and give the illusion of a stable category of identity built around an object on which it focuses in the hope of wholeness. Jouissance does make connections – or gives the illusion of doing so – and, at the same time, undoes social reality.

What Edelman suggests is a political activism that consists in refusing liberal politics and that queers should embrace. Queers can have a life only through resistance to futurism, not a new form of society that is a fantasy that "reproduce(s) the past, through displacement, in the form of the future".[56]

The queer subject that Edelman calls *sinthomosexual*, a term coined by drawing on the Lacanian notion of *sinthome*, the way in which each subject makes sense of "the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real"[57] and the subsequent possibility to access jouissance, should refuse the narrative of a futurism.

In other words the force of jouissance seems to succumb under the pressure of the narrative of futurism and in order to make it flourish it is necessary to refuse such a narrative. In this light, homosexuality becomes the:

> threat to the logic of thought itself insofar as it figures the availability of an unthinkable jouissance that would put an end to fantasy – and, with it, to futurity – by reducing the assurance of meaning in fantasy's promise of continuity to the meaningless circulation and repetitions of the drive.[58]

Edelman therefore utterly refuses any attempt to "normalize queer sexualities within a logic of meaning that finds realization only in and as the future".[59]

Edelman's antisocial drive and his radical politics based on the opposition to any narrative of identity and gay rights, proposes the celebration

[56] Edelman, *No Future*, 31.
[57] Edelman, *No Future*, 35.
[58] Edelman, *No Future*, 39.
[59] Edelman, *No Future,* 74-75.

of jouissance as the vehicle to queerness, and as the core of the subject.

I will use Edelman's analysis of queerness as opposite to social order when analyzing, in *Maurice*, the relationship between Maurice and Alec and their rejection of a narrative of futurism identified in the novel in following the path of his father, his job, getting married and living what Clive, as I will explain in chapter four. I will also refer to the antisocial thesis of queer theory to interrogate the relationship between the literary texts and the heteronormative environment they were produced in. In the analysis of the relationship between authors and their novels I will argue that both Forster and Saba – although in different specific ways – inhabit a hybrid place between the queer space that collides with futurity as analysed by Edelman and the Symbolic order.

The decision not to publish *Maurice* and *Ernesto* in my reading is an uneasiness to combine the death drive with the urge to adhere to the path of futurity imposed by society. Nevertheless, my argument moves further and I will analyze how both Forster and Saba do reject the Symbolic order that enable them to publish their books as the contribution to society, yet they choose a different option that is a posthumous publication.

1.6 Not here, not now: José Esteban Muñoz's queer futurity

I am indebted to the work of José Esteban Muñoz,[60] and his analysis of queerness as "not yet here"[61] and as a mode of desiring that exists not in the present but in the ideality and in the future. In his views, the present is compared to "a prison house"[62] and therefore "we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds".[63]

What Muñoz claims is that queerness as a potential is projected towards the future, in the horizon where it could have full expression. The book aims to:

[60] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia. The Then and There of Queer Futurity,* New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.
[61] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
[62] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.
[63] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

> describe a modality of queer utopianism that I [Muñoz] locate within an historically specific nexus of cultural production before, around, and slightly after the Stonewall rebellion of 1969.[64]

Yet, it can be useful to explain the choice of Forster and Saba in relation to the non-publication of their works as I will explain further in chapter eight.

Muñoz criticizes the anti-relational approach because while "dismantling an anticritical understanding of queer community, it nonetheless quickly replaced the romance of community with the romance of singularity and negativity".[65] His book is "a polemic that argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity".[66] According to Muñoz, "queerness is always in the horizon"[67] and its value lies in what queerness can be in the future.

Despite Edelman and Muñoz occupying deeply different positions I will make use of both in my thesis. The antisocial approach will be helpful for an understanding of how Forster and Saba inhabited this hybrid space between the antisocial and the symbolic order, and Muñoz's notion of queerness in the horizon will support my analysis of the relation between the authors and *Maurice* and *Ernesto* as queer posthumous writing.

1.7 Outside Anglo-American Academia: queer theory and the national question in the Italian context

The last aspect I want to bring up in this chapter is the relationship between queer theory and the Italian question of nationality, by which I mean the relative use of queer theory in a very specific national context. Models of same-sex desire and sexuality vary in relation to different national contexts, and therefore the use of queer theory can also change considering that it was born and developed in an Anglo-American context. In Italy, queer theory is not an established tool of investigation or practice, and we need to ask questions about the reasons behind this limited presence.

For anyone engaged in research on male homosexuality and same-sex desire in Italian studies, Derek Duncan's *Reading and Writing Italian*

[64] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 3.
[65] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 10
[66] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.
[67] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11.

Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference, is a fundamental source of analysis. [68] Duncan analyzes the public presence of homosexuality in contemporary Italian society and the visibility of gay men and women in Italy, looking for historical reasons behind these specific conditions. The first element we need to take into account is that Italy became a nation only in modern times, in 1861. Before this date, it was divided into separate states, each of which had its own legislation about homosexuality, resulting in different notions of sexuality as well. In certain areas homosexuality was penalized whereas in others it was not even acknowledged. In the twentieth century, Fascism struggled to decide how to tackle homosexuality. The so-called "Codice Rocco", dated 1930, did not criminalize homosexuality, on the implicit assumption that denying such an aberration was the best solution. Cultural history – for example the notion of masculinity as forged by Fascism – shows us how certain imposed models attempted to (re)shape society, gender roles, and sexuality.[69]

Historians, among whom Lorenzo Benadusi and Sandro Bellassai are perhaps the most notable,[70] have started to research these issues and any study of sexuality, sex, and gender that wants to acknowledge a sense of difference and specificity needs to consider these historical elements. Duncan and Benadusi also investigate the misreading of the homosexual body by the law in Italy. In 1936, the Fascist government introduced a battery of legislation that aimed to defend the race and, for the first time after 1870, homosexual acts were criminalized. A prosecutor in Catania, Carlo Molina, found a case of 42 men engaged in same-sex activities and decided to investigate the matter by requesting a medical examination of the anus to check on possible alterations due to penetration. This demonstrates a misreading of the homosexual body as only passively penetrated which is specific to Italy and, as argued by Robert Aldrich, in most Mediterranean countries.[71] This is something that was not

[68] Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference,* Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006.
[69] See chapter 5.8.
[70] See Sandro Bellassai and Maria Malatesta, *Genere e mascolinità. Uno sguardo storico*, Roma: Bulzoni, 2000; Lorenzo Benadusi, *Il nemico dell'uomo nuovo. L'omosessualità nell'esperimento totalitario fascista*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005. Trans. Suzanne Dingee, and Jennifer Pudney. *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.
[71] Robert Aldrich*, The Seduction of the Mediterranean*, *Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

present in the British context as I will discuss in chapter two. The particular geopolitical Italian structure before unification also caused a misreading by upper-class English men who thought of Italian men as more open to the possibility of same-sex relationships because of the absence of any legislation.[72] After being "diagnosed" with homosexuality, Maurice is advised by a hypnotherapist to move to Italy where homosexuality is not punishable.[73] Sexual identity in the Italian context is intertwined with issues of class, economics, and national difference. The opposition between the North and South of Italy comes with another stereotype according to which Southern Italian men have sex with each other to compensate the unavailability of unmarried women and these sexual acts do not question their identity as heterosexual. Mario Mieli presents an explanation of the peculiarity of anal activities in Italy with the concept of "maschio doppio" as the heterosexual man who penetrates another man without feeling challenged in his heterosexuality.[74]

The South would be a sort of a sexual homoerotic paradise: a notion that does complicate the understanding of homosexuality seen, as Duncan suggests, as a "non-transparent category".[75] For this reason paraphrasing Duncan's words we could use the expression "something like homosexuality"[76] in the Italian context to indicate the opacity this category carries. If sexual identity in other contexts is explained thorough the gender of the object choice, in Italy it is more a matter of geopolitics. This is linked also to an attribution of value of the role in sexual acts that assimilates passivity to femininity and, by extension, to homosexuality, whereas activity remains linked to masculinity and heterosexuality even if the subject engages in same-sex sexual acts. The considerations are fundamental for every study of sex/ sexuality/ gender in the Italian context and therefore relevant for my analysis of *Ernesto* and Saba.

---

[72] See for example John Addington Symonds, E.M.Forster, travelled to Italy with the idea that men were keener to have sex with other men. André Gide travelled to Africa and had the same vision about the place, orientalising and charging with sexual fantasy the locals. See Aldrich, *The Seduction,* especially chapter 3, "Englishmen in Southern Europe, p 69-100.

[73] In Forster's earlier novels Italy is represented as the place where desire can flow freely. See *Where Angels Fear to Thread* (1905) especially the relationship between Gino and Philip and *A Room with a View* (1908) where Lucy finds in Italy the place to let her feelings flourish.

[74] Mario Mieli, *Elementi di critica* omosessuale, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002, 129. For an exhaustive analysis of Mieli's book in English see Duncan, *Reading and writing*, 150-153.

[75] See Duncan, *Reading*, 4.

[76] Duncan, *Reading*, 12. I will come back to this concept in chapter 8.

I want now to move to some reflections about gay studies and queer theory in the field of Italian studies. While in the 1980s and 1990s in the Anglo-American context gay studies and queer theory had been giving space to issues linked to gender, sexuality and same-sex desire within academia, in Italy there has been a tendency to avoid these topics. In his 1999 article "The 'white hole' of Italian gay studies",[77] Marco Pustianaz analyses the reasons for the absence of these studies in the specific Italian context, and explains why he prefers the metaphor of the "white hole" over that of the "closet": "the violent dialectics of power that typically produces the awareness of the closet and that of its opposite, the public space of discourse, is typically muted in Italy" (1).

The five reasons he singles out apply, in my view, to the reluctance to accept queer theory too. The first reason is "the widespread culture of homosexual invisibility and its resistance to 'uncloseted gayness'" (1). A relative invisibility surrounds male homosexuality in a society where homosexuality cannot be spoken of overtly, a sort of refusal of using identity names.

The second problem Pustianaz analyzes is a "resistance and failure to theorize a politics of difference". He refers to an Italian lack of politicization in the gay liberation movement that, since the 1970s, has been focusing on homologation rather than resistance. This emphasis on sameness and the fight by activists for equal rights leaves, according to him, no room for queerness and multiplicity. There is no such thing as gay history in the Italian context, and this leads to a difficult relation between political and cultural activism. This means an almost complete absence of gay and lesbian researchers in academia at the time of the article. Another serious issue Pustianaz's analysis points out is the lack of interdisciplinary approaches in Italian academia. Since gay studies require multidisciplinarity, there cannot be space for syllabuses that offers modules on gay studies. This is linked to the fourth point: the lack of an explicit demand for gay studies on the part of students. According to Pustianaz, gay studies need empowerment by gay students, especially because there are no gay student organizations. The final point underlined by the article is the political question of how academic staff are recruited, especially the difficulties for researchers or students interested or working in the field of gay studies.

[77] http://old.www.gay-web.de/fluss/konferenz/pdf/pustianaz.pdf (accessed: 19.09.2011).

Pustianaz wrote this article in 1999 and he spoke about gay and lesbian studies so I want to see how and if the situation has changed since then and if the same analysis can be applied to queer theory. I think the context has slightly improved since Pustianaz's analysis, at least because there is more research on and attention to studies on sexuality, gender and sex. Despite most scholarly work being based in foreign institutions, multidisciplinarity is developing and in the last few years there have been some publications on queer theory. Although it is still not a common tool of analysis in Italian studies there has been a proliferation of interests, conferences and studies that point to a change in direction.

The new attention to the national question I have already mentioned has produced some interesting research in queer theory in the Italian context.

Besides Duncan's book, which I have already mentioned and which I will be using in my work, there are other interventions that are worth mentioning.

One of the first books to explicitly give an account of queer theory in the Italian context is *Queer Italia*,[78] published in 2004. It is a collection of essays that investigate same-sex desire in literature and cinema in the Italian context throughout the centuries and the fact that the publications on the Italian context are written in English is a confirmation of the reluctance of Italian critics to endorse queer theory.

In 2011, the volume *Queer in Europe*,[79] a collection of case studies, examined the notion of Europe in connection with queer, proposing a resistance to the Anglo-American queer theory dominance and focusing on national cultural specificity. Although there is only one chapter dedicated to Italy, written by Luca Malici on queer television,[80] it gives, in my view, an idea of new interests.

Also in 2011, Marco Pustianaz edited a volume in Italian, *Queer in Italia. Differenze in movimento*,[81] which is a collection of interviews with young scholars and individuals involved in any queer practice (intellectual, political,

[78]Gary P. Cestaro ed., *Queer Italia. Same-sex desire in Italian literature and film,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
[79] Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett eds., *Queer in Europe*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011.
[80] Luca Malici, "Queer in Italy: Italian Televisibility and the 'Queerable' Audience", 113-128, in Downing and Gillett, eds., *Queer in Europe*.
[81] Marco Pustianaz, ed., *Queer in Italia. Differenze in movimento,* Pisa: ETS, 2011.

sociological, social etc.). Interviewees are asked questions about the relevance of queer in their lives and their personal and intellectual relationship with queer and queer theory. It is a very interesting overview of current research on queer theory. Almost all of the interviewees raised the issue of the availability of texts and the necessity to go abroad and to read in a foreign language in order to find available books.

The last point I want to mention about the relationship between queer theory and Italian studies is the (near) absence of books on queer theory in translation. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* was translated into Italian only in 2004 and Sedgwick's *Epistemology of Closet* only in 2011.[82]

All these specific elements are what, I think, is profitable to take into account when studying queer theory in the Italian context. We need to use queer theory to interrogate texts, to interpret them from a different perspective in order to stretch the space for investigation. My methodology is a combination of queer theories, an understanding of sexuality and desire as structuring the novels I am studying and the lives of Forster and Saba while negotiating with a heteronormative society. I am interested in how issues of sexuality were shaped in specific historical and cultural moments, as I believe we cannot understand the complexity of these issues otherwise. Susan McCabe, talking about queer identification, argues for a queer historicism that takes into account a mapping of sexual practices but at the same time understands that "sexualities are socially constructed and can take multiple forms".[83] I see my use of queer theory as very close to this definition, but I also add to my investigation an understanding of sexuality that is as much psychological as it is historically and culturally constructed.

[82] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Stanze private. Epistemologia e politica della sessualità,* trans. by Federico Zappino, Roma: Carocci, 2011.
[83] Susan McCabe, "To Be and To Have, The Rise of Queer Historicism" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 11(2005): 119-134.

CHAPTER 2
From homophilia to sexual scandals: debates on sexuality in late nineteenth-century Britain

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will investigate how Forster's understanding of homosexuality is especially informed by the work of John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter. I will argue that Forster renegotiates the debates and transports them into a fictional world, sometimes relying on some of their ideas, and occasionally departing from them and criticising them. In doing so, he presents diverse examples of how the experience of homosexuality can be lived by different characters. In addition to the influence of Symonds and Carpenter, other discourses shaped the debates on same-sex desire in Britain to the extent that the particular context of the nineteenth century is often referred to as "homophile England".[1] Forster is well aware of all such discourses and he uses them as a reference either to accept or reshape them in his own writings. Only by looking at the context in which these debates were formed and developed is it possible to fully understand what was at stake in Forster's presentation of what I believe to be his fictional theorization of homosexuality in writing *Maurice*.

2.2 German sexology and its introduction in Britain

Before focusing on the debates on homosexuality in Britain in the late nineteenth century, I will briefly introduce the first authors who originated and developed sexology in Germany because their work constitutes the main influence on British discourses. I will rely on a recent study by Heike Bauer, which combines the current scholarship on sexology with a particular focus on the important role played by translation in the transmission of ideas on the theorization of sex from the German context into Britain and Joseph Bristow whose study of effeminacy in late Victorian England I find very useful to understand issues of sexuality.[2]

---

[1] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford,* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994, 28.

[2] Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology. Translation of Inversion, 1860-1930*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 and Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoeroticism After 1885,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

While looking at the reasons that made Britain particularly receptive of ideas on sexology and the contribution of women to such narratives, Bauer also makes some important points on the specificity of British society and its cultural domain, which helps us to understand the contextualization of the debates on sexology, or – as she prefers to call it – *scientia sexualis*.[3]

As Joseph Bristow defines it, "sexology initially designated a science that developed an elaborate descriptive system to classify a striking range of sexual types of person […] and forms of sexual desire".[4] The first theorization of sex, alongside a proposed taxonomy of sexualities, took place in Germany as part of a larger project aimed at describing a society in its process of transformation. In other words, as Michel Foucault has argued, it was an instrument through which the State exerted its control over the citizens. Bauer emphasises the close connections between the emergence of sexological ideas and the notions of nation, law and citizenship and she underlines that some of the fundamental contributions to the theorization of male homosexuality are located in the domain of "*anti-governmentality"* insofar as they aim to "resist dominant state ideology". [5]

The German lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-95) is an example of such a resistance as his theorisation of male 'inversion' was born in response to the new ideas of nation and of a unified state of Germany in the 1860s and 70s and as a reaction to the legal system, which criminalized same-sex acts.[6]

Ulrichs created a detailed taxonomy of sexual types, which listed several sexual diversities and, at the same time, created a specific vocabulary based on a terminology borrowed from Plato's *Symposium*. "Uranian love" was the name Ulrichs used to refer to same-sex love, from the Greek god Uranus, and the people who lived this love were called "Urnings". He conceptualized the "invert" – a term which gradually replaced "Urning" – as a third sex in which there was no correspondence between body and soul. His political agenda aimed at

[3] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 8.
[4] Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality,* London: Routledge, 1997, 13.
[5] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 24.
[6] Ulrichs started his career in Hanover where the *Code Napoleon*, which did not record any laws against same-sex acts, was inforce. After the invasion of Prussia, whose legal system listed criminalization of sodomy, he took part in the resistance against such a law. Bauer stresses that sodomy was condemned with imprisonment but also with a possible revocation of the civil rights, hence the close connection between the social body and national body. See Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 18-30. For further readings on Ulrichs see Bristow, *Sexuality*, 19-25.

fighting the criminalization of same-sex acts and he advocated the dissociation of sexual activities from sexuality, body from soul. His famous dictum "anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa" (a woman's soul enclosed in a male body) explains his understanding of same-sex desire in terms of gender inversion and, according to Bauer, "reinforced the non-corporeal qualities of sexuality".[7]

As Bauer suggests, the success of Ulrichs' ideas for the theorization of same-sex desire lies in his use of Greek philosophy, which helped him to propose a binary model based on the idea of "attraction to an opposite pole"[8] – a notion easily understood in a Western cultural domain also because it is endowed with cultural prestige. By borrowing from Greek philosophy Ulrichs was also creating a cultural discourse characterized by a transnational essence and at the same time was refusing the pathological nomenclature of same-sex relationships. If Ulrichs' taxonomy originated in his activism, in the same years other discourses were produced from scientific sources in order to offer a cataloguing of both sexual activities and sexualities. The psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) reflects this scientific investigation in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* published several times with additions and revisions between 1886 and 1902.

Part of the present scholarship agrees in understanding sexology at its origins as an interactive discipline, one that involved a dialogue between patients and doctors,[9] but that was also influenced by the political and social changes of that time. Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing took part in this wide process of shaping a cultural domain, which involved a continuous game of interaction between personal "experience and discourse".[10] Bauer expands this point and analyses how the translation of *Psychopathia Sexualis* into English is revealing of cultural influences and of "the nationally-specific formations of the *scientia sexualis*".[11] She argues that the first English translation by Francis Joseph Rebman of *Psychopathia Sexualis* "anglicised the German text"[12] and she investigates what impact it had on the shaping of cultural debates in Britain

[7] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 26.
[8] Bristow, *Sexuality*, 24.
[9] Bauer mentions other scholars who share this idea, such as Lucy Bland, George Chauncey Jr., Lisa Duggan and Harry Oosterhuis. See Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 31.
[10] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 31.
[11] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 31.
[12] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 31.

about same-sex desire.[13] Bauer interestingly notes that the translator's choices of vocabulary correspond to his plan to adapt the German discourses to the contemporary British context. Thus the English text deploys concepts intrinsically connected to the scientific theories of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory. For example, when the relation between sex and society is analysed, the German text's idea of primitive society's selection of the most beautiful of the opposite sex becomes in English a selection of the 'fittest', echoing Darwin's theory. The concept of fitness was then adapted to serve Imperial purposes and linked to the development of an "imperialist masculine identity of the male subject"[14] and then used to label those who lacked fitness as effeminate and degenerate, especially after Oscar Wilde's trials in 1895.[15]

Another important adaptation of the original text concerns, according to Bauer, the influence of Protestantism, which led the translator to dismiss the sections exploring the bodily aspect of sexuality; while Krafft-Ebing insisted on an analysis of the individual, the English translation was more concerned with community. The discrepancy between the original text and Rebman's translation according to Bauer "reinforces that the emergence of sexology as a scientific discipline was closely tied in to nationally-specific cultural discourses of the time"[16] and underlines the essence of translation as "an authentic cultural production".[17]

My reason for drawing attention to the first German theorists of sexology is to give an account of what was at stake when Symonds and Carpenter started their research and their theorization of same-sex desire in Britain. By following Bauer's idea I want to stress the importance of the transferral of ideas as fundamental to understanding how the British sexological discourses were shaped. Bauer claims that *scientia sexualis* is "shaped as much by literary contributions as it is by the more familiar scientific and political contributions"[18] especially in the case of Britain where the medico-forensic discourses which

[13] She analyses the translation by Francis Joseph Rebman dated 1899 and based upon the tenth edition of the German text. See Bauer, *English Literary Sexology,* 35.
[14] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 36.
[15] Bauer notes for example that the original mention of civilization in general becomes in Rebman's translation a specific reference to the British spirit of colonization.
[16] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 41.
[17] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 42.
[18] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 8.

characterized German theories are somehow replaced by a more literary specificity. British sexology is presented in diverse literary genres such as poetry, biographies and memoirs and, according to current scholarship, it differentiated itself from "Continental sexology" for the absence of medico-forensic perspectives. In other words the framework for the debates on *scientia sexualis* was social and political rather than scientific.

2.3 Homophile Victorian Britain

British sexology is also characterized by a stronger connection to a literary dimension since the key authors – namely John Addington Symonds, Henry Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter – did not receive a scientific education and the corpus of sexological texts they produced comprises different genres, from autobiographical texts to poetry and translations. This specific literary dimension was combined with the Homophile culture of Victorian aestheticism, which has been thoroughly studied, in particular, by Linda Dowling and Richard Dellamora.[19]

In her study Dowling tracks down the roots of the "positive social identity"[20] of homosexuality, made up of a diverse range of cultural and social transformations which occurred in the past, especially in the nineteenth century. Her emphasis is on how the "counterdiscourse" concerning male same-sex desire arose within the context of the University reform carried out in 1850s and 1860s, particularly by Benjamin Jowett, a leading professor at Oxford. According to Dowling, Jowett introduced the works of Plato to the University curriculum and reshaped the use of the institution of tutorials so that they became a vehicle of homosocial bonds. This change had a substantial impact on the formation of what is called "homosociality" in late Victorian Britain. The important achievement of such an innovation has to be read in terms not so much of content – in fact Jowett omitted the sections in the works of Plato that dealt with the institution of *paiderastia* so that they could be closer to the British understanding – but of the impact it had on the intellectuals who developed the debates on sexuality, such as Symonds, and those who shaped the Aesthetic

[19] Dowling, *Hellenism*; Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1990. See also Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
[20] Dowling, *Hellenism*, xiii.

Movement, such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. In other words it gave them the opportunity to use also the "omitted Plato" and his reference to male same-sex desire.[21] As Dowling suggests, the university reform was part of a wider project "to restore and reinvigorate a nation fractured by the effects of laissez-faire capitalism and enervated by the approach of mass democracy".[22]

The anxiety about the threat of dullness linked to modernity also worried Victorian liberal intellectuals – and Utilitarians – such as John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold who, in the 1850s, singled out the power of the energy they found in Hellenism as a possible solution. Since the use of religion proposed by Tractarianism in the 1830s and 1840s had proved to be ineffective for the restoration of society and culture – in fact religion was contributing to the development of the commercial system – Victorian liberals such as Mill asked where to find an effective response to this commercial system, what he called "counterpoise".[23] According to Dowling, Mill argued that industrial modernity was frustrating the individual thus leading to a state of stagnation, the response to which had to be, in his view, a call for individuality. Mill also recorded that the crisis did not lie in the "corruption" of society but rather in its "uniformity". Thus the response was to be found elsewhere, namely in Hellenism, a notion mediated, according to Dowling, through German Hellenism in the works of Winckelmann, Schiller, and others.[24]

As I have mentioned, the debates on Hellenism were closely connected to the ones on education. Richard Jenkyns has shown that the debates on whether to include Greek studies in the school syllabus had started to intensify at the time of the first Utilitarians – such as Matthew Arnold and James Mill – at the beginning of nineteenth century with the result that their presence "remained dominant […] but it was modified".[25] Furthermore over the years, Jenkyns continues, the Greek presence intertwined with Christianity in school and outside school to the extent that "a sense of the close alliance between

---

[21] On the omission Jowett operated in the introduction of Plato into the Academic syllabus see also Frank Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, 424 and ff. Turner claims that it was Pater who first highlighted the aspect of sensuality in Plato whereas previous readers had been uncomfortable to acknowledge any physical component in his works, especially the same-sex love.
[22] Dowling, *Hellenism*, 31.
[23] For a full account on Tractarianism see Dowling, *Hellenism*, 36-40.
[24] Dowling, *Hellenism*, 59.
[25] Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorian and Ancient Greece,* Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980, 60 and ff.

Christianity and the study of the classics, strangely but eloquently blended with an awareness of tension between them, runs right through the nineteenth century". [26]

Such tension was theorized by Matthew Arnold, who shared with Mill and other liberals a critical view of present society and analysed the tension in a chapter of his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) dedicated to the opposition of Hellenism and Hebraism.[27] Arnold's book is a collection of articles written in response to the attacks on the "man of culture" as unsuited for political discussion. As Stefan Collini has remarked, Arnold identified the problem of present British society of his time not so much with the Industrial Revolution, but rather with the religious and commercial developments of the early seventeenth century, linking the problem, as Mill had done, to religion.[28] It was Puritanism in his view that caused Victorian society to be torn by religious issues and created a neat separation between state and individual interests. The individualist ideal that society seemed desperately to pursue in both social and economic terms was, according to Arnold, synonymous with a sectarian vision which could produce nothing but cultural weakness. The aim of his critique was therefore to urge British society to reconnect together separate sources of energy and also to open up to ideas coming from other European countries, since another effect of Puritanism was a closure to foreign discourses. His very idea of culture was opposed to Puritan religion and its aim was to contrast the rigidity and individualism typical of his society. Hebraism and Hellenism were linked to Arnold's idea of culture by which he meant, among other things, according to Jenkyns, "the ideal and the achievement of the Greeks".[29] I will focus on Arnold's intervention on the debates on the concept of culture and on how the model he proposes is linked to the ideal of perfection.

---

[26] Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, 72. Jenkyns gives a detailed account on how the studies of ancient Greece and the religion ones intertwined over the decades of the nineteenth century. Tutors and masters of ancient Greek history and culture were often men of the Christian Church and the reliance on ancient Greece also pervaded the Christian language. See especially Chapter IV, 60-86.

[27] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

[28] Stefan Collini, "Preface" in Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy.*

[29] Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, 265. It has been extensively remarked that Arnold's ideas are lacking in coherent theorization, and he gives different definitions of culture and other notions. Jenkyns, Collini, Bristow and Dowling all agree on the lack of a systematic project behind Arnold's theorizations.

Arnold identifies Hebraism and Hellenism respectively with "an energy driving at practice" and "an impulse to know" [30] and sees them as the two forces that govern the world. While Hebraism is characterised by discipline and self-control and Hellenism is linked to intelligence and ideas, they both aim at perfection and their rivalry is not natural but constructed by men over the centuries. Hebraism, whose source is the Bible, is mainly concerned with moral rigour, a "strictness of conscience"; whereas Hellenism, whose source is the ancient Greek philosophers and poets, is concerned with beauty and knowledge, with a "spontaneity of consciousness."[31] The emphasis on practice over ideas was the trouble of British society at the time, according to Arnold, therefore the solution could only come from the "sweetness and light" typical of the Hellenic approach to life, by which Arnold meant an urge to know things in their essence and beauty, "as they really are".[32] In order to support his idea, Arnold draws on Plato and his preference of men of pure knowledge over practical men. The history of humanity becomes in his view an alternation of periods when one force prevails over the other, up to his present time, characterized by a perception of Hebraism as "the *law* of human development" whereas according to Arnold both Hellenism and Hebraism are "*contributions* to human development" [33] Arnold's ideas have to be seen within a larger framework of a society concerned with the relationship between morality and religion, and a process of restructuring a society in all its aspects.

But how is this stance related to sexuality? As Frank Turner has suggested, we have to bear in mind that Arnold's terms are symbolic, so that his:

> Hebrews were not Jews but rather contemporary English Protestant Nonconformists. His Greeks were not ancient Hellenes but a version

[30] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy,* 126.
[31] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 128.
[32] Jenkyns remarks how Arnold's understanding of Greek ideal as a search for perfection was based on misconceptions. Furthermore he claims that: "The words Hellenism and Hebraism may be understood either symbolically or historically. In the first sense they denote two types of human impulse which may be found […] at any time and in any society; in the second sense they denote the character of the Greek and Jewish cultures as they actually were two thousand years or so ago. […] Arnold's attempt to define his terms is no definition at all, but a confusion between the two senses". Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, 271. Here I am concerned with the use Arnold made of the terms rather than with the rigour of his argument. As regards the use of the term light and the association of Hellenism with lightness in both Arnold and Walter Pater see Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, 147 and ff.
[33] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 133. Emphasis in the original.

> of humanity largely conjured up in the late-eighteenth-century German literary and aesthetic imagination.[34]

Victorian liberalism, which eventually opened up a possibility for advocating homosexual desire, was therefore a complex combination of social discourses calling for individuality and diversity as in Mill's ideas Arnold's intervention on the positive aspect and necessity of Hellenism as new vital sources, and the Oxford university reform promoting Hellenism. As Turner argues:

> Just as Arnold used Hellenism to oppose social and political pluralism, romantic literary excess, and subjective morality, the commentators on Greek art used Hellenism as a basis for attacking what they regarded as extravagance, sensuality, particularity, and individualism in contemporary art. [35]

Hellenism meant a kind of timeless beauty in opposition to contemporary art. All critics of Victorian Hellenism who focused on art, agree in recognising in Johann J. Winckelmann the critic through which British theorizations on sculpture developed.[36] As Dowling has argued, the new wave of interest in Hellenism opened up for Oxford students such as Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and the Uranian poets a possibility for developing a discourse on same-sex desire and for advocating a sexual acceptance of their sexualities. In the hands of men whose desires were towards other men, the Hellenism that for Mill and Arnold meant the possibility of social and cultural renovation became a vehicle of self-expression. Following the lesson of Alan Sinfield in his discussion on Aestheticism, I am interested in pinpointing the grounds on which the association between Hellenism and same-sex desire is made in such a context.[37]

As Dowling claims, Pater, Wilde and the other exponents of Aestheticism found a possibility to develop a discourse of homosexuality as a "mode of self-

---

[34] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 21.
[35] Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 37.
[36] See Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 40; Dowling, *Hellenism,* 60; Dellamora, *Masculine Desire,* 64- 65.
[37] Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment,* London and New York: Cassell, 1994.

development and diversity, no longer a sin or crime […] but a social identity functioning within a fund of shared human potentialities".[38] Dellamora focuses on what he calls a "cultural ideal expressive of desire between men"[39] that takes place at Oxford, and how Walter Pater and Aestheticism in general provided an encoded discourse on same-sex desire whose decodification was subject to a certain interest and predisposition, or, in Dellamora's terms, required "sympathetic listeners".[40] In different ways, both Dowling and Dellamora have shown how Pater's texts are full of allusions and suggestions of homoerotic themes.

In his revival of Hellenism and Plato, Jowett did not feel comfortable giving an account on pederasty and therefore chose to either ignore the passages related to such a practice or to give negative comments on the difference with contemporary Britain.[41] Nevertheless, Jowett's efforts to eliminate the uncomfortable references to Greek *paiderastia*, which was present in Plato, did very little against the urge felt by young students such as Pater and Symonds to find legitimization for their sexual attractions. Dowling suggests that whilst Jowett regarded *paiderastia* as a "figure of speech",[42] Pater saw it as an essential constitutive element of Greek society and decided to fight for legitimization, especially in the essay "Winckelmann" (1867), where he celebrated the German historian of art emphasizing how his interest in sculpture was directly derived from Plato.[43] Referring to Winckelmann's temperament as queer, Pater drew a parallel between Greek same-sex desire and Winckelmann as both lacking any guilt or immorality.

[38] Dowling, *Hellenism,* 31.
[39] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 58.
[40] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 67.
[41] See Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 424 and ff; and Dowling, *Hellenism*.
[42] Dowling, *Hellenism,* 95.
[43] For a more specific discussion on Winckelmann see Turner, *The Greek Heritage*, 40 and ff. Alan Sinfield has underlined how Greek sculpture served two different purposes as it was in Pater a vehicle of same-sex passion but at the same time was professing a non-sexual calm. In Sinfield's words "aestheticism does not stand in for same-sex passion; it produces it, but in a 'sexless' mode" Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* 90.

2.4. British literary sexologists and the American poet: John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter and the influence of Walt Whitman

2.4.1 John Addington Symonds

If in Pater's writings any references to same-sex desire is limited to subcoded allusions, John Addington Symonds made them explicit. Moved by the discovery of Plato's account of same-sex desire while at Harrow School, and then later, within the Oxford homosociality I have already mentioned, Symonds hoped to find legitimatization for male same-sex relations. He developed a theorization of same-sex desire and, as noted by Bauer, in order to build his argument he made use of translations and other contributions as he believed in a kind of transnational and "transhistorical homosocial bond".[44] He is the key figure who combined a notion of Hellenism informed by Oxford discourses with a specific interest in German sexology which he used as a starting point to develop his own discourse on same-sex desire.

As claimed by Bristow, Symonds' political achievement was to connect the notion of identity with sexual preference, thus paving the way for the discussion on homosexuality that would follow. Greek love and Plato meant for Symonds – as they did for Pater – a framework for the comprehension of his own sexual identity. The liberating effect the discovery of Plato played in Symonds's early life was reinforced when he discovered the Greek philosopher in the syllabus of an orthodox institution such as Oxford in 1858, although he soon experienced what Dowling has referred to as the "central contradiction within Oxford homosocial Hellenism"[45] which regulated and filtered the texts and the contents. Nevertheless, since Hellenism had become synonymous with respectability[46], Symonds hoped to expand this veil of morality to same-sex desire by referring to Greek *paiderastia*. Therefore he embarked on a project which occupied him all his life and which he carried out through several writings whose importance lies not only in the cultural debates but, as I have already mentioned, in the formation of British sexology.

---

[44] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 59.
[45] Dowling, *Hellenism*, 88. Dowling gives a thorough analysis on the issue of this contradiction examining the figure of Jowett whom Symonds, she claims, thought to be mainly responsible for such contradiction.
[46] On this account see especially Turner, *The Greek Heritage;* Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, and Dowling, *Hellenism.*

In a privately published work written in 1883 with the title of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*,[47] Symonds started giving voice to his interests by looking at Greek poetry in order to give an historical and cultural account of *paiderastia*, or boy-love, in different ancient Greek societies. This book aimed to establish how Hellenic society, which was so well praised by his contemporaries, was based also on relationships between men.[48] In other words he sought to demonstrate the value and the social constitutive elements of "homosexual passions".[49] Not only were same-sex relations tolerated in such contexts but they were part of an institutional social body and therefore not to be punished. Symonds was intervening in diverse debates – legal, cultural and intellectual – in order to achieve his purpose, namely to find a justification of same-sex desire by re-elaborating the works of Victorian liberals like Mill and Arnold, and Oxford Hellenism. He introduced the aspect of sexual passion between men in the debates about Hellenism and tried to focus on the respectable component of homosexuality. In depicting *paiderastia*, Symonds was very much preoccupied to present a respectable model of male same-sex bonding that could be justified and accepted by his society. While investigating Greek *paiderastia*, Symonds was at the same time paving the way to, and setting the terms for, his theorization of same-sex desire which reached its climax in his *Memoirs*. The notion of male comradeship in the military Dorian civilization easily created a connection with the poet who theorized the very concept of the celebration of comrades, namely Walt Whitman, to whom, as I will explain in the next few pages, Symonds's theorization is indebted.[50]

Symonds created a set of connections and cross-references between Ancient Greece and his contemporary cultural and intellectual sphere. This needs to be noted in order to understand his wider project. The emphasis on

---

[47] John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics: Being an inquiry into the phenomenon of sexual inversion: Addressed especially to medical psychologists and jurists* [1883] 1901, n.p.
[48] Symonds had already tried to introduce a claim for legitimacy of same-sex desire within Oxford through his study *Studies of the Greek Poets* published in two volumes in 1873 and 1876. As noted by Dellamora, the sexual claims present in this work, together with two sexual scandals Symonds had been involved in at Harrow School and then at Magdalen College, prompted a personal attack on him by the Academia at Oxford and the subsequent end of his career and a withdrawal to Italy. It was while there that he decided to present his theorization of same-sex desire in a more specialized and niche context, addressing his writings to scholars of inversion. See Dowling, *Hellenism* 90 and ff, and Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 159 and ff.
[49] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 1.
[50] Symonds analyses the concept of Dorian comradeship in *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 19.

Plato's account of *paiderastia* in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* is evidence of the importance of such passion in a civilized society like Ancient Greece, and was much praised by the Victorians.[51] The superiority of *paiderastia* over the other form of passions Plato mentions – heterosexuality included – is underlined by Symonds in order to give emphasis to a cultural and social model of male bonding from which women were excluded.[52] Symonds produces a discourse based on the "true Hellenic manifestation of the paiderastic passion",[53] and created a dichotomy in which a noble form of same-sex passion (as promoted and governed by civil laws) is opposed to aberrations located at the margins of society and therefore punishable by law. What notion was Symonds referring to then? The emphasis was on the masculine elements of such a relationship and therefore on the absence of effeminacy and softness. In other words, Symonds suggested that the law was right in punishing same-sex desire when it was linked to lust and effeminacy, whereas the Greek model based on a regulated social relationship between a man and boy needed recognition by society as valid form of bonding.

Jenkyns draws a parallel between the male-dominated Greek society, and late Victorian Britain. In the upper class of the latter, men spent most of their time in institutions from which women were excluded – such as schools, universities, the navy, and the club. [54] Symonds plays with this parallel and hopes to make his reader draw the equation between Greece, where same-sex relations were praised, and contemporary Britain, where they could be, if not praised, at least tolerated and not punished by law.

---

[51] For an extensive account of Plato in Victorian Britain see Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, particularly chapter X, 227-264.

[52] Symonds explanation of how in Plato marriage was an act of loyalty to the country rather than a genuine interest in sharing a life with a non-educated woman contributes to the misogyny so typical of Victorian Homophile Britain and its writers. For an analysis of *paiderastia* see Halperin, *One Hundred Years,* and J. K. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

[53] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics,* 19. On the importance of Symonds as a sexologist there are opposite attitudes: some critics disqualify him because of his privileged position in society, which prevented him from challenging the status quo and the class system. This opinion is stressed among others by Sedgwick in *Between Men* whereas Bauer underlines how the notion of inversion created by Symonds acted as a challenge to society and the existing health system as he preferred male prostitution over marriage. Dellamora in his introduction is sceptical of Sedgwick's anti-privilege attitude. On this debate see Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 58.

[54] Jenkyns, *The Victorian*, 284.

I want to go back to the masculine notion of same-sex desire first underlined by Symonds in the study of Greece, both because it is a leitmotif of his later theorization and because I regard it as one of the most important aspects of his work that influenced Forster deeply. Symonds's analysis moves from ancient Greece to an enquiry into his contemporary society's attitude towards same-sex relationships in *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, finished in 1890 and published for private circulation in the following year. At this point, he had already created, as I have outlined above, a system of cross-references between Hellenic antiquity and his time. In this work he investigates the literature on same-sex sexuality analysing the inconsistencies present in most of these works and insisting that Western societies owe a great cultural and intellectual debt to ancient Greece. By tracing the discrepancies and hypocrisy of his contemporaries towards homosexuality, he wonders why a passion that had been considered even more noble than a relationship between a man and a woman by one of the most civilized societies in history has become something modern societies find aberrant and disgusting, to such an extent that "no one dares to speak of it".[55] Such a passion needs and deserves to have a name especially because, despite all the attempts to destroy it, it can be traced through the centuries and over many countries, thus establishing itself as "a persistent feature of human psychology".[56] Symonds wants to give it a name that is not associated with negative connotations and vituperation; thus he turns to the scientific discourses of his time where, he argues, it is possible to find an adequate term: "inverted sexual instinct".[57] One of Symonds's most substantial claims in this book has to do with the new vocabulary he introduces, borrowing it from the German works mentioned above.[58]

It is by analysing – and departing from – the debates of German sexology, especially Krafft-Ebing's and Ulrichs's, that Symonds built his argument and proposed his own theorization of same-sex desire. In order to understand the terms of such theorization we have to bear in mind, as Bristow has pointed out, the necessity for a homosexual difference, for a distinction of

[55] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 3.
[56] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics,* 3.
[57] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 3.
[58] Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace. Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986, 156.

the homosexual from heterosexual sexuality that the Victorian age seemed to require.[59] Symonds's determination to find a name for his identity is typical, Bristow claims, of an urge to classify that characterized the end of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, I think his determination lies in his dissatisfaction with the existing classification made by medico-forensic European discourses.

Symonds refused to accept Ulrichs's notion according to which homosexuals were characterised by a female soul trapped in a male body and to question such an assumption he put the emphasis on virility and masculinity. Nevertheless, this emphasis does not only mark an opposition to the feminine model of inversion proposed by German sexology, but also responds to a far more complex network of associations linked to the notion of effeminacy that had caused embarrassment in British intellectual spheres and from which Symonds – like Carpenter – wanted to distance himself.[60] In investigating German sexology, Symonds insists on the fact that "inverts" "are athletic, masculine in habits"[61] thus revealing his theory of same-sex desire based on the notion of the respectable homosexual with whom he identified and who deserved a legitimate space in society.[62] Throughout his writings Symonds proposed his own chart of homosexuals and posited a dichotomy between respectability and aberration maintaining that such distinction was necessary, and that only in the first case should society recognize homosexuals' rights. Symonds is concerned with the issue of acceptance and inclusion in the

[59] Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 131. In analysing Symonds's *Memoirs* within the production of what he calls "homophile autobiographers" (131) Bristow discusses how these writers felt compelled to advocate a differentiation in the quality of their desire. Although sometimes they did not feel that the erotic attraction of men to other men was in any way different from the one men felt towards women in heterosexual relationships, they felt the pressure to claim it was so. Bristow claims that at the base of the choice to emphasize masculinity lies an urge to theorize a difference which resulted in a belief that the more masculine the models were, the more desirable they were.

[60] Alan Sinfield has studied this thoroughly see especially Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* chapter 5.

[61] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics,* 15.

[62] Alan Sinfield discusses how in Victorian society the dominant idea proposed by the Industrial Revolution was that the man had to be fit and able to fight in order to respond to the demands of progress. He also analyses how this idea found its climax in the association of Darwinism and the imperial purposes of Britain, according to which "the superiority of the British race was expressed in its manly men". Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* 63.

existing society, hence the perplexity of some critics in acknowledging his impact on the theorization of dissidence.[63]

Symonds relied on the inborn theory developed by the German sexologists to pinpoint the legal injustice against this category of homosexuals; the law was unfair insofar as it punished respectable human beings who happen to be inborn inverts in the same way as it treated the cases of lust and vice. Symonds saw Urnings – he borrowed the term from Ulrichs – as victims of an unfortunate condition which did not deserve any further punishment as they were not criminals. The law, Symonds pointed out, treats all cases of sexual inversion as crime, although sometimes inverts were instead considered as lunatics. According to him – and Ulrichs – they were on the contrary neither criminals nor insane, but "only less fortunate through an accident of birth, which is obscure to our imperfect science of determination".[64]

As Bristow has suggested, Symonds went even further in making a claim about the excellence of homosexuals and their literary production, especially in his *Memoirs*.[65] He presented his literary success as the proof of how there was no trace of moral or mental disease in homosexuality and that in fact there was a special bond between same-sex desire and literary production.[66] Bristow gives an account of how such a relation was revealed to be problematic, and how Symonds went through a conversion that enabled him to live his same-sex sexual desires. The issue of class, which Symonds discusses in his memoirs, was problematic for British homosexuals, both in the late Victorian period and beyond, including for Forster, as we shall see.[67] According to Bristow, Symonds was able to indulge in same-sex practice with working-class men only when he changed his opinion on that class, which he had previously associated with evil and corruption. Bristow adds that the conversion was made possible by Symonds's change of perspective towards politics in general and by his newly-

[63] I manly refer to the fact that Symonds's influence on gay right issues has been diminished for the very fact that, being a member of English upper class he did not challenge existing society. On these grounds Sedgwick is more convinced by Carpenter's theories than Symonds's. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 210-212, and also Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 58.
[64] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern,* 100.
[65] John Addington Symonds, *Memoirs. The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds,* London: Hutchinson, 1984.
[66] Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 136-137. The association underlined by Bristow is very useful as it brings up issues of the relation between career and sexuality that occupied and preoccupied Forster all of his life. I will come back to this point in chapter 8.
[67] See chapter 4.

born belief that the cause of recognition of rights for the proletariat was very similar to the longing for civil rights by homosexuals. He thus established what Bristow calls a "link between working-class liberty and middle-class homosexual emancipation".[68] Such a link, continues Bristow, seemed to be embodied in the figure of the American poet Walt Whitman whose influence in British society has been fully analysed by Sedgwick.[69] Symonds read Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and he was deeply influenced by the celebration of comradeship present in the "Calamus" section.[70] As Sedgwick notes, Whitman is "a magnetic figure in the history of English sexual politics"[71] and British sexologists read his celebration of comradeship as a contribution to the development of the concept of same-sex desire. In a society profoundly characterized by a rigid class system like the British one in the nineteenth century, Sedgwick notices that the way men understood issues of same-sex desire and homosexuality were utterly connected to and dependent upon social class differences. Since in the English (homo)sexual system middle-class men seem to engage in sexual activities primarily with working class men, as Sedgwick claims, the fact that Whitman was a member of the working class helped to link him to same-sex practice.[72]

From Symonds's own admission it was Whitman who taught him "to appreciate the working classes"[73], and to develop his theorization of same-sex relations based on the notion of comradeship, which, as I have already mentioned, Symonds also linked to the Greek ideal. Symonds was fascinated by the representation of the male body, and male bonds in Whitman's works, to such an extent that he drew a comparison between Plato's and Whitman's portrayal of an enthusiastic type of masculine emotion with no moral judgment. Symonds wanted to show the survival of Greek love in modern society and in his view Whitman perfectly addressed the purpose, as:

---

[68] For further information on how this conversion occurred within the framework of the Reform Bills see Bristow, *Effeminate England* 140. The term conversion is used by Symonds in the original text and only reported by Bristow.
[69] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 201.
[70] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* New York and London: Paddington, 1976.
[71] For the role of Walt Whitman in the shaping of the concept of homosexuality in Britain in the late nineteenth century see Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 201-217.
[72] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 204.
[73] John Addington Symonds, *Memoirs. The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds,* Hutchinson: London, 1984, 191.

> The language of *Calamus,* the section dedicated to the celebration of comradeship, has a passionate glow, a warmth of emotional tone, beyond anything to which the modern world is used in the celebration of the love of friends.[74]

According to Symonds:

> no man in the modern world has expressed so strongly a conviction that 'mainly attachment', 'athletic love', 'the high towering love of comrades' is a main factor in human life, a virtue upon which society will have to rest, and a passion equal in its permanence and intensity to sexual affection.[75]

In his view, "Calamus" was the perfect example of homosexual politics insofar as it advocated the ideal of virile love between men that Symonds was also trying to establish.

In 1890, Symonds directly asked Whitman in a letter whether the concept of comradeship could be read in terms of sexual attachment: "In your conception of Comradeship, do you contemplate the possible intrusion of those semi-sexual emotions and actions which no doubt do occur between men?" by which Whitman was shocked.[76] Symonds quotes directly from the letter:

> About the questions on 'Calamus,' & c., they quite daze me. 'Leaves of Grass' is only to be rightly construed by and within its own atmosphere and essential character – all its pages and pieces so coming strictly under. That the Calamus part has ever allowed the possibility of such construction as mentioned is terrible. I am fain to hope the pages themselves are not to be even mentioned for such gratuitous and quite at the time undreamed and unwished possibility of morbid inferences – which are disavowed by me and seem damnable. [77]

Although Symonds acknowledges Whitman's statement, he nevertheless underlines the points of contact between the concept of comradeship and sexual inversion suggesting that the ideal of comradeship proposed by Whitman

---

[74] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics,* 102.
[75] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics,* 115.
[76] See Woods, *A History of Gay Literature,* 177-180 and quoted also in Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 141.
[77] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics,* 119. For a full account of the correspondence between Symonds and Whitman on this issue see especially Sedgwick, *Between* Men, 203 ff. and Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 141.

could be read as a spiritual salvation from the "filth and mire of brutal appetite". In other words, it could function as a sort of process of moralization of abnormal instincts that ends up raising "man" to a "higher value".[78] Symonds establishes a possible connection between Whitman's work and the Hellenic spirit; by quoting some passages from *Calamus*, he is able to show how comradeship is essentially a social and political virtue, and how it is informed by a Hellenic spirit that goes back to Plato. The celebration of manly love – of comradeship – is then linked to democracy as a force able to change the present social situation. It is through this network of associations – Whitmanian democracy, manly same-sex bonding, and the link of both of these to the Greek ideal – which Symonds established his theorization of respectable same-sex desire that he hoped to see accepted by society. Symonds's critique is about how society has misread and erroneously treated the issue of love between men. Whitman also acted as a link between intellectuals interested in same-sex desire as in the case of Symonds and another important figure of British sexology, Edward Carpenter. [79]

2.4.2 Edward Carpenter

Carpenter, like Symonds, worked towards a theorization of same-sex desire which excluded effeminacy in favour of a strong emphasis on masculinity and virility as characteristics of "normal types" of homosexuals. Unlike Symonds though, Carpenter's sexual activism is not limited to sexuality and is connected to a more radical social reform.[80]

He follows an inversion model in understanding homosexuality as an "intermediate sex" made of individuals who bear the sexual characteristics of one sex and many of the emotional characteristics of the other. Carpenter wrote numerous essays on the subject gathered together in *The Intermediate Sex* published in 1908,[81] where he reflects on what he calls the "Uranians". While

[78] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics,* 120.
[79] On Whitman as a figure linking Symonds and Havelock Ellis and then allowing the collaboration on *Sexual Inversion* see Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, 6 passim.
[80] See on this issues Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,* London: Quarter Books, 1990, 69 and ff.; Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 73-79.
[81] Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women,* London: Allen and Co., 1912.

presenting a critique of the attitudes of society towards "homogenic love" and the hostile environment in education, he proposes a possible solution to avoid unjust treatment, and underlines the contradiction existing in the public school system as regards issues of friendship and affection. Carpenter claims that education should provide information about sexuality and physiology and, like Symonds, he draws from Hellenism to support his emphasis on the importance of friendship as an institution and he looks for positive examples of same-sex "temperaments" in history to find legitimization in his own society.

The emphasis of his argument is on the importance of the human nature of each individual, regardless of their sexual temperament. Carpenter sees the human race as a continuum in which the distances and the boundaries are more fluid than the labels society gives and imposes. The two sexes are not two isolated groups but rather a single group distributed along a continuum between two poles "so that while certainly the extreme specimens at either pole are vastly divergent, there are great numbers in the middle region who (though differing corporeally as men and women) are by emotion and temperament very near to each other".[82]

The differentiation of individuals has to be found in nature, which is responsible for mixing the masculine and feminine elements. In some cases, there are some remarkable types of character in which the balance of the two components makes excellent interpreters of men and women to each other. A vision of the sexes as a continuous group allows Carpenter to make a connection between Love and Friendship as two elements belonging to the same group, namely emotions. In his contemporary society, as Carpenter depicts it, therefore, the distinction of the diverse emotions and passions are blurred, making is almost impossible to separate effectively the different kinds of attachment:

> We know, in fact, of Friendships so romantic in sentiment that they verge into love; we know of Loves so intellectual and spiritual that they hardly dwell in the sphere of Passion.[83]

[82] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 17.
[83] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 18.

Carpenter insists on the fact that the very presence of a large number of homosexuals in his present time – as shown by the flourishing sexological debates in Germany – requires special attention in order to understand their position and contribution to the social order. In doing so, he argues that many Uranians are active members of society; he gives evidence of this through case studies, which also allow him to trace a type of homosexual as a normal person:

> Such men, as said, are often muscular and well-built, and not distinguishable in exterior structure and the carriage of body from others of their own sex.[84]

The space for difference is in the mind and not in the physical appearance, and such a claim is fully supported by the cases from which it emerged that Uranian men are rather gentle and emotional, and inclined towards artistic feelings. Carpenter traces a summary of the common points of the scientific investigation of his time especially the theories of Henry Havelock Ellis.[85] This influenced the understanding of homosexuality as a congenital condition free from any morbidity:

> in a vast number of cases quite instinctive and congenital, mentally and physically, and therefore twined in the very roots of individual life and practically ineradicable.[86]

Although Carpenter makes a distinction between those whose inversion is deeply rooted and natural, and those who experience homosexual practices, nevertheless he warns that from a mere scientific point of view "too much emphasis cannot be laid on the distinction"[87] and the difference is that the latter group is in the public eye and attracts public reprobation especially as it is often

---

[84] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 33-34.

[85] Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. This is a medical text focusing on the sexual relations of homosexual men published in Germany in 1896 and written by Ellis in collaboration with Symonds. Carpenter and Ellis had a long friendship and correspondence, and Carpenter himself was asked to give his contribution to the book. For the relation between Carpenter, Ellis and Symonds see the introduction written by Ivan Crozier in Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

[86] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 55.

[87] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 56.

attached to scandals.[88] The case studies he mentions also give evidence of homosexuals as artistically-gifted individuals in society, thus demonstrating a "healthy" social role. According to Carpenter, the hereditary neurosis associated with the cause of homosexuality is rather a result of the social plight "inverts" have to face, which is due to compulsory secrecy and the impossibility to express their feelings.[89] Hence his insistence on the necessity to abandon the term "morbid" in connection with inversion, and the stress on the need to express one's inversion openly in order to live a healthy life. Since Uranians are governed by natural feelings "to deny to such people all expression of their emotion, is probably in the end to cause it to burst forth with the greater violence".[90]

Carpenter also makes some claims about the physical element in same-sex desire – that he calls homogenic love – according to which the impossibility of expressing it in society diverts it towards emotional channels, and "to find its vent in sympathies of social life and companionship".[91] In his view, therefore, the sexual component is an essential part of human existence, and in order to understand this claim we need to locate it in the broader frame of his theory of social radical reform. Carpenter questions the naturalness of the link between love and child bearing; in pointing out its arbitrariness he separates sex from procreation, thus making an important claim of legitimacy for homosexuals and at the same time taking part in the liberation movement of women.[92] As noted by Weeks, Carpenter replaced this concept with an idea of the pleasure of sex and its socially-binding function whose aim was "union"; Carpenter's aim, continues Weeks, was "to free love from darkness and shame, and to place sex in the vital heart of the new awareness".[93]

This is where we see the importance of Whitman for British debates on homosexuality. Carpenter celebrates Whitman as "the inaugurator, it may

---

[88] I shall analyse the issue of scandal when referring to Oscar Wilde and the Cleveland Street Scandal in 2.4.3.
[89] Carpenter in here is referring to Krafft-Ebing's who speaks of "an hereditary neuropathic or psychopathic tendency" in the Uranian condition. See quotation in Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 61.
[90] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 67.
[91] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 68.
[92] For a brief account on the importance of Carpenter towards the feminist cause see Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 212-214; and Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 76.
[93] Weeks, *Coming Out,* 75.

almost be said, of a new world of democratic ideals"[94] and as the preacher of a social function of "intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man".[95] In Whitman, as read by Carpenter, the love of comrades is the source for the creation of a new society based on democracy. The link he establishes between this ideal of comradeship and homogenic love is based on a potential in binding members of different classes together and this is the very strength of comradeship in his view.

As noted by Bauer, it is in poetry that Carpenter gives voice to "the contingencies of individual desire and its relationship to society."[96] In his Whitman-like collection of poetry, *Towards Democracy* (1883-1905), [97] Carpenter proposes a utopian vision of a society where all present values are abandoned and replaced by a liberated existence. The present social order, based on economic, social and sexual prescriptions which, as Weeks has noted, could be summarized in the concept of "respectability",[98] is rejected in favour of a new ideal order that eliminates the class barriers that were so strong in British society. To build such a model, Carpenter borrows the idea of comradeship from Whitman and its focus on the working-class, and he transforms it into a political ideology on which he bases his life. He rejects his privileged life as a lecturer to live in companionship with a working-class man, George Merrill**,** thereby realizing his vision of the abandonment of social and economic constraints. Linked to this notion of democracy, as a radical life based on equality is the idea of the homosexual as an outlaw who can embark on a project aimed to create a better society. The influence of Whitman on Carpenter is therefore very important in both his personal life and intellectual production. Carpenter's theorization in turn became fundamental for Forster's own writing, as I shall argue later.[99]

Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 76.
[95] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 75.
[96] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 76.
[97] Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1883.
[98] Weeks, *Coming Out,* 71.
[99] See Weeks, *Coming Out*, 68.

2.4.3 The Wilde trials and the end of Homophile Britain

Before moving on to the study of *Maurice*, I want to draw attention to some of the scandals at the end of the nineteenth century, and to the Wilde trials of 1895, as their political, social and cultural impact played an essential role in the formation of the notion of homosexuality, determining the circumstances for some of the later theorizations of same-sex desire, especially in fiction.

I am mainly indebted to Dellamora's discussion of the impact of these scandals on the definition of same-sex desire. According to Dellamora the relative fluidity and confusion on issues of masculinity in the second half of the century was mainly due to middle-class men spending most of their time in institutions only attended by men, such as public school, universities and clubs. These exerted a strict control over the boundaries between what Dellamora, drawing on Adrienne Rich, calls the "homosexual continuum" and "homosexual existence", and what we could call, quoting Sedgwick, homosociality and homosexuality.[100] Gentlemen educated in public schools were encouraged to develop a male bond yet through institutionalized homophobia were pushed towards marriage.[101]

Dellamora sees a crisis of masculinity in the 1880s as being linked to the school system and this emphasis on male friendship, and together with the weakening of the structure that regulates the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality, as a threat to Victorian society. The ultimate result of such anxieties was the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which included the

[100]Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 193. Dellamora borrows the concept of the "lesbian continuum" as the bonds between women and "lesbian existence" as the historical lesbian presence by Adrienne Rich and applies them to the male context. In this new use, "homosexual continuum" indicates the bonding between men with no necessary sexual involvement whereas "homosexual existence" refers to the social and historical identity of homosexual. The distinction is similar to the one between homosociality and homosexuality as proposed by Sedgwick in *Between Men*, 1.

[101] Dellamora analyses how the concept of the gentleman became central to middle-class existence as a vehicle of exerting power. According to him, the contraction arose when the very notion of gentleman, originally a product of aristocracy and the possession of land, was embraced by middle-class men. The public school system attempted to solve this contradiction by teaching "gentility" within the set of values of the middle-class. Dellamora, *Masculine Desire,* 196.

Labouchère Amendment under which Wilde was charged, as a mechanism of control over the sexual identities of men and women.[102]

The increasing visibility of marginal groups such as homosexuals in the 1880s, and also the visibility of Wilde's celebrity persona, are some of the circumstances that contributed to the scandals, both sexual and literary.[103] In 1889-90, the Cleveland Street scandal involved a male brothel where telegraph youths worked as rent boys, and aristocrats and gentlemen were the clientele. The importance of such a scandal lies, as noted by Dellamora, in the fact that it established a (sexual) connection between upper class and working class men. This link proved to be a fruitful paradigm around which many men in the following decades – and centuries – understood their sexual desires.

At the time when Wilde was brought to the Old Bailey to answer the accusation of being a "Sodonmite" *(sic),* in the spelling of his accuser, the dominant society was alert to issues of sexual control.[104] However, the trials established a productive relationship between categories that were not linked before. Sinfield is the first critic to have thoroughly studied the impact of the Wilde trials on the notion of homosexuality and the figure of the "queer"[105] and its association to the concept of effeminacy. According to Sinfield, the trials "helped to produce a major shift in perception of the scope of same-sex passion".[106] Sinfield analyses the Wilde trials in the context of sexological and ideological debates and explains that they served to crystallize what we now see as the homosexual figure, what we associate, only in retrospect, with the

[102] The Labouchère Amendment is Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 which made "gross indecency" between men a crime in Britain. The text reads: "Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour". The important novelty of this Act is the vagueness of the expression "gross indecency" that differentiated it from physical sodomy and the extension of the law to the private space. Since it opened the space for a wave of blackmail the law became to be known as 'Blackmailer's Charter' and forced same-sex relationships between men into a domain of secrecy. See Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* 12-13; Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 1. For a full account on the Criminal Law Amendment as an instrument of social control in terms of sexualities see Dellamora, *Masculine Desire,* 200 and ff.

[103] Dellamora treats the literary scandals of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Here, I am only interested in the Cleveland Street scandal.

[104] On Josephine Butler and the control over prostitution, and the resulting separation between good and bad women, see Dellamora, *Masculine Desire* 200 and ff.

[105] Sinfield uses the term "queer" as noun to refer to a sexually dissident male person.

[106] Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* 121.

figure of Wilde. The trials are precisely what produced a model of the modern queer.

The dichotomy masculine/feminine, Sinfield argues, was given a central role by the sexologists (as I have shown above in Symonds and Carpenter, who stressed the masculine component in "respectable" homosexuals). Effeminacy was previously associated with the aesthete and leisured-class men but correlated neither to same-sex passion nor to homosexuality as an identity. "The image of the queer", writes Sinfield, "cohered at the moment when the leisured, effeminate, aesthetic dandy was discovered in same-sex practices, underwritten by money, with lower-class boys".[107]

The effeminacy of dandies and leisured class men had been conceived as part of their essence and not questioned in terms of gender role or sexual identity.[108] Wilde came out of the trials openly defined as a sodomite, having indulged in sexual practice with other male persons, namely prostitutes of the lower class; because he was also a dandy and thanks to the celebrity of his trials, the two conceptions of dandyism and homosexuality were correlated for good. In other words, Sinfield argues, Wilde embodied in his persona the modern homosexual as dandy, effeminate and passive in sexual activity, the latter characteristic seen as diminishing the power of the man taking the feminine role.

Bristow links the attacks on Wilde during and after the trials to the fact that he embodied everything that was against athleticism and manliness, which were the characteristics of being respectable as perceived by the late Victorian mainstream.[109] The effect of the trials on the understanding of same-sex desire was, according to Sinfield, a double one. On the one hand, it put an end to the Victorian exploration of same-sex relations and its interest in cataloguing different types and experiences, thus resulting in the impossibility to publish or debate on sexual issues.[110] On the other hand, however, its resonance in the

[107] Sinfield, *The Wilde Century,* 121.
[108] Sinfield claims that the leisured class men in the mollies house when engaged in same-sex activities were nevertheless perceived as superior therefore taking the active role, in other words they were not the sodomites. Only on these grounds their activities were silently accepted by society. Once the trials established the possibility of them taking the passive role with lower class men, thus being the sodomites, the acceptance came to an end. See 122 and ff.
[109] Bristow, *Effeminate England*, 19.
[110] See Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, 125 and ff. Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* was published first in Germany due to the panic caused by the trials.

press gave a certain degree of awareness to people, even in remote non-urban places, of a possible model of same-sex desire thus paving the way for a future gay movement. In other words it helped people to find a name or to identify with a desire different from the heterosexual one.[111]

According to Dowling, the Wilde's trials in 1895 put an end to what she calls "Homophile Britain"[112] (the cultural space of the 1890s, open to debates on homosexuality and homosexuals' rights[113]), while in her study on the figure of Wilde as a market product, Gagnier focuses on the fact that Wilde embodied both art and sexual deviance, thus creating a new category of aestheticism.[114]

Before the trials, Wilde was a married man who engaged in – and frequented a society in which men indulged – same-sex practices; however, that did not mean a homosexual identity.[115] During the trials Wilde's life was scrutinized and he was arrested on charges of sodomy and gross indecency. His condemnation, as Dellamora claims,[116] has to do with the threat he posed to the public school and university system as regards male bonds. In other words, as a product of that privileged world, Wilde's fault was to infringe the boundaries between male homosociality and homosexuality, and this fault explains the huge impact his trials had on society and the large audiences they drew.

At the same time, they provided a model for people who lived same-sex desire and in the specific case of Forster, I will argue, the Wilde trials played an important role in the fictional theorization of same-sex passion, insofar as Forster tried to escape with obsessive meticulousness the role that the effeminate figure had come to embody. The stress on the masculine, and on the lack of effeminacy in *Maurice*, finds its origin as much in sexological discourses as in avoiding the negative connotations that the Wilde persona had come to stand for.

---

[111] In the urban space, especially in London, the possibilities of sexual meetings between men were more frequent than in non-urban contexts, and so was the public awareness of same-sex relationships. See Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: perils and pleasures in the sexual metropolis, 1918-1957*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

[112] Dowling, *Hellenism,* in her study sees in the link between Hellenism and Liberalism a positive environment for advocating homosexuality. Bristow is justly reluctant to embrace such a positive model as it fails to take into account at least a partial hostility in the context.

[113] Dowling, *Hellenism,* 28.

[114] Gagnier, *Idylls of Marketplace*, 144.

[115] I use the term sexual identity in this context as a politicized identifiable position in society embraced by a group of people. I borrow the concept from Barry Adam, *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday life*, NY: Elsevier, 1978.

[116] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire,* 208 and ff.

The context that I have presented is where and when Forster was born and formed his intellectual life. At King's College, Cambridge at the end of 1890s, Forster became a member of the Apostles together with some of the future Bloomsbury Group. Forster was surrounded by the ideas about Hellenism I discussed earlier, and his degree in Classics was part of his formation as a writer, and as a person who started interrogating his sexuality.[117] He read Symonds and Carpenter and his debt to both is explicit in his diaries, as I will explain in chapter four.

In writing *Maurice*, Forster was also experimenting with some of these ideas about homosexuality before presenting his own model. Only by contextualizing Forster's understanding of sexuality it is possible to grasp the power and the impact of *Maurice*.

[117] For biographical information on E.M. Forster see Nicholas Philip Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, 2 vols, San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace Company, 1981. For the years Forster spent in Cambridge as a student see especially 49-80.

CHAPTER 3

Minor, gay or queer fiction? Scholarly literature on *Maurice* since its publication

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I want to give an overview of the criticism on *Maurice* since its publication in 1971. The publication of a novel dealing with homosexuality cast a new light on Forster's previous writings and some critics questioned his ability to represent all aspects of society. I will briefly present the most significant essays on the novel and analyse the impact of gay studies and queer theory on its interpretation. I will focus mainly on criticism that explores sexuality and I will follow a chronological order to underline, when relevant, possible developments due to changes in the critical and theoretical approach. The criticism could be roughly divided into four chronological periods, which reflect the influence of literary theories and cultural debates. Before beginning I will give a short summary of the novel that will be useful to follow the main lines of criticism and also my analysis of the novel in chapter four.

The plot organizes around Maurice Hall, a young, ordinary, middle-class boy who lives with his sisters and mother after his father has died. Forster shows Maurice discovering his homosexuality while he is at school and then later at university. During his school years, Maurice has a few dreams about a male figure, but his dull mind does not allow him to read or connect them to his sexuality until later in his life. In Cambridge, Maurice firstly meets Risley, a stereotypical flamboyant character based on the Wilde-type homosexual, and through him, Clive Durham, an intellectual and clever boy who has discovered his sexuality early in his life and has modeled it and justified it through the Hellenic ideal. Clive helps Maurice to finally discover his sexuality and the two characters live a love affair regulated by Clive's ideal of Platonism. The two characters are presented while living this double life and negotiate their subjectivity with the external social order until Clive succumbs under the pressure of social requirements and, while in Greece, converts to heterosexuality, ending his relationship with Maurice.

The second part of the book focuses on the encounter between Maurice and Alec Scudder, Clive's gamekeeper at his Penge estate where Clive lives with his wife. After a first sexual affair, and Maurice's initial doubts derived from social conventions, the two characters start a relationship based on the rejection of the social class system and social order, and on mutual sacrifice: Maurice abandons his privileges and Alec decides not to leave for Argentina. The novel, as it is published, ends with Maurice and Clive who abandon society, for the greenwood. In the first version of 1914, there was an "Epilogue" in which Maurice's sister, Kitty, meets Alec and Maurice in the greenwood, but Forster decided to eliminate this epilogue in the other versions.

The criticism on *Maurice* published in the late 1970s focused predominantly on the moral issues connected with the presence of same-sex relationships in the novel, and on its literary value in mainstream production and also within Forster's canon. Negative moralistic readings were followed by attempts to present a positive analysis of the novel and to re-establish the role of Forster as a major writer. The heterocentric readings considered *Maurice* as a minor novel, partly reflecting the idea according to which homosexuality was considered an inferior form of sexuality. The question was put in terms of literary value, of Forster's merits or demerits in writing the novel and in comparison to his previous fiction, most of which had been acclaimed by critics. Although this approach is followed sporadically in some of the later readings, it is the main characteristic of the criticism of the 1970s.

At the beginning of the 1980s as the cultural studies and interdisciplinary approach developed, criticism on Forster started to consider the complexity of the novel and the cultural and social discourses linked to the issue of sexuality. The development of gay studies, whose main critical operation consisted in the use of sexuality as a possible tool of analysis and in investigating the mechanism of homophobia as resistance to heteronormativity, coincided with a reading of *Maurice* more focussed on how homosexual identity was portrayed. Given the debt of gay studies to the gay liberation movement of the late 1970s, the political aim is a presence in the literary criticism of this time, and in this period *Maurice* started to be read in the context of its political value. Despite the risk of oversimplification I want to draw a differentiation within the criticism of *Maurice* influenced by the gay studies approach as I see two strands. One

strand was more concerned with how homosexual identity was portrayed as showing the possibility of happiness and wholeness, whereas the other analysed the context and the sexological debates of late Victorian society which informed Forster's own perception of same-sex sexuality both in his life and in the novel. If the first approach used a defensive tone against homophobic attacks, the latter explored the political implications of homosexuality in society.

The criticism on *Maurice* saw a further evolution in the early 1990s due to the influence of post-structuralism, deconstruction and especially the works of Michel Foucault. The reliance on the Foucaldian concept of sexuality as a social and cultural construction, and the challenge to the idea of stable binary oppositions such as heterosexuality/homosexuality problematized the very understanding of identity. Such debates had an impact on the criticism of *Maurice*, and the readings published in the early 1990s thus focused on the investigation of historically-specific processes which led to the formation of a homosexual identity and the evolution of concepts such as effeminacy and masculinity as linked to such identity. Concurrently, the terminology also changed and more specific terms were used to refer to different historical/cultural ways of experiencing same-sex desire. Again, although this was the main theoretical approach there were outside voices, which I will highlight in more detail below.

In the second part of the 1990s the influence of queer theory became more explicit on the studies of *Maurice* and a collection entitled *Queer Forster*[1] gathered together a series of different interventions that put into practice some of the possible ways in which queer theory can work. Its main aim was to unveil the categories assumed to be universally valid and reveal their social and cultural constructedness. If gay studies was interested in the construction of the homosexual identity, queer theory refused it on the grounds of its being a mere illusion, an essence. In the reading of *Maurice*, such an approach focused on the analysis of the subversive aspects of Forster the author and his engagement with a heteronormative-homophobic society.

The publications on *Maurice* from 1998 until the present have been diverse single interventions difficult to group together under the same theoretical

[1] Robert Martin and George K. Piggford, eds., *Queer Forster*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

approach. Some of the analyses have gone back to read *Maurice* in terms of its literary value, whereas some others have reiterated the importance of the biography of the author and his literary figure.

3.2 Heterocentric early readings: *Maurice* as minor fiction

Jeffrey Meyers's *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930*,[2] published in 1977, includes a chapter dedicated to *Maurice*, which he calls "a *roman a thèse* whose aim is to defend homosexual love".[3] In his view the plot is too simple and the eponymous character "bourgeois, unfinished and stupid […] brought up in a family of females and in a home that emasculated everything".[4] The account of the "platonic" relationship between Maurice and Clive at Cambridge is in his view, "disastrously false and hysterical";[5] according to Meyers "both Clive and Maurice approach homosexuality as a Hellenic predilection"[6] based on the assumption that men can experience a better relationship than that between men and women because of a harmony of body and soul.

When it comes to the analysis of homosexuality, Meyers expresses an almost embarrassing homophobia. The opening comment makes a joke on how in the novel there is "a different kind of pastoral penetration"[7] compared to pastoral aspects in Forster's previous novels. According to Meyers, Forster condemns homosexuality by linking it to degradation:

> Maurice achieves considerable masochistic pleasure by cleaning up the close-stool after Clive's attacks of diarrhoea […] Maurice's connection with Clive's 'filth' is the symbolic equivalent of the 'self-condemned feeling' that impels Maurice toward a lower-class lover, with whom sex replaces shit.[8]

The episode I think has to be read in terms of the evolution of the relationship between the characters and I believe that the pleasure – if any – in Maurice lies in the fact that it is a further step in the connection between him

[2]Jeffrey Meyers, *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1977, 99-107.
[3] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 101.
[4] Meyers, *Homosexuality,* 100.
[5] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 100.
[6] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 101.
[7] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 99.
[8] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 104.

and Clive. Forster is making a claim about the fact that the dynamics of helping and supporting each other in a homosexual relationship are the same as in any heterosexual one, and by mentioning these aspects – normally passed by in silence – he also wants to show that there are many taboos in literature. Ultimately the novel is defined by Meyers as a "study of repression and guilt".[9] The only positive element Meyers recognizes in the novel is the therapeutic effect it had in Forster's life as it allowed him to express in writing his sexual orientation.

Meyers argues that Forster's vision of homosexuality is deterministic in its essence, as the author believes it to be governed by biological factors. In his view, Forster blames society for problems that are in fact due to Maurice's lack of self-insight and moral courage. The latter remark deserves further attention because it reveals what I think is a complete misunderstanding of the novel. I believe that, in fact, Forster's aim is the opposite of what Meyers thinks. Forster wants to show that homosexuality is not a superior condition but, as I will show later in my reading of the novel, he is interested to show that homosexuality, as Norman Page claims, "could be anyone's problem",[10] being in Forster's view a natural and congenital "condition" and not linked to intelligence, moral stature or other personal characteristics. According to Page, the flatness and the deliberate mediocrity that *Maurice* shows, and that early criticism dismissed as lack of talent, is indeed an intentional choice and strategy. Maurice's mediocrity reflects, in Page's view, Forster's intention to prove that his character's only exceptional characteristic is his sexual nature:

> the case of Maurice Hall demonstrates that homosexuality can be anyone's problem; and since he is athletic, handsome in a masculine way, and a successful businessman, he helps to demolish the popular stereotype of the languid, high-voiced, exhibitionistic or visibly effeminate invert.[11]

Homosexuality is what saves Maurice from a dull life because, by being forced to reject sexual conventionality, he needs to question other aspects of

[9] Meyers, *Homosexuality*, 107.
[10] Norman Page, *E.M. Forster's Posthumous Fiction*, Victoria B.C.: University of Victoria, 1977, 74.
[11] Page, *Forster's Posthumous*, 74.

society and conformity – in Page's words, "to use his brain".[12] Thus Maurice develops as a character: at first he embraces conventional values and beliefs – namely class issues – later he rejects them totally in the name of his sexuality. Page's main criticism concerns two aspects: one is Alec, a character whom he sees as flat; the second is failure of the mirror structure Forster tries to build between the relationship of Maurice and Clive on the one hand, and that of Maurice and Alec on the other. Despite the presence of a few positive elements, Page considers *Maurice* a minor work within Forster's production, thus inscribing his study in the wave of criticism aiming to establish the value of the novel.[13]

The therapeutic force *Maurice* had for Forster, claimed by Meyers, is reiterated two years later, in 1979, by Glen Cavaliero.[14] He considers Forster's homosexuality as a condition that produces a friction between the author and society due to homophobia where same-sex relationships were illegal. Such a tension, far from being an impediment to his creativity, is used by Forster as a positive element resulting in a personal unique style that Cavaliero calls "evasion".[15] This style finds its best expression in *Maurice,* which is, in his view, a social protest novel. According to Cavaliero, Forster's writing is concerned with humanism, by which he means a condition or a possibility of reaching a state of happiness common to each human being, not just homosexuals. This is Cavaliero's response to those critics who questioned Forster's ability to portray the complete social spectrum due to the presence of a homosexual novel in his canon. At the same time, however, the source of such humanism – this faith in human beings' possibility to pursue wholeness – is specifically homosexual in Forster and not all writers have been as good as he was in preserving this "homosexual sensibility". In Cavaliero's words "the problem for the homosexual novelist (as distinct from the novelist writing about homosexuals) is to preserve the particular quality of his sensibility without being forced into a special pleading by society's attitude".[16]

---

[12] Page, *Forster's Posthumous*, 74.
[13] The same idea is reinforced by Page in a monograph on Forster where *Maurice* is included in a section dedicated to "Minor Fiction". See Norman Page, *E.M. Forster*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.
[14] Glen Cavaliero, *A Reading of E.M. Forster,* London: Macmillan, 1979.
[15] Cavaliero, *E.M. Forster*, 130.
[16] Cavaliero, *E.M. Forster*, 133.

According to Cavaliero "as a novel of homosexual love, *Maurice* must be accounted as a partial failure" [17] because eroticism and physicality are absent, and not convincingly replaced by any other feeling in the relationship between Maurice and Clive, thus leaving a sense of defensive pathos in the love scenes. This is for Cavaliero also true of the relationship between Alec and Maurice, which also lacks depth. The only convincing and interesting element in this relationship is the transcendence of class barriers that Cavaliero reads as "a reward of the homosexual condition".[18] The faith in humanity is reiterated by the choice of the two characters living together after Maurice "confronts the men in authority",[19] namely the teacher, doctor, scientist and priest, each of whom fails or proves to be inefficient in their attempt to give answers. Maurice's development and growth is therefore seen as a sort of pilgrimage towards fulfilment and joy.[20] Despite arguing that there is a form of social protest in the novel, Cavaliero reads it as a journey of the human condition, thus overlooking, in my opinion, Forster's political and social investigation of homosexuality.

Barbara Rosecrance's criticism, published in 1982, is also based on the value of *Maurice*. [21] In her view, the way in which Forster presents homosexuality is informed by his own sense of guilt and shame that is linked to the impossibility for homosexuals "achieve wholeness", [22] because denied reproduction. This is also echoed in *Maurice* where the characters cannot reach fulfillment. She reiterates the divisions of Forster's works into heterosexual and homosexual novels, arguing that whereas the heterosexual novels show depth, *Maurice* is a minor piece of work constructed around a single idea: the portrayal of homosexuality. According to Rosecrance there is no dialectic between Maurice and society; Alec is an opportunist who is only interested in his personal social advantage, and both characters are perceived as having "only the pitiful significance of their story".[23] As regards the relationship between Alec and Maurice and the issue of class barriers, Rosecrance, quoting Wilfred Stone,

[17] Cavaliero, *E.M. Forster*, 133.
[18] Cavaliero, *E.M. Forster*, 137.
[19] Cavaliero, *E.M. Forster*, 137.
[20] On this account see also Matthew Curr, "Recuperating E.M. Forster's *Maurice*" in *Modern Language Quarterly*, 62 1 (2001): 56.
[21] Barbara Rosecrance, *Forster's Narrative Vision*, Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1982, 150-184.
[22] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 153.
[23] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 152.

sees Maurice's intercourse with a lower class man as a symbol of "his descent, morally and socially, into the lower depths",[24] a sort of depravity. Moreover, she argues that at the base of the choice of the affair between Alec and Maurice there is a claim of distrust in sex as, in her words "a person who believes that sex is bad is likely to choose as a partner one who is 'unworthy' rather than vent his desire on an equal".[25] I would argue that Rosecrance does not give enough importance to the rejection of social class and physical love in the novel. Rosecrance does not acknowledge Maurice's development and his growth as a character, empowered precisely by and through these changes in attitudes towards the values of society. Maurice is, and remains, in her view, embedded in convention in all aspects of his life. Therefore the centre of interest of the novel for her is Clive, "whose inner harmony and moral superiority Forster unambiguously endorses"[26]; Clive's refusal to engage in a physical relation with Maurice would prove "his wisdom and ascendancy over the grosser Maurice".[27] Ultimately, *Maurice* is perceived as a total failure compared to the heterosexual novels and the reason lies in the suppression of the subversion that is the narrative energy of the heterosexual novels.

3.3 *Maurice* as a positive homosexual novel

The 1980s, as I have mentioned, saw a shift in the criticism on *Maurice* due to the emergence of the gay studies approach. The first novelty was the interest in the social and cultural discourses seen in a wider historical context. In 1982 Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin edited a volume of essays on Forster among which three are dedicated *Maurice*[28] that marks this shift in interest. I will give an account of two of them, as the third one, written by Philip Gardner, is dedicated to the philological evolution of the text and I am not concerned with those issues here.

---

[24] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 160.
[25] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 162.
[26] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 165.
[27] Rosecrance, *Narrative Vision*, 165.
[28] Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K. Martin, *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*, London: Macmillan Press, 1982. It is a volume that comprises a selection of papers presented in the conference organized on the occasion of the centenary of Forster's birth by Concordia University, Montreal.

Ira Bruce Nadel's "Moments in the Greenwood: *Maurice* in Context"[29] can be seen as a turning point in the critical reception of Forster's novel, as it recognizes the fundamental influence of cultural and social discourses around sexuality on *Maurice*. He investigates the relationships between men at the end of the nineteenth century and the mechanism of homophobia carried out thought the threat of blackmail. The Cleveland Street scandal, concerning a male brothel and involving members of high society in 1890, and the Wilde trials in 1895, had linked homosexuality with criminal behaviour, thus reinforcing the negative view of homosexuality that was condemned as an immoral act and a criminal offence with its consequent need for secrecy. According to Nadel, the novel stages the tension between social demands and private desires and the greenwood setting seems the only possible space where same-sex desire could happen freely. The issue of class difference is seen as a trope of same-sex relationships modulated in Forster's time through the Greek classical notion of *paiderastia*.[30] Such a model is, according to Nadel, the one Forster uses in the relationship between Maurice and Alec, whereas I will argue later in more detail that the model Forster conceives of has its origins elsewhere, as Forster attempts to reject such an ideal in the novel.[31]

Kathleen Grant's short paper, "*Maurice* as Fantasy",[32] re-establishes the value of the novel as fantasy not as a fairy tale or an infantile book as seen by other critics.[33] By referring to Forster's own observations in *Aspects of the Novel*, Grant suggests that in order to understand the ending and its special features, typical of the fantastic, we are required to adjust our attitude. *Maurice*'s final effect is not a happy ending but a representation of the double as Forster perceives it: Grant suggests indeed a reading of Maurice/Clive as two personas of the same character. Maurice would be the passionate self, the self of dreams, Clive's double, and his irrational part.

---

[29] Ira Bruce Nadel, "Moments in the Greenwood: *Maurice* in Context", in Herz and Martin, 177-190.

[30] He relies on the studies on Greek homosexuality by Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

[31] I will come back to this point later. On this account see also Raschke and her analysis of Platonism in the novel analysed later in this chapter.

[32] Kathleen Grant, "*Maurice* as Fantasy", in Herz and Martin, 191-203.

[33] See among others Cynthia Ozick "Forster as Homosexual", *Commentary*, 52:6 (1971): 81-85. In her view, *Maurice* is a fairy tale, a parable in the sense that it narrates the story of a hero who is stuck with an eradicable disability.

Robert K. Martin published one of the most influential articles on *Maurice* in 1983, "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*".[34] Martin is the first critic to explore the significance of the influence of sexological discourse, especially on Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds. By rejecting previous assumptions according to which the novel is concerned with an opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality, Martin argues that *Maurice* portrays instead an opposition of two kinds of homosexuality – one identified with Cambridge and Clive, and one with Alec and open air.

Arguing against the identification between Clive's views on homosexuality and Forster's, Martin concludes that *Maurice* is "an exploration of the growth in awareness of a homosexual protagonist, who moves from a false solution to a truer one".[35] According to Martin, the double structure of the novel is symbolic of two different representations of homosexuality. While the first section is dominated by Plato and indirectly by Symonds, what he calls "the apologists for "Greek love"" and homosexuality is defined as a higher form of love, and its spiritual superiority is preserved by its exclusion of physical consummation, the second is dominated by Edward Carpenter and his translation of Walt Whitman and includes the physical component and the only superiority over heterosexuality – if any – is related to its social consequences, "to its provision of an outlaw status for even the most respectable adherents".[36] Among the influences on Forster, Martin identifies the genre of the public schools and college novels that portrayed hopeless love between men.[37]

Martin also argues that the first part of the novel is primarily concerned with the inadequacy of schools and university in providing a guide to conduct in sexual matters, and the irony and negative elements Forster uses in the depiction of such an environment. Maurice's awareness of his homosexuality is divided, in Martin's view, into three stages: the vision of homosexuality as an

---

[34] Robert K. Martin, "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice", Journal of Homosexuality*, 8 3-4 (1983): 35-46.
[35] Martin, "Double Structure", 35.
[36] Martin, "Double Structure", 38.
[37] Martin is referring to the genre of the school story which was popular in the Nineteenth Century. The first publication was Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), which opened up a space for homoerotic exploration within the context of boarding school. It was followed by others amongst which the most famous were H. O. Sturgis's *Tim* (1891), Ashley Clarke's *Jaspar Tristram* (1899). For a full account of this genre see Parminder Kaur Bakshi, *Distant Desire, Homoerotic Codes and the Subversion of the English Novel in E.M. Forster's Fiction*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996, 60 and ff.

idealized friendship; a full acceptance of the physical component, and Maurice's acceptance of the social and political consequences of homosexuality, as well as acknowledging that the outlawed status of the homosexual provides the privilege of a radical perspective on society. Martin's article can be considered a landmark in the criticism on *Maurice* because it introduces, new debates and elements, in particular: the exploration of the connection to sexological discourses that inform the novel, and an emphasis upon the contradictions of the attitude to same-sex desire in the main institutions which, on the one hand, promoted Hellenism and homosociality and on the other hand, avoided any references to same-sex passion in the same culture.

Nevertheless, there are two aspects that I do not find entirely convincing. The first is Martin's association between Clive and Symonds, and the subsequent suggestion that in Symonds's works the physical component of same-sex desire is absent or condemned, whereas – especially in a later stage of his life, as I have shown earlier – Symonds fully recognised not only the possibility but the very need for a sexual component in a same-sex relationship. Moreover, while considering the novel as "an exploration of the growth in awareness of a homosexual protagonist, who moves from a false solution to a truer one",[38] Martin proposes a binary opposition that, I think, fails to grasp the complexity of the same-sex theorization. In my view this binary opposition runs the risk of putting the question in terms of the value of one or the other, a position that I have already criticized in the previous studies on *Maurice*. Furthermore, in proposing such a binary opposition he does not take into account other influences such as the cultural and social debates I have already mentioned in the previous section. Despite these flaws, and his tendency to divide the influence of Symonds and Carpenter into different sections of the novel rather than seeing the presence of both spread throughout it, Martin's contribution remains a crucial turning point in criticism of *Maurice*, and one of I feel very much indebted to.

The emblem of the gay-affirmative studies on Forster, as noted by Martin and Piggford,[39] is undoubtedly Claude Summers's study in his attempt to

[38] Robert K. Martin, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 8 (1983), 37.
[39] See Robert K. Martin, and George Piggford, "Introduction: Queer Forster?", 1-28, in Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster*.

present Forster as positive model for same-sex desire.[40] In the chapter dedicated to *Maurice,* Summers is interested in countering negative readings of the novel, and to present Forster not just as portraying homosexuality but of the "human condition" as a whole. His position echoes Cavaliero's in the emphasis on the humanism and Forster's ability in portraying human feelings, but such a claim is used by Summers to argue that *Maurice* should be included in the canon of a major author. In his view "homosexuality is a set of feelings involving the connection and commitment one individual makes with another and that such feelings predate sexual expression, sometimes by years".[41] Summers also underlines the importance of the social setting of the novel as it explores the impact of self-awareness on social attitudes. *Maurice* is thus fundamentally a political novel. He refuses the reading of the novel as a fantasy and claims that it is a realistic depiction of his "hero's gradual awakening to – and ultimate salvation by – the holiness of direct desire".[42]

He acknowledges the double structure presented by Martin[43]and sees as the core of the book "the loneliness of the human condition"[44] and the search for a possibility to escape such a condition through love. Society is, in Forster's depiction, a prison for homosexuals and only love can help escape it. According to him, "Maurice's self-realization is accomplished as the result of a struggle between his real self and the obscured 'I' of his social self. Maurice alternates his snobbery and a conventional distaste for the 'social inferiors' and his desire for a comradeship".[45] The symbolic passing of the Royal family, when Maurice is deciding whether to leave society, stands for Maurice's realization of the need for choosing between his two 'I's. The Royal family is read as the symbol of the mainstream society that Maurice renounces to live with Alec. In this light, Maurice and Alec's retreat to the greenwood is a way to achieve happiness through sacrifice and suffering, and therefore through a mutual process that leads them to be equal, they are well matched, despite belonging to different

[40] Claude Summers, *E.M. Forster*, New York: Ungar, 1983. See in particular "The Flesh Educating the Spirit: *Maurice*", 141-180.
[41] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 142.
[42] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 143.
[43] Although the two works are published in the same year Martin's study was published earlier in the year as shown by the fact that Summers refers to this study. See Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 176.
[44] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 150.
[45] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 170.

classes. The mutual sacrifice makes the choice "less fantastic than realistically necessary".[46] So, for Summers, "the escape into the greenwood expresses Forster's radical critique of his society while also conveying his humanistic faith in personal relationships".[47] Summers disputes the idea that *Maurice* claims the superiority of homosexuality; instead he sees Forster sharing the Wildean motto according to which to "become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered".[48] Such privilege is not a constitutive element of homosexuality but rather a sort of liberation achieved through the social stigma that homosexuals have to face. Far from being a sentimental apology for homosexuality, Summers argues, *Maurice* is "a convincing account of its hero's growth toward wholeness in a society that makes such growth very difficult".[49] *Maurice* is a political novel insofar as

> Maurice's education through suffering culminates in a sweeping indictment of his society, an indictment that results directly from his awareness of the political implications of the homosexual experience in a hostile world At the same time, however, the book transcends the political by affirming the possibility of alleviating the loneliness endemic to the human condition.[50]

In what may be seen as an over-defensive attitude against negative readings, Summers insists on the artistry and majesty of the structure, and the continuous interventions of the authorial voice, Forster's use of irony and of other sophisticated literary devices in the construction of the novel. His main concern is, however, to establish the positive values of the novel in showing the possibility of happiness and wholeness in a homosexual novel. He recognizes the flaw of the ending, however he emphasizes the completeness of the character of Maurice that, in itself, is enough to give it "full integration into Forster's canon".[51]

---

[46] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 175.
[47] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 175.
[48] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*¸ quoted in Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 176.
[49] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 177.
[50] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 180.
[51] Summers, *E.M. Forster*, 179.

3.4 Masculine love

At the beginning of the 1990s, the influence of studies of masculinity, virility and effeminacy resulted in three publications between 1992 and 1995 that investigated these issues in *Maurice*. John Fletcher published an article on *Maurice* and the issue of masculine love and virility.[52] He is interested in investigating the silences and the gaps in the novel, and especially the issue of effeminacy and its connections with the issue of intellectualism that helps explain, in his view, the complexity of the same-sex desire in the relationships between Maurice and Clive initially, and between Maurice and Alec later. Forster's insistence on the masculinity of Maurice signifies his intention to refuse his contemporary understanding of homosexuality as based on sexual inversion.

In a similar way, Alan Sinfield in 1994, sees at the core of *Maurice* a notion of masculinity based on Carpenter's idea of comradeship that Forster uses to masculinize Maurice first, and then couple Maurice-Alec in the second part of the book.[53]The only character in the novel that is provided with a model for his sexuality is the aristocratic Risley, a symbol of "the leisure-class stereotype"[54] based on the Wildean model even if it is a model that Forster wants to dismiss. In an attempt to distance his model from the Wildean stereotype, that Sinfield argues "is still powerful in the novel, though by negation",[55] Forster relies on masculinity and virility as the main characteristics of the homosexual characters.

In 1995, Joseph Bristow published a book on the effeminacy and homoeroticism in Britain since the late nineteenth century that follows the lesson of Sinfield.[56] Bristow starts from the idea that Forster lives a conflict between contesting "the imperialist masculinity that was keenly intolerant of the intellectual artistic type of leisure-class aesthete",[57] and the rejection of the

---

[52] John Fletcher "Forster's Self-Erasure: *Maurice* and the Scene of Masculine Love" in Joseph Bristow ed., *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, New York: Routledge, 1992.
[53] Alan Sinfield, "Sorting out the men from the queer", Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, 1994, 140-142.
[54] Sinfield, "Sorting out the men", 140.
[55] Sinfield, "Sorting out the men", 142.
[56] Bristow, "The sexual predicament of E.M. Forster's fiction", in *Effeminate England*, 55-99.
[57] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 56.

Wildean model.[58]In this project to reject the latter, Forster has to banish the form of the effeminate intellectual and of cultured masculinity in order to show how "two men overcome the class barriers by obeying an unstoppable impulse to love the body".[59] The narrative is a triumph of the 'comradeship' as professed by Edward Carpenter and it "stages […] Forster's compulsive need to grapple with what was for him the enigmatic psychology informing sexual desire between men".[60] In order to portray what Maurice himself calls "masculine love" the novel juxtaposes, in Bristow's reading, two characters: Maurice who stands for the average man, athletic, good looking, and "possessing the willingness to obey his bodily desires"[61] and the "intellectual arrogant and upper-class Clive".[62] In this view, the novel therefore pinpoints "Clive's moral and physical failure to obey his erotic attraction to other men"[63] and at the same time, it also attacks women and rejects vehemently the association with the "effeminate homosexual identity of the 'Oscar Wilde's sort".[64] Risley, in particular, embodies the worst traits of the intellectual type modelled upon Strachey. *Maurice* responds exactly to Forster's project to present a different model of homosexuality, freed by the connotation of morbidity that is characterized by masculinity, in Bristow's view.

The issue of reception and its relation with *Maurice* as gay fiction is what interested Dellamora in an article published in 1993.[65] The publication of *Maurice* had, in his view, a double impact: it produced shock in the mainstream criticism which tried to play down the value of the writings (see the critical reactions by Meyers and others discussed above); on the other hand, it was negatively received by gay militants of the post-Stonewall decade who considered these texts to be feeble and dated, and looked at Forster suspiciously for not announcing his homosexuality during his lifetime. Dellamora criticizes both positions as they focus on the binary assumption of a true or false Forster. Instead, he claims that Forster "alters the structure of literary history by

[58] Bristow analyses this returning pattern especially in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *The Longest Journey* (1907), 55-71.
[59] Joseph Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoeroticism after 1885,* 80.
[60] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 81.
[61] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 81.
[62] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 81.
[63] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 81.
[64] Bristow, "The sexual predicament", 81.
[65] Richard Dellamora, "Textual Politics/Sexual Politics", *Modern Language Quarterly* 54: 1, March 1993, 155-64.

inserting his texts into it in a new mode of temporal allegory"[66] thus demanding a different and continuous reading process. The appearance of a new body of posthumous works in Forster requires a continuous re-reading in relation to his other texts. In other words, Dellamora sees in the allegorical essence of posthumous fiction a possibility of involving the readers in a continuous re-interpretation because, he claims, an allegorical text is "one that, because of the materials entrusted to posterity by the writer, always differs from itself" [67], making it difficult – if not impossible – to speak of an authentic text. In the case of Forster "individual texts function as systems of signs dialectally related by means of temporal difference"[68] creating a singular complex ambivalence.

Dellamora thus claims that in order to understand the meaning of each of Forster's novels we have to assess the set of texts published before 1924 (the date when the last piece of fiction was published during his lifetime), the set of texts published after his death in 1970, and also the way these two sets are placed in both "the contexts of production and their appearance half a century apart".[69] Such an understanding is further complicated by the position of gay politics towards the set of texts and by its continuous changing the evaluation of the new assessments of homophobic forces. In other words, Dellamora maintains a sort of impossibility to grasp a sexual truth about *Maurice* and he asserts the necessity for Forster's posthumous texts to be continually recalled, taking into account the shift of sexual politics. Dellamora is concerned with the complexity of the reception of this set of texts and he claims that only a double framing that put into question both historical and contemporary truths can give a full account of a reading.

In the same year, Dimitra Papazoglou [70] published a book on the influence of Hellenism in all of Forster's works in which she reads *Maurice* as Forster's attempt to combine the Hellenic ideal of same-sex desire with modernity. His main Hellenic influence, in her view, were Symonds and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, the latter being "a fervent Platonist"[71] and one of

[66] Dellamora, "Textual Politics", 163.
[67] Dellamora, "Textual Politics", 163.
[68] Dellamora, "Textual Politics", 163.
[69] Dellamora, "Textual Politics", 163.
[70] Dimitra Papazoglou, *The Fever of Hellenism. The Influence of Ancient Greece on the Work of E.M. Forster*, Athens: Parousia, 1995.
[71] Papazoglou, *Fever of Hellenism*, 163.

Forster's friends from Cambridge. According to Papazoglou, both Symonds and Dickinson, whose interest in Platonism was very much due to their homosexuality, were not at ease with the physical component in same- sex relationships. The Hellenism Forster dramatizes in *Maurice* derives from Carpenter's influence and therefore it displays a more naturalistic approach. In doing so Papazoglou follows the double structure reading of Martin and neglects, in the case of Symonds, the recognition of physical love in his *Memoirs*, which I have already mentioned. Papazoglou sees Alec's eroticism and his belonging to the natural world as deriving from an Arcadian world that has its origins in Paganism, therefore something different from the intellectual Hellenism to which same-sex desire was associated in Victorian England.

Papazoglou believes that *Maurice* is not only a novel about homosexuality but one that presents all Forsterian themes such as "self-realization and self-fulfilment, acceptance of one's true nature, recognition of diversity in human nature, emphasis on individuality, acceptance of all the impulses that make up a man, liberation from conventionality".[72] The quotation gives an idea of how Papazoglou's view is close to the gay studies approach in her reference to a human condition that need to be accepted and liberated, and also on the shift back to the value of Forster as a novelist and as a homosexual one.

The last publication I want to mention in this section is Parminder Kaur Bakshi's study on desire and homoeroticism in Forster's works.[73] She shares with Papazoglou a return to the value of Forster and she presents homoeroticism as an integral part of Forster's production. In her view Forster's homosexuality "endowed him with an alternative sense of reality", responsible for his creativity. [74] The latter position echoes Cavaliero's: however in Bakshi's reading the novels appear as a result of "the negotiations between the author's personal desire and the public conventions".[75] Bakshi claims that Forster's novels display the supremacy of personal relations as the possibility for fulfillment over the social and political reforms proposed by the dominant

[72] Papazoglou, *Fever of Hellenism*, 189.
[73] Parminder Kaur Bakshi, *Distant Desire. Homoerotic Codes and the Subversion of the English Novel in E.M. Forster's Fiction*, New York: Peter Lang, 1996.
[74] Bakshi, *Distant Desire,* 29.
[75] Bakshi, *Distant Desire,* 3.

cultural debates as the only possible vehicle to self-accomplishment: from this point of view she is very close to Summers. I believe that by arguing this Bakshi underestimates the political value of Forster's novels.

She argues that, while in the early novels homoeroticism was portrayed through silences and displacements, in *Maurice* it is explicit. She tracks back the origins of homoeroticism in the genre of school stories as one of the most influential over Forster. She investigates how words such as "friend" and "brotherhood" acquired a new dimension by the association with homoeroticism in what she calls "homosexual writing".[76] And she goes further, claiming that "gay novels" – in which *Maurice* is included – can be seen as the last remaining examples of romantic literature, a sort of fantasy. Bakshi focuses on the writing process of the novel, highlighting the pressures of homoerotic desire that almost compelled Forster to write *Maurice*. She reads traces of romance in the novel (for example in the way Maurice meets Clive by accident) and insists on how Forster creates Maurice's identity through a series of fragmented incidents in order to claim the naturalness of the homosexual identity.

The distinguishing feature of *Maurice*, by comparison with the genre of school stories, is the absence of death and the tone of affirmation that pervades the novel. The radical component of *Maurice* is the positive view of homosexuality and Forster's determination to give Maurice and Clive a place in society. Forster tries to adapt homoerotic desire to heterosexual themes but the former inevitably explodes the values of heterosexual life. As a result Forster's novels do not resolve the compatibility between homosexuality and heterosexuality, but rather expose the tensions between them.

The affirmative approach of Bakshi's work and her aim to appreciate the positivity of the homosexual representation in the novel lead her to claim that Forster wants to restate the superiority of homosexual love over the social normativity represented by heterosexuality in society. In her reading, the fact that Forster "highlights the inadequacy of a system that allows one set of relations but banished the other"[77] is synonymous with claiming the superiority of homosexuality: Forster blames society for turning Maurice into an outlaw, but

[76] Bakshi, *Distant Desire*, 43.
[77] Bakshi, *Distant Desire*, 198.

he is not able to find an alternative solution, thus proposing an escape that can be seen as a failure.

Bakshi's work is useful insofar as it investigates the issue of desire in all of Forster's works but in my view she is too concerned to claim a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the novel, and thus she fails to investigate further the depth of the novel. She follows the critical approach interested to decide whether *Maurice* has any literary value and she dismisses it as having a weak structure. In her view, Forster expresses in the novel the superiority of same-sex desire over heterosexuality and thus she does not recognise the important influence of the sexological debates in *Maurice*. Her argument creates an oppositional model where the homosexual subject is 'the other' in comparison to the heterosexual self, implying throughout her text that the homosexual self is linked to fantasy rather than reality.

3.5 Queer at last

In the second half of the 1990s most studies on sexuality were influenced by the evolution of queer theory that, as I have already mentioned, is very much indebted to post-structuralism and postmodernism.

The impact of such theory in the readings of Forster is registered in a volume published in 1997 and edited by Robert K. Martin and George Piggford.[78] It is the first volume on Forster to explicitly refer to queer theory as the methodological framework.[79] In the introduction the authors explain how Forster can be seen as a queer artist insofar as he "seeks to disrupt the economy of the normal".[80] According to Martin and Piggford, Forster is queer insofar as he queries the idea of assimilation and he makes visible a certain "insistence on the peculiarities of passion, a force that constantly works to undermine any move to a reassuring 'gayness'".[81] The book aims to queer Forster by examining the "theoretical and critical forces that produce the illusion of a stable category – the author – in ways that privilege the normative over the

[78] Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster*.
[79] It needs to be noted that Dellamora, Bristow and Sinfield in their approach and terminology were informed by queer theory.
[80] Martin and Piggford, "Introduction: Queer Forster?",4.
[81] Martin and Piggford, "Introduction: Queer Forster?", 4.

disruptive"[82] and by deconstructing the very category of "gay author" attached to Forster. The operation consists in finding the connection between the narratives of sexuality and desire in his writing and in his biography, and to show how sexuality and desire in Forster are presented as a "destabilising force that undermines class and convention". [83] Despite being fruitful in itself, this operation of emphasizing Forster's desire for men of other classes and of ethnicities and races, and his sadomasochist tendencies, gives the erroneous impression that sexual desire is the only driving force of Forster's writing.

I will discuss here only the two essays in the collection that analyse *Maurice* extensively. Gregory W. Bredbeck's "Queer Superstitions: Forster, Carpenter and the illusion of (sexual) identity" [84] focuses on how Forster eroticizes the Other in an attempt to open up the narrow erotic possibilities offered by the British establishment. In reading *Maurice,* Bredbeck draws a parallel between Carpenter and Maurice arguing that both "in contrast to dominant strains of British homophobia which constructed homosexuals as stigmatized deviants, [...] fetishize the homosexual positing him as a valorized other".[85] In his view, *Maurice* centres on sexuality and the dynamics of class eroticism and the novel is governed by a binary between the system that opposes two kinds of homosexuality and something else, which he identifies with an outside space of the novel. He finds a movement of the Dionysian towards "culture" carried by Clive in his "conversion" to heterosexuality[86] and one from culture towards the Dionysian that Maurice starts exactly since Clive's conversion. Bredbeck argues that the Dionysian "comes to suggest the possibility of an unknowable and unrepresented space *outside* of the text"; [87] hence the climax of the Dionysian is Maurice's physical relationship with Alec. What Bredbeck claims to be Forster's queerness is his aim to advocate a liberation of all subjects from the "very system of western subjectivity and meaning" [88] that he took from Carpenter. According to Bredbeck Forster's

[82] Martin and Piggford, "Introduction: Queer Forster?", 10.
[83] Martin and Piggford, "Introduction: Queer Forster?", 13.
[84] Gregory W. Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions: Forster, Carpenter and the Illusion of (sexual) identity" in Martin and Piggford eds., *Queer Forster*, 29-58.
[85] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 34.
[86] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 53.
[87] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 53.
[88] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 50.

politics revolve around "a poetic of *dis*identification – a strategy of embedding identifications within an epistemological framework that questions the entire apparatus of 'identification', 'identity', 'politics'".[89] In other words, Bredbeck argues that Forster was well aware of the instability of the categories that his own society presented as fixed, and he adds that the presence of distinct and oppositional terms in his works are a symbol of such awareness. The conflicts have been resolved into the figure of a "humanist Forster"[90] created by both academia and gay and lesbian studies which is a fictional invention.

In the same volume, another voice connected to the queer theory approach is Debrah Raschke's essay "Breaking the Engagement with Philosophy: Re-envisioning Hetero/Homo Relations in *Maurice*".[91] The study is concerned to demonstrate how "*Maurice* engages Platonism as a site of sexual struggle".[92] She investigates how Platonism, although providing an escape from a religious condemnation of homosexuality, is at the same time revealed to be an impediment to physical love. Raschke's draws a parallel between the feminist critic Luce Irigaray's and Forster's critique of Platonism. Irigaray condemns Western metaphysics and Platonism for their insistence on positioning the truth away from the body; Forster in *Maurice* criticizes Platonism in the same way for seeing the body and all materiality as a position of non-truth. Raschke shows how the novel displays discourses of Greek love and Platonism as linked to power and class hierarchies – in the relationship between Clive and Maurice – just to reject that system in the name of mutuality in the relationship between Maurice and Alec. Consequently, she argues that Forster's preference for the body is at odds with Platonism and she shows how the characters associated with it – namely Mr Ducie and Clive – use it to escape from any kind of physicality and any experience connected to the sensual. Clive is seen as the embodiment of Platonism that functions as "a barrier between the

[89] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 56. (Emphasis in the original).
[90] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 56.
[91] Debrah Raschke, "Breaking the Engagement with Philosophy: Re-envisioning Hetero/Homo Relations in *Maurice*" in Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster*, 151-165. A modified version of this article appears in Debrah Raschke, *Modernism, Metaphysics, and Sexuality*, Selingrove: Susquenhanna University Press, 2006, 102-128. My quotations are from Martin.
[92] Raschke, "Breaking the Engagement", 152.

self and another subject"[93] and his conversion to heterosexuality is indeed the result of a confused perception of the "desires of his culture with his own".[94]

Raschke also relies on Judith Butler's assumption that the heterosexual matrix is reinforced by the repetition of its supposed normative and idealized positions thus becoming the law of sex. The more this law is cited or repeated, the more it gains the appearance of possessing an *a priori* authority. "The authoritative bearers of the law in *Maurice* (Dr. Barry, Lasker Jones and Mr. Ducie) in losing their authoritarian grip, lose also the strength of their labels".[95] Raschke concludes her analysis claiming that *Maurice* is a lesson on love that advocates that, in order to reach body fulfilment, Platonism has to be abandoned.

The two essays I have presented from *Queer Forster* give a sense of how queer theory applied to an analysis of Forster and *Maurice* can reveal a fruitful connection between the author as a fluid and unstable category, and his writing. Queering Forster and *Maurice* results in challenging the readings of both gay studies and mainstream academic analyses in order to open up the possibility of new perspectives.

3.6 Into the canon: but which one?

As I have indicated above, after this publication, critical interventions on *Maurice* have been sporadic, and I have decided to select four that I think give an idea of the evolution of the criticism.

The first two contributions I want to mention were published respectively in 1998 and 2007. Despite the long time lapse, I think they are motivated by a similar intention to position Forster in a canon – one in the gay canon, and the other, in the canon of classic literature. The third one is also in a way concerned with the re-evaluation of *Maurice* within Forster's works. The last article I will mention concerns modalities of silence in Forster's "minor" fiction.

In his *History of Gay Literature*[96] Gregory Woods presents the model of same-sex desire Forster articulates in *Maurice.* In his view, Forster provides the model for the invisible, ordinary, masculine homosexual of the twentieth century,

[93] Raschke, "Breaking the Engagement", 160.
[94] Raschke, "Breaking the Engagement", 160.
[95] Raschke, "Breaking the Engagement", 157.
[96] Gregory Woods, "The Tragic Sense of Life" in Woods, *A History of Gay Literature*, 217-218.

a man from suburbia "who happens also to be an 'outlaw' because he is homosexual".[97] Maurice's dreariness is linked to the major flaw of the book: "the laughable implausibility of its 'happy ending'".[98] Nevertheless, Woods does not dismiss the whole novel as boring; its very flaws make it interesting; *Maurice*, in a sense, *"has to be dull*. The very 'ordinariness' of the invisible, masculine, homosexual man can kill a novel whose central theme is the potential respectability of homosexual love." [99] Maurice is the "model of the undistinguished middle-class man of the twentieth-century suburbs"[100] and for this reason, according to Woods, the essence of modernity.

The *Cambridge Companion to Forster*, published in 2007,[101] follows a similar desire to appreciate the canonical figure of Forster, but aims to position him in the classical literary canon rather than in the gay one, without, it needs to be said, dismissing his sexuality. In the chapter on *Maurice*, Howard J. Booth emphasizes the literary elements of the novel by exploring the genres, namely the *Bildungsroman* and the "marriage plot", and the schoolboy novel, of which he believes *Maurice* is a development.[102] *Maurice* is different from these genres, however, because there is no trace of the tragic condition so typical of the former genre and because its aim is "to address individual maturation with the outcome of comedy, while remaining attentive to the wide range of homosexual experience".[103] In trying to define *Maurice,* Booth considers the novel precursor of modernist texts in its addressing self-formation in a way that anticipates the era of identity politics.

According to Booth the novel depicts Maurice and his different possible ways of living, including a socially imposed "normality", the relationship with Clive that proves to be wrong and then the final relationship with Alec. The text narrates how Maurice learns to cope with his homosexual condition, and for this reason Booth sees the structure as a set of developing associations. Booth applies the Freudian concept of "identification", the process through which

---

[97] Woods, "The Tragic Sense of Life", 218.
[98] Woods, "The Tragic Sense of Life", 218.
[99] Woods, "The Tragic Sense of Life" 219.
[100] Woods, "The Tragic Sense of Life", 219.
[101] David Bradshaw ed. *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
[102] Howard J. Booth, "Maurice", Bradshaw ed. *The Cambridge Companion*, 173-187.
[103] Booth, "Maurice", 174.

individuals form their character by identifying with strong role models, to the reading of homosexuality in the novel. Heterosexual male individuals identify with the father whose authority, reinforced by secondary identifications – social forces such as education and law – help to build their personality. The absence of these models in a homosexual individual results in the delay of such a process until suitable models are available. The homosexual characters in the novel, in this light, go through their lives in an unconscious search through different attempts for the "right" identification.

Booth also argues that the novel does not interpret homosexuality through the sexological models existing at the time. In staking this claim, Booth fails to acknowledge the influence of sexology on Forster who, as Martin and others have demonstrated, and I will argue later, was well informed about sexology thanks to the works he read through Symonds and Carpenter. In conclusion, Booth claims that the novel explores the view that homosexuality, rather than being rare, very often did not show its presence because of the pressure of normative society.

In 2001, Matthew Curr published an article that"[104]aims to re-establish the position of the novel by investigating its critical reception. He starts by exploring how the tendency of the New Criticism to read each novel by the same author in terms of a unity of production caused, in *Maurice*'s case, a comparison with Forster's acclaimed works, thus leading to label this as the weakest in the author's canon. He is attacked both for failing to reinscribe his novelist's skills and for failing to come out as a homosexual. In order to recuperate *Maurice*, Curr suggests that we re-read the final scene of the greenwood in connection to "Terminal Note" written by Forster – and therefore the autobiographical presence – so that we can rethink the whole ending as "an explosive social revision".[105] The departure from England that is a leitmotif of Forster's early novels comes to an end in *Maurice* for there is "no more need of departures, to other countries, no more expatriations of rebel souls or escapes from barbarous British rule".[106]

[104] Matthew Curr, "Recuperating E.M. Forster's *Maurice"*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 62:1 (2001): 53-69.
[105] Curr, "Recuperating", 60.
[106] Curr, "Recuperating", 60.

Curr claims that the relationship between Clive and Maurice is presented by Forster as natural and therefore set in Nature, whereas Clive and Anne are set outside a natural setting to prove that Clive's conversion is unnatural. In order to corroborate such a reading, Curr investigates the absence of nudity and desire in Clive's marriage but he fails to pinpoint that Clive showed the same absence of sexual desire in his relationship with Maurice. Therefore it is not possible to say that this absence of physicality is specific to his heterosexual conversion; rather, it is related to the way his figure is constructed around Platonism.

What I find particularly interesting in Curr's article is the insistence on the autobiographical presence in the novel, and the correlation between private passion and public art, which is an essential aspect in the understanding of queer posthumous writing, as I will explain the chapter eight.

3.7 Coda

The last publication I want to discuss is Vybarr Cregan-Reid's analysis of the modalities in which Forster uses silence in his fiction.[107] According to his study published in 2013, while in other "minor" fiction Forster had deployed the mechanism of silence to disguise homoerotic desire, in *Maurice* the silence becomes "capable of questioning the moral and social order as it exists in the teens of the twentieth century".[108] Cregan-Reid is interested in investigating how Forster deals with the definition of the homosexual body, especially in a heteronormative and heterocentric environment where "there were few existing taxonomies to draw upon and with no socially permitted way of doing so".[109] Forster experimented with different genres and modes until in *Maurice* he found a convincing model of being queer. Cregan-Reid's reading of the epilogue, informed by queer theory, offers an innovative perspective. The silence that surrounds the afterlife of Maurice and Clive is what Cregan-Reid calls a "rejection of ancestry and a repressive social order".[110] He claims that what the greenwood represents is not the opposite of socially-conventional norms which

[107] Vybarr Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence in E.M. Forster's 'Inferior; Fiction", *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920,* 56: 4 (2013): 445-461.
[108] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 455.
[109] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 453.
[110] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 455.

society forced into us, "but their complete absence".[111] He insists that "the silence in *Maurice* is "an altogether more proactive one"[112] as Forster uses it politically to imply that, while the world Alec and Maurice reject is definable with words, there is no expression to explain the space to which the two characters have access. In Cregan-Reid's words, "[Maurice and Alec] are liberated to explore outside their class and their geography in a way that marrying heterosexuals, like Clive, are not permitted to". [113]

By placing emphasis on the specificity of being queer, Cregan-Reid rejects the previous readings of the epilogue as fantasy or idyll and reveals how Forster's representation of male desire can be analysed from a different angle. I find this reading very convincing especially for its investigation of the relation between Forster and his writing and I will use it when analysing queer posthumous writing in chapter eight.

3.8 Conclusion

I will now summarize which critical views I am indebted to and have informed my own reading of *Maurice*, as presented in the next chapter.

After a negative strand of reviews that focused on the literary value of *Maurice*, in 1979 Cavaliero started to investigate the power of homophobia in the novel, an issue that was extensively analysed in the 1980s by the gay studies approach, especially by Martin and Summers. Martin was also the first to recognise the literary value of the novel and at the same time to focus on the way same-sex desire was represented and problematized in different characters in the novel. Moreover, he also analysed the influence of sexological debates in Forster's perception of homosexuality and how these debates structured the novel itself. His reading of the influence of Symonds, Carpenter and Whitman in the novel is still an important contribution to the criticism.

Furthermore, I am indebted to some of the interventions of the 1990s, especially Dellamora who shifts the focus to the novel's reception. In his review on posthumous fiction, Dellamora also warns about the risk of giving a fixed interpretation of the novel that purports to be true, since in the case of *Maurice*,

[111] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 455.
[112] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 457.
[113] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 457.

a particular status of self-censorship linked to the intervention on sexual politics requires a continuous renegotiation due to the shifting of such politics. The analysis of the social and cultural construction of masculinity, effeminacy and other issues linked to models of same-sex desire, present in the works of Sinfield and Bristow, will help me to develop my reading.

Additionally, I find particularly interesting the impact of queer theory on the criticism of *Maurice* especially for its challenging the idea of a "gay" stable author-Forster, thus suggesting a space for investigating the gaps, the aporias and the frictions between the author and the text. This approach is also interesting for exploring the force of desire and its power to undermine class and conventions in *Maurice*.

I share with Curr's view an interest in analysing the specificity of the autobiographical presence in *Maurice*, especially due to the fact that Forster decided not to publish it during his lifetime. Finally, I will use Cregan-Reid's analysis of the silence as a starting point to investigate the relation between private writing, posthumous writing and oeuvre.

Although the lack of publications recently might suggest that little remains to be said on the subject, I think there still are aspects to be analysed about the novel, especially as regards its correlation with Forster's life, the sexological and cultural debates it is informed by, and the issue of writing a novel for posthumous publication. It is in this space I want to posit my reading of the novel.

CHAPTER 4

Homosexual characters and queer choices: E.M. Forster's *Maurice*

4.1 Introduction

In my analysis of Forster's *Maurice* I am mainly interested in how Forster works with the idea of homosexuality to create a fictional representation of homosexual characters. Edelman notes that as soon as homosexuality emerged as an identifiable category through cultural and social constructions for social and political-controlling aims, the representation of it emerged too.[1] What we perceive as being the homosexual is the result, according to Edelman, of a "compulsory marking of his legibility",[2] the urge to represent it and to make its body visible. In writing *Maurice*, I believe, Forster is working exactly on this mechanism of representation, trying to make sense of what different modes of homosexuality existed in his time. I will argue that, insofar as Forster presents the different possibilities of homosexualities and rejects heteronormative logic – especially in the elimination of the epilogue – he shows in *Maurice* a queer approach.

The understanding of homosexuality that Forster is depicting in *Maurice* is informed by the sexological discourses of the time, but also by other relevant cultural, scientific and social debates. Furthermore, Forster is combining different ideas to negotiate his own understanding which requires, also the elimination of the cultural and intellectual common views of his time he refuses. At the same time, he is interested in exploring the social space of homosexuals in a heteronormative and homophobic context, such as in Edwardian Britain, when the novel is set. Throughout the novel, as I will show, the dynamics of social exclusion homosexual characters have to go through is fiercely criticized for its injustice and through Maurice's words, Forster expresses his frustration for the condition of the legal system of England.

Homosexual characters in the novel are forced into a choice between expressing their desire and becoming queer subjects – which implies being

[1] Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*, New York: Routledge 1994, xiv.
[2] Edelman, *Homographesis*, 12.

social misfits – or abandoning such a subjectivity in order to fit in society. Elisabeth Grosz applies Deleuze's concept of active/reactive forces to explain the possible threat posed by non-heterosexual practices and lifestyles to heteronormative society and defines queer subjectivity as an active subject position exactly for its renunciation of a comfortable space that closetedness might offer.[3] Maurice and Alec will choose to occupy the space of active subjects, whereas Clive will retreat to the space of privilege offered by society by becoming a reactive subject and denying his desire.

The process that conducts the characters to this final stage is presented as a complex and articulated path of self-discovery, especially for Maurice who is presented as a mediocre character. The process of understanding his homosexuality is also slow because there are no models he can follow. Clive, instead, is the intellectual intelligent character who is aware of his interests for men since childhood and whose life is characterised by a constant search for explanation, and social acceptance of his condition through intellectual and cultural models such as Platonism and Hellenism.

During the love affair between Maurice and Clive, it is the latter who dominates the relationship and imposes his own Platonism, which implies a total exclusion of physical contact. It is only after the end of this affair due to Clive's decision to stick to society and heterosexuality – explained by Forster as a response to social pressure – that Maurice gradually finds his own way to live his sexuality. Through a second encounter with Clive's gamekeeper, Alec Scudder, he also learns to accept his sexual subjectivity and ultimately abandons English society for a comradeship in the greenwood with Alec. Being a member of the lower class, Alec is not troubled by the intellectual constraints of society and therefore, in Forster's view, ready to live his sexuality and desires. The happy ending of the novel, which was imperative for Forster, sees Maurice and Alec at the threshold of a life together in the greenwood. The first edition of the novel comprised an Epilogue that Forster decided to eliminate in the following versions. [4]

[3] Elisabeth Grosz, "Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity", in Hall, *Queer Studies Reader,* 194-211.

[4] The *Epilogue* is now published in the appendix of the Abinger critical edition of *Maurice* under the editorship of Oliver Stallybrass and Elizabeth Heine, 221-224. For the evolution of the novel see Philip Gardner, "Introduction" in E.M. Forster, *Maurice*, Philip Gardner, ed. The Abinger

Being a queer subject means inhabiting the space between heterosexual requirements and subjectivity, a difficult task, for, as Bersani claims, "we have learned to desire from within the heterosexual norms and gendered structures that we can no longer think of as natural, or as exhausting all the options for self-identification".[5]

In the first section of this chapter I will analyse how the characterization of Maurice as a mediocre boy and man allows Forster to create an alternative to the stereotype of the homosexual as an artistic and intelligent type. At the same time, Forster explores the dichotomy between social conformity and private subjectivity, finally asserting that there is no viable space for homosexuals in English society of the Edwardian era. In the second part, I will investigate the way Forster refuses the positive connection between homosexuality and Hellenism by presenting, in the characterization of Clive, the failure of the Platonic model. To reiterate this point, Forster also contrasts Hellenism and the statues at the British Museum with Alec and Maurice's bodily presences, thus emphasizing the opposition between a dead cult and real life. Hellenism proves unable to provide any positive models to understand same-sex desire, to the extent that Clive, who has relied on it, feels left alone and he succumbs to social pressure and chooses heterosexuality.

In the third part, I will explore the issue of class as Maurice's negotiation of his own desires finally find its climax in his decision to live outside society with Alec in the greenwood. It is a gradual achievement that occurs only after long and tormented processes.

4.2 A mediocre man

From the earliest pages of the novel, Maurice is characterized by mediocrity and normality. During his years at the boarding school he is described as "a plump, pretty lad, not in any way remarkable" [6] and the narrator draws a parallel between him and his father:

Edition, London: Andre Deutsch, 1999, vii-liv and also Philip Gardner ,"The Evaluation of E.M. Forster's *Maurice*, in Herz and Martin, 204-223.

[5] Leo Bersani, *Homos,* 6.

[6] Edward Morgan Forster, *Maurice*, ed. Philip Gardner, The Abinger Edition, London: Andre Deutsch, 1999. All references to the novel will be hereafter given in the body of the text.

> who had passed in the procession twenty-five years before, vanished into a public school, married, begotten a son and two daughters, and recently died of pneumonia. Mr Hall had been a good citizen, but lethargic. (2-3)

Maurice's mediocrity is associated with his father's ordinariness who had followed the path offered by what Butler has called "heterosexual matrix",[7] that is the complex hierarchical system that imposes coherence and stability between sex, gender and sexuality, giving the impression that this is the only set of possibilities. In drawing this parallel, Forster suggests a hereditary conception of homosexuality, and which is reinforced further throughout the novel until Maurice is put under hypnosis, in the hope of resolving his condition, and is told that he is affected by "congenital homosexuality" (158). Forster shares this belief in the hereditariness of homosexuality with the main sexologists of his time, including Symonds and Carpenter, as I have already showed.[8]

The stress on *normality* in the quotations, derives also from Symonds and Carpenter, according to whom homosexuality is just one of the possible ways for humans to experience their sexuality, and it is thus perfectly normal in its essence. I have already mentioned the stress on normality that British debates on sexology affirm in their attempt to produce a respectable model of homosexuals that could be included in the existing society. Symonds writes that:

> The majority [of inverts] differ in no detail of their outward appearance, their physique, or their dress from normal men. They are athletic, masculine in habits, frank in manner, passing through society year after year without arousing a suspicion of their inner temperament.[9]

Symonds makes a point about visibility and the absence of external signs of "inversion" and claims that it is only a matter of "temperament" and

---

[7] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 9. Butler's expression is a combination of Monique Wittig's notion of the "heterosexual contract" and Adrienne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality". See Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 194; See Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. NY: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1980, 21-32 and Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality.*

[8] See 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

[9] John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion Addressed especially to Medical Psychologists and Jurists*, London: privately printed, 1896, 15.

personality. In the same way, Carpenter insists on the fact that homosexuals are "muscular and well-built, and not distinguishable in exterior structure and the carriage of body from others of their own sex".[10]

Symonds and Carpenter underline the muscularity and the masculinity of inverts implying that there is no specific invert body, but only a male body defined by gender rather than sexuality. The aim of both was to present a case for legal rights and to gain respectability, which was articulated through the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion of different modalities of being inverts. Instead of challenging the existing notions of gender and sex, what Rubin defines a "sex/gender system", the system in which through a cultural, political and social mechanism everyone is assigned a gender that derives from chromosomal sex,[11] Symonds and Carpenter's project was an intervention in the social arrangements that were required to underline the similarities to those who socially and legally occupy the space of privilege, namely heterosexual men.

Forster is influenced by this idea of masculinity and *normality* in the characterization of Maurice and in order to emphasise this trait, he introduces another character, Risley, who is instead characterised by unmanliness:

> Risley was dark, tall and *affected*. He made an *exaggerated gesture* when introduced, and when he spoke, which was continually, he used strong yet *unmanly* superlatives. (19, my emphasis).

The juxtaposition of Maurice and Risley serves the purpose of reinforcing the distance between the models of homosexuality characterized by masculinity that should be accepted by society and the Wildean model of the effeminate homosexual associated with morbidity, as noted by Bristow.[12]

Risley echoes the Wildean model of the homosexual that was constructed after the Wilde trials and that I have already discussed in chapter two.[13] Risley is the embodiment of the artistic type, modelled around Lytton Strachey,[14] the artistic and intellectual type whereas, as noted by Norman Page,

---

[10] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 33-34.
[11] Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy of Sex", 57-210.
[12] See chapter 4.
[13] See 2.4.3.
[14] See Bristow, *Effeminate*, 81.

because Maurice "is athletic, handsome in a masculine way, and a successful businessman, he helps to demolish the popular stereotype of the languid, high-voiced, exhibitionistic or visibly effeminate invert".[15] If Risley is "exaggerated", Maurice "[e]xcept on one point his temperament was normal" (114).

Despite taking from Symonds and Carpenter the idea of masculinity as a necessary trait of homosexuality, Forster however departs from them in freeing Maurice from any artistic characteristics, which they both emphasized as specific to homosexual men. It is especially Carpenter who recognizes in what he calls Uranians – his term for homosexual – a special "artist-nature, with the artist's sensibility and perception" or at least "almost always […] a peculiar inborn refinement".[16]

Maurice needs to remain dull and, in order to reiterate the fact that homosexuality does not have any visible physical traits, Forster creates a dichotomy between Maurice's public and private personas. From the beginning of the novel, the reader is presented with the gap between external appearance and Maurice's inner identity: "the boys had showered presents on him, declaring he was brave. A great mistake – he wasn't brave: he was afraid of the dark. But no one knew this" (3).

Maurice has a secret, there is something about him that is not visible to others, which belongs to his private domain. Foucault has underlined the process by which knowledge and sex were indissolubly linked together in the late eighteenth century, when knowledge started to mean principally sexual knowledge.[17] On these grounds, Sedgwick develops the assumption and claims that "by the end of the nineteenth century, when it had become fully current [...] that knowledge meant sexual knowledge, and secrets sexual secrets, there had in fact developed one particular sexuality that was distinctively constituted *as* secrecy".[18] Homosexuality became *the* secret.

In *Maurice*, the eponymous character is constructed, especially in the first part, around the domain of secrecy and while being closeted to himself. His homosexuality is discovered by the reader step-by-step through different phases, by connecting and summing up the diverse elements present in the

[15] Norman Page, *E.M. Forster's Posthumous Fiction*, 74.
[16] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 34.
[17] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1.*
[18] Sedgwick, *Epistemology,* 73.

book: secrecy is one of the discourses surrounding his fictional personality. Maurice's subjectivity is created in order to give the impression that his personality is not even disclosed to himself, thus suggesting that he has no control over it and therefore no control over his homosexuality, the latter being only a part of his personality.

The dynamics of disclosure of Maurice's subjectivity start through a crisis Maurice experiences during a holiday at home when he bursts into tears with no rational explanation, at least as far as his family can understand. Maurice starts to cry after he finds out that George, the garden boy he used to play with as a child, is no longer at his house. It is only later when he goes to sleep in his room that a feeling of fear appears again in Maurice, and that we are able to connect the two episodes:

> His heart beat violently, and he lay in terror, with all his household close at hand.
> As he opened his eyes to look whether the blots had grown smaller, *he remembered George. Something stirred in the unfathomable depths of his heart.* He whispered, "George, George." Who was George? Nobody – just a common servant. (10, my emphasis).

Maurice is not able to understand the importance of George in rational terms because it is something related to his unconscious, where his sexuality is starting to articulate itself. Forster is showing the reader Maurice's sexual awakening through an omniscient narrator whose voice constantly comments and expands on the episodes of Maurice's life throughout the novel. The two dreams Maurice has at school serve the very same purpose. In one of them, the figure of George reappears:

> Maurice had two dreams at school; they will interpret him.
> In the first dream he felt very cross. He was playing football against a nondescript whose existence he resented. He made an effort and the nondescript turned into *George, that garden boy.* But he had to be careful or it would reappear. George headed down the field towards him, naked and jumping over the woodstacks. "I shall go mad if he turns wrong now," said Maurice, and just as they collared this happened, and a brutal disappointment woke him up. (12, my emphasis).

A feeling of restlessness is linked again to the figure of George, this time adding nudity and therefore homoerotic desire. The restlessness correlates to this sexual image, and is an important aspect to understand the development of Maurice.

The narrator introduces Maurice's two dreams at school underlining that they are the key to understanding him. The narrator always adds information to the words of the characters and he is the depository of the knowledge on all of them. His presence seems to guide the reader and make sure that he/she links the information disseminated through the novel in the appropriate way. In the specific episode of the dreams, by introducing an explicit erotic texture, Forster draws the reader's attention to homoeroticism in the characterization of Maurice as the garden boy can be seen as the signifier of homosexual desire, as noted by Bristow.[19] Furthermore, in presenting these two elements here, I argue that Forster is making a claim about Maurice's attitude towards the physical, namely a presence of an innate sexual impulse, and this will give us some guidance in understanding his behaviour in his later relationships with Clive and Alec.

In the second dream, he again sees a figure, but this time it is an indefinable presence:

> He scarcely saw a face, scarcely heard a voice say, "That is your *friend*," and then it was over, having filled him with beauty and taught him tenderness. He could die for such a friend, he would allow such a friend to die for him; they would make any sacrifice for each other, and count the world nothing, neither death nor distance nor crossness could part them, because "this is my friend".(12, my emphasis)

This second dream is even more interesting as it connects the concept of friendship to the notion of comradeship as theorized by Symonds and Carpenter, especially through the influence of Whitman.[20] As we have seen, Forster introduces here the term "friend" which is later replaced by "comrade". Bakshi has showed how in the nineteenth century the word "friend" was used to "both cover and deploy homoerotic feeling".[21] In the "Introduction" of the anthology of gay literature he edited, Brian Reade notes that most of the

[19] Bristow, *Effeminate*, 81.
[20] See 2.4.
[21] Bakshi, *Distant Desire*, 43.

authors used the word friend or friendship to refer to relationships with other men in order to the word "homosexual" and the possible legal consequences.[22] Furthermore, as noted by Rictor Norton, the word friend was erroneously used to translate from the Greek "pederast".[23] The homoerotic connotations of the word friend bear witness to a step forward in the disclosure of Maurice's secrecy.

As Maurice tries to interpret this figure he first links it to "Jesus", then to a "Greek god", and to ultimately reject them in favour of "just a man" (12). This is very important as Forster tries out and rejects both the religious and the Hellenic models in order to fully insert this figure, finally, in the domain of the human.

These two dreams disclose the secrecy: "Maurice's secret life can be understood now; it was part brutal, part ideal, like his dreams" (13). The second dream marks Maurice's life as he sees the face and hears the voice that produces in him a mixed feeling of happiness and misery. The words of the narrator announce the interpretation of Maurice and give, once again, the reader an insight into the realm of secrecy which is displayed neither to the other characters nor to Maurice himself. The narrator asks the reader to share this knowledge and therefore to read the subsequent narration of Maurice's growth in the light of such knowledge: at this point, the knowledge of his sexuality. This pattern is used throughout the novel: the narrator announces and judges the characters' lives, giving an interpretation of facts and of their unconscious and asks for the reader's complicity.

Homosexuality is connoted by secrecy and needs to remain as such because of the pressure from a heterocentric and heteronormative society aiming to silence it. Forster problematizes the relations between private and public space by presenting Maurice as he struggles to adhere to the requirements of society. He tries to follow the socially-accepted path, until to a point when he is urged by the drive of his sexuality to reject the symbolic for a relationship with Alec through which he can achieve completeness, as I will explain later. The dichotomy is essential in the economy of the novel and is

[22] Brian Reade, *Sexual Heretics: male homosexuality in English literature from 1850 to 1900*, New York: Coward-McCann, 1971, I.
[23] Rictor Norton, "Ganymede Raped: Gay Literature – The Critic as Censor", in Ian Young ed. *The Male Homosexual in Literature: a Bibliography,* N J and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1982, 278-279.

used by Forster to criticize the heterocentrism of institutions. One of the novel's targets is the school system which Forster criticizes for several reasons, drawing especially, as I will demonstrate, from Carpenter. One of the very first episodes of the novel concerns a lecture on sex Maurice is given while at school by Mr Ducie, a senior schoolmaster:

> he approached the mystery of sex. He spoke of male and female, created by God in the beginning in order that the earth might be peopled, and of the period when the male and female received their powers. "You are just becoming a man now, Maurice" (4-5).

These words raise a number of issues related to authority and sexuality and also allow me to develop the issue of school criticism. After the reference to the creation in the Bible, and its prescriptive model of life based on marriage and procreation, Mr Ducie continues his speech by telling Maurice that "[t]o love a noble woman, to protect and serve her – this, he told the little boy, was the crown of life" (6). Mr Ducie acts as the spokesman of the heteronormative society. However, he is also the spokesman of the education system and therefore responsible for all the major flaws Forster sees in such an institution. One of the most severe faults is the lack of guidance school provides to young boys experiencing same-sex desire, leaving them abandoned on this complicated path. According to Carpenter:

> the undoubted evils which exist in relation to it [the homogenic or comrade-attachment], for instance in our public schools as well as in our public life, owe their existence largely to the fact that the whole subject is left in the gutter so to speak – in darkness and concealment. No one offers a clue of better things, nor to point a way out of the wilderness; and by this very non-recognition the passion is perverted into its least satisfactory channels.[24]

Carpenter goes further, warning about the risk that "[t]he homogenic attachment, left unrecognised, easily loses some of its best quality and becomes an ephemeral or corrupt thing".[25] Drawing from Carpenter, Forster develops the idea of the failure of education in recognizing the importance of

[24] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 82.
[25] Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex,* 82.

guidance towards different models other than heterosexuality.[26] This passage tells about the absence of models for the understanding of same-sex desire that Sinfield, as I have pointed out earlier, considers to be the core of the novel.[27] I find Booth's use of the Freudian concept of identification quite useful to explain the relation between models and the formation of queer subjectivity.

Freud maintains that identification is the process of how character is formed by the individual who looks at another person on whom they try to shape their own behaviour. Freud focuses on the early years of the child who identifies with the father but he also maintains that the secondary identifications – social forces such as education and law – help to reinforce the model provided by the father[28]. What Freud did not explore is the situation of a male child who desires his own sex, and the consequences of the absence of models for such same-sex passion in the process of identification.

While forming his subjectivity, a homosexual individual is left without primary and secondary models for identification, as both concur to provide models for the heterosexual matrix. Booth argues that the homosexual starts the process of identification only when he finds some models to identify with. In *Maurice*, the eventual rejection of convention runs across sexuality, family, class, and work as Maurice – and the other homosexual characters in the novel – go through their lives in an unconscious search for the "right" identification. Clive firstly finds the right identification for himself in Plato, whereas Plato is not the right one for Maurice. Nevertheless, Maurice has to go through it and eventually reject it before starting his search again: also the useless identification is, in Booth's view, necessary for personal development. In the same way, Maurice would gradually learn to recognize useful identifications

[26] Forster comments on his own negative experience of school in his diary: "School was the unhappiest time of my life, and *the worst trick it ever played me was to pretend that it was the world in miniature*". Quoted in P. N. Furbank, *E.M. Forster A Life*, San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1981, 48 (my emphasis). Although it could be argued that the school system fails to provide guidance to relationships, I think Forster is mainly concerned with the issue of same-sex desire in his criticism.

[27] See 3.4.

[28] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id, The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Vol.. xix, trans. Lytton Strachey, London: Hogarth Pr. and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961, 28-39.

such as the one with Risley, until he fixes on those identifications that grow along with his development, such as Clive's and then Alec's.[29]

Once at Cambridge, Maurice meets Clive Durham, with whom he experiences his first love affair. The reader is thus introduced to a character whose process of sexual self-awareness is different from Maurice's. Clive is not dull or mediocre; on the contrary, he is an intellectual whose alert mind has compelled him to find answers to his desires. He first thought he was punished by God with same-sex desire, and understood his "condition" through the Bible:

> Deeply religious, with a living desire to reach God and to please Him, he found himself crossed at an early age by this other desire, obviously from Sodom. […]
> At first he thought God must be trying him, and if he did not blaspheme would recompense him like Job. He therefore bowed his head, fasted, and kept away from anyone whom he found himself inclined to like. His sixteenth year was ceaseless torture. He told no one, and finally broke down and had to be removed from school. During the convalescence he found himself falling in love with a cousin who walked by his bath chair, a young married man. It was hopeless, he was damned.
> These terrors had visited Maurice, but dimly: to Clive they were definite, continuous, and not more insistent at the Eucharist than elsewhere. […] He could control the body; it was the tainted soul that mocked his prayers. (55)

Clive is described therefore as aware of his same-sex desire from an early age and the vagueness that characterizes Maurice's personality is replaced in Clive by an insistent desire to understand.

The emphasis on the different attitude in Clive's personality towards body and soul is developed throughout the novel in both the relationship he has with Maurice and after his conversion to heterosexuality, when he gets married to a woman. If Maurice is depicted while struggling to make sense of his secrecy and to give it a name, Clive is instead aware of his sexuality that is disclosed to himself since a very early age. He finds explanation through cultural reference as in the town of Sodom. Clive, as I will explain later, looks for models of identification in Greek cultural examples through the school system to justify his sexuality, but Forster shows that these models are not useful either. Forster is therefore suggesting a double failure of the school system: firstly it fails to give

[29] Booth, "Maurice", Bradshaw ed., *The Cambridge Companion*, 173-187.

positive models and secondly it leads, albeit indirectly, towards false and misleading ones as in the case of Clive. The solution Forster seems to suggest is a total absence of intellectualism and a reliance on directness of sentiments, not intellect. It is for this reason Forster decides not to give an account of Alec's early understanding of his same-sex desire, whereas we have a full history of Clive's and Maurice's desires: education and intellectual environment seems to make it harder to live same-sex desire. If Cambridge seems to create a space for same-sex desire through classic civilization, on the other hand the homosocial environment of university bans the very possibility. Forster seems to suggest that lower class men have access to queerness in an easier way because they are less subject to social and cultural constrains.[30]

Moreover, Forster emphasizes a different way of understanding same-sex desire between Maurice, whose interest in physical eroticism is overt in the naked figures he dreams of, and Clive who appears to be troubled more by the control of his soul than by his body. This dichotomy is presented throughout the novel in order to help understand the end of their relationship.

After an attempt to repress his nature, Clive decides to allow himself to accept it:

> By eighteen he was unusually mature, and so well under control that he could allow himself to be friendly with anyone who attracted him. […] At Cambridge he cultivated tender emotions for other undergraduates, and his life, hitherto grey, became slightly tinged with delicate hues. Cautious and sane, he advanced, nor was there anything petty in his caution. He was ready to go further *should he consider it right*. (56, my emphasis).

Clive is then ready, aware of his sexuality and his concerns about the possibility to "go further" are highlighted again through the words of the narrator. The narrator's voice is still guiding the reader but an element of free indirect speech is introduced in the character of Clive, to signify, I think, his continuous mental process, in opposition to the almost absence of any intellectual activity by Maurice, and which requires a more frequent intervention of the narrator. The very narrative structure reflects in the novel the relationships between the

[30] See 2.4.1 on working class men. Symonds learns it through Whitman, see *Between Men*, 174.

characters. When he meets Maurice at Cambridge, Clive has already gone through all those phases; he is grown enough to understand the nature of his sexuality whereas Maurice is not aware of his homosexuality.

Maurice and Clive develop and became "intimate at once" (30). Intimacy is articulated through those mechanisms of homosociality, as analysed by Sedgwick, that allow social male bonding in particular privileged spaces at the end of nineteenth century in Britain.[31] Public schools and universities were institutions frequented only by privileged men where such bonds were not only socially accepted but warmly encouraged. Therefore when could "[t]hey walked arm in arm or arm around shoulder" (33) and when together show signs of affections and a degree of intimacy, while sitting "nearly always in the same position – Maurice in a chair, and Durham at his feet, leaning against him" (33) without any concern: "[in] the world of their friends this attracted no notice. Maurice would stroke Durham's hair" (33).

After the intimacy is established, Clive, who believes Maurice to share the same feelings, confesses his love to him instigating the mechanism of what Sedgwick calls "homosexual panic".[32] She defines homosexual panic as the reaction of men in front of the breaking of boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality, the threat of abandoning the privileged space by trespassing the boundaries of the socially acceptable and the prohibited space. This mechanism is deeply rooted in modern society to such an extent that homophobia became a regulated necessity for "patriarchal institutions as heterosexual marriage"[33] and that "homosexual panic became the normal condition of male heterosexual entitlement"[34] and the only possibility to access this privileged space.

Maurice is shocked by such a revelation as he had never been able to formulate a thought about that, or even recognize it:

> Maurice was scandalised, horrified. He was shocked to the bottom of his suburban soul, and exclaimed, "Oh, rot!" The words, the manner, were out of him before he could recall them. "Durham, you're an

[31] Sedgwick conceptualizes the notion firstly in *Between Men,* especially in the "Introduction", 1-5 and then expands it in *Epistemology* where she talks about homosocial bonds,184 and ff. See chapter 1.
[32] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, p 185 and ff., and Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 3.
[33] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 3.
[34] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 185.

> Englishman. […] I'm not offended, because I know you don't mean it, but it's the only subject absolutely beyond the limit as you know, it's the worst crime in the calendar, and you must never mention it again. Durham! a rotten notion really –". (44)

Now that Maurice is starting to disclose his secrecy, the narrator's voice leaves space for his own words. His initial shock is exactly the outcome of the mechanism of homosexual panic and it seems to him that Clive has overstepped the boundaries between the two spaces. Then, Maurice quickly realizes that he has always cared for men and that the friendship with Clive was instead love. Maurice feels like he has found a model to understand his subjectivity and explain the signifier of the dreams. He discovers and accepts his homosexuality while living a relationship with Clive, which is the first in the novel.

Among the episodes that narrate such a relationship, there are some I want to focus on because they reveal a developing sense of identity in Maurice and a consequent clash with the normative society, and increase his sense of himself as an outlaw that will lead him to reject society with Alec. The first episode narrates a day in the countryside that Clive and Maurice spend together. While driving the side-car to leave the college, they refuse to stop when called by the Dean and such misbehaviour results in a suspension and a request for a formal apology. Once at home, Maurice intends not to apologize, and is confronted by a family friend, Dr Barry, who reprimands him severely for his impudence. The justification Maurice adduces for such a refusal is worth quoting: "[i]f a woman had been in that side-car, if then he had refused to stop at the Dean's bidding, would Dr. Barry have required an apology from him? Surely not" (68).

The critique at stake in here is double. On the one hand Forster criticizes heteronormativity, the social norms that regulate heterosexual behaviour and exclude any other form of relationship; on the other hand, he also aims his severe criticism through Maurice's words at the hypocrisy typical of the university system towards male bonds. The episode could be read once again through the mechanism of homophobia and panic.[35] As soon as the boundaries

[35] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1, and Sedgwick, *Epistemology.* The same sort of panic is revealed by Carpenter who speaks about "The panic terror which prevails in England with regard to the expression of affection" while referring to the school system. See *The Intermediate Sex,* 105.

between homosociality and homosexuality become blurred, the dominant society takes action to assure a push towards the mainstream, redefining the boundaries. In other words, it is a mechanism of homophobia created around this gap in order to preserve the establishment and preserve masculinity.[36]

Maurice makes another important comment, which is connected to the same issue of the clash with the mainstream, during his visit to Clive in his family house in Penge. The narrator reports Maurice's feelings who "felt he had a greater right to be there than anyone" (71). Maurice is visiting the house of the person he is in love with and with whom he is having a relationship. The only model to understand a relationship available for Maurice is heterosexuality, therefore he assimilates his relationship to the one between a man and a woman. Self-identification as a queer subject is, as Bersani has claimed, a very difficult task when desire is defined by heterosexual structures.[37] On the grounds of this assimilation, however, Maurice feels he is denied a set of rights by heteronormative society.

Forster seems to suggest that since homosexuality is a natural inclination, a relationship between men should be regulated by the same social norms that control heterosexual ones, and therefore homosexuals should have the same rights. At the same time, he is incrementally showing that in this gender/sex system, to use Rubin's words, there is no space for a homosexual relationship and that the model needs to be found elsewhere.

The structure of the novel also reveals a juxtaposition and opposition between Maurice and Clive in dealing with their sexual identity. Sexual subjectivity is depicted as a continuous negotiation between heteronormativity and their own lives, a position the characters take towards the social requirements they are surrounded by. The formation of such an identity, as I have already pointed out, is characterized by numerous crises both Maurice and Clive go through. In order to emphasize the difference in understanding of same-sex desire in the two characters, Forster often presents their reactions in similar contexts. If Maurice in Clive's house feels he has a right to be there as his partner, for Clive staying with Maurice's family, it means the beginning of his crisis, which ends up with his conversion to heterosexuality. A crucial turning

[36] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 193.
[37] Bersani, *Homos,* 6.

point in the novel is, indeed, Clive's crisis, which brings about the end of his relationship with Maurice. It happens while he is staying at Maurice's place:

> He said he caught cold in the car; but in his heart he believed that the cause of his relapse was spiritual: to be with Maurice or anyone connected with him was suddenly revolting. The heat at dinner! The voices of the Halls! Their laughter! Maurice's anecdote! It mixed with the food – was the food. Unable to distinguish matter from spirit, he fainted.
> But when he opened his eyes it was to the knowledge that love had died, so that he wept when his friend kissed him. Each kindness increased his suffering, until he asked the nurse to forbid Mr. Hall to enter the room. (100).

In the same context Maurice and Clive have opposite reactions and the latter is disgusted by what the scene at the Halls' stands for: social alienation. Unable to accept such alienation, Clive leaves for Greece and in a Greek temple he realizes that he is not interested in men, finds women attractive, and will eventually marry a woman. Again, we see that social norms and assumptions participate in choices about one's life, and in certain circumstances, win, even over sexuality.

Clive's conversion has produced several diverse interpretations among critics. Some read it as Forster's condemnation of Clive while others stress the fact that Forster is asserting once again the naturalness of sexuality and therefore the impossibility to change its forces. As I have already said, I am more interested in the fact that Forster is exploring the power of social forces and the complex relations with sexuality rather than to assert his condemnation or absolution of Clive. Forster suggests that the construction of a homosexual desiring subject in that particular heterosexual matrix, is articulated through renunciations, lacks and compromises in a constant negotiation with the social requirements. In front of that crossroads Clive chooses to inhabit heterosexuality, while Maurice and Alec, in order to avoid perpetual alienation, choose to reject this dynamic.

Clive surrenders to a social comfortable life and after his conversion he lives with a relieved simplicity:

> [i]t pleased him to find that the women often answered his eye with equal pleasure. Men had never responded – they did not assume he

> admired them, and were either unconscious or puzzled. But women took admiration for granted. They might be offended or coy, but they understood, and welcomed him into a world of delicious interchange. […] How happy normal people made their lives! (99).

Clive is comforted by normality and integration, and finally exits the space of secrecy. The gap between Maurice and Clive becomes increasingly wider throughout the novel, and while Maurice learns how to address and live his sexuality and how to deal with social alienation derived from his sexuality, Clive surrenders to social pressure.

Maurice's path towards a full acceptance of a homosexual identity goes through different phases as he learns how to deal with an absence of models. I have already mentioned how Maurice understands his relationship with Clive through assimilation to the heterosexual couple: his reaction to Clive's change makes it even more explicit:

> […] he behaved as would the average man who after two years of happiness had been betrayed by his wife. […] While he had love he had kept reason. Now he saw Clive's change as treachery and […] returned in a few hours to the abyss where he had wandered as a boy. (114)

The assimilation to the heterosexual couple is presented as the only possible model provided to Maurice to understand his relation to Clive up to this point. To Maurice, Clive's conversion means confusion and desolation, and Forster introduces for the first time the element of the greenwood which is present in the epilogue:

> […] he wished that he had shouted while he had the strength and smashed down this front of lies. What if he too was involved? His family, his position in society – they had been nothing to him for years. He was an outlaw in disguise. Perhaps among those who took to the greenwood in old time there had been two men like himself – two. At times he entertained the dream. Two men can defy the world (114).

The words of the narrator in free indirect speech shape Maurice's identity as an "outlaw in disguise", derived from his homosexual subjectivity. This desire to disintegrate a world of lies and demolish the wall between disclosure and secrecy is perpetrated by the "dream" of a relation between men.

Forster problematizes the relationship between secrecy and the public domain when linked to same-sex desire, by making a claim about the possible results of the pressure a heterocentric society can exert on people who find themselves with no valid instruments to understand their condition and desire. As there is no place in society for same-sex desire, Maurice and Clive have to choose whether to deny their nature or to leave society. Their choices are opposite but Forster draws a parallel between the two stories, as we do not know the results of such choices. Clive gets married, but we are not to know whether his marriage and his conformist life will be successful, in the same way as we do not know what will happen to the love affair between Maurice and Alec in the epilogue, which is a possibility of the fulfillment of this dream and giving a space to homosexual relations.

4.3 Hellenism: deconstruction of a cultural trope

References to ancient Greece and Hellenism are numerous in *Maurice*. I have already pointed out how important the references to Hellenism are in the Homophile late-Victorian age both for social and cultural debates in general, and for the evolution of the understanding of sexuality in particular.[38] Symonds and Carpenter, for example, as we have seen, used the reference to Greece to find a cultural and social justification for same-sex desire within society.[39]

In this section I want to argue that Forster departs from such a positive evaluation of Hellenism, and demolishes a myth perpetrated through a variety of discourses to ultimately reject the correlation between Hellenism and same-sex desire – something he shows as failing in the figure of Clive – and to replace it with a masculine love dramatized between Maurice and Alec. His distrust of Hellenism is asserted through diverse critiques among which I will try to emphasize the most relevant to support my argument.

In *Maurice*, the Greek element linked to homosexuality finds its expression in the characterization of Clive and his total reliance on Greek culture. In the "Terminal Note" Forster admits that:

[38] See 2.3.
[39] See 2.4.

> Clive is Cambridge. […] I produced him without difficulty and got some initial hints for him from a slight academic acquaintance. […] It was I who gave Clive his "hellenic" temperament and flung him into Maurice's affectionate arms. […] He [Clive] believed in platonic restraint and induced Maurice to acquiesce (217)[40].

Clive embodies a set of characteristics linked to the academic appreciation of Hellenism, as I have shown above. Like Pater, Symonds, and other intellectuals Clive seeks in Greek literature a name and a justification for his sexuality, as well as a model to understand his own desire:

> Never could he forget his emotion at first reading the Phaedrus. He saw there his malady described exquisitely, calmly, as a passion which we can direct, like any other, towards good or bad. *Here was no invitation to licence* (55-56, my emphasis).

If religion gives Clive a feeling of condemnation ("The temperament, to quote the legal formula, is 'not to be mentioned among Christians'" (56)) Plato instead provides him with comfort becoming, in a way, his personal religion. As Halperin writes, Plato allowed him "to gradually accept himself and his desires" and "the Greeks provided an ideological weapon against the condemnatory reflexes of his own Christian conscience".[41]

Clive idealizes Greek love to such an extent that he becomes a substitute for real experience: all his words are mediated through a reference to Hellenism:

> Clive had expanded in this direction ever since he had understood Greek. The love that Socrates bore Phaedo now lay within his reach, love *passionate but temperate*, such as only finer natures can understand, and he found in Maurice a nature that was not indeed fine, but charmingly willing. He led the beloved up a narrow and beautiful path, high above either abyss. […] He educated Maurice, or rather *his spirit educated Maurice's spirit,* for they themselves became equal. […] Love had caught him out of triviality and Maurice out of bewilderment in order that *two imperfect souls* might touch perfection. (80, my emphasis).

[40] E.M. Forster, "Notes on Maurice" in *Maurice*, 217.
[41] Halperin, *One Hundred,* 3.

As Dimitra Papazoglou accurately summarizes in her account on the impact of ancient Greek culture on homosexuality, for "a whole line of homosexual intellectuals Ancient Greek culture provided not only an established literary tradition but also psychological encouragement and support".[42]

Forster presents a critique of what Dowling calls the "central contradiction within Oxford homosocial Hellenism"[43] that regards the double attitude towards Hellenism and that Symonds links to the figure of Jowett as I have already mentioned. Mr Cornwallis is one of Maurice's professors at Cambridge who, facing a reference to *paiderastia* in a seminar of Greek literature urges the students to "'[o]mit: a reference to the unspeakable vice of the Greeks" (37-38). While using one of the euphemisms for homosexuality which became crystallized in Victorian and post-Victorian society, Mr Cornwallis, whom we later understand to be homosexual himself, represents the hypocrisy of a system that praises Hellenism but at the same time neutralizes it.

Clive uses the works of Plato to declare his love to Maurice. He asks Maurice to read the *Symposium* during a vacation from university and then he discusses it with him:

> "I knew you read the *Symposium* in the vac," he said in a low voice.
> Maurice felt uneasy.
> "Then you understand – without me saying more – "
> "How do you mean?"
> Durham could not wait. People were all around them, but with eyes that had gone intensely blue he whispered, "I love you."
> Maurice was scandalised, horrified. (44)

Clive uses the *Symposium* to communicate his feelings to Maurice. Since he found an explanation of his sexuality through the reference to the *Bible* and in reading the Greeks, he assumes that Maurice had done the same but finds out, unexpectedly, that Maurice has not understood the message. Again what is clear for Clive is not obvious to Maurice: they seem to speak a different language. Once again, the absence of useful models to understand sexuality is reaffirmed.

[42] Papazoglou, *The Fever of Hellenism,* 160.
[43] Dowling, *Hellenism,* 88.

Maurice's reaction is violent in the language he uses because he relies upon all the values that society has instilled in him, those heteronormative prescriptions that emerge from the words of Mr Ducie. Same-sex relations – in this case love between men – is *the* topic that cannot be mentioned. It is "beyond the limit", also because there is no common language to refer to it. It is only thanks to Clive's revelation that Maurice reflects on his nature and, after a crisis, he fully understands his own feelings. Being dull, Maurice is unable to change unless he is stimulated by other characters. All of Maurice's crises are initiated by external interventions and are characterized by physical restlessness in contrast to Clive's more spiritual agitation:

> That evening Maurice went to bed as usual. But as he laid his head on the pillow a flood of tears oozed from it. He was horrified. A man crying! […] Lighting a candle, he looked with surprise at his torn pyjamas and trembling limbs. He continued to cry, for he could not stop […] (46)

Maurice's reaction is independent from his will and he seems to have no control over his physical actions. As in his previous crises, he cannot stop crying and this episode echoes the reaction he had when the garden boy was no longer in his family home. However, this time Clive's declaration has forced Maurice to wake his mind up and to face his feelings:

> He would not – and this was the test – pretend to care about women when the only sex that attracted him was his own. He loved men and always had loved them. He longed to embrace them and mingle his being with theirs. Now that the man who returned his love had been lost, he admitted this. (47)

Maurice's series of tests that started with the dreams finds their climax here, where a final test compels him to explicitly recognize his feelings. If for Clive the final test which leads him to understand his sexuality is the readings of Plato, for Maurice it is the link with human feelings with the admission of love by Clive that shakes his dull mind.

Forster once again puts the emphasis on Clive's and Maurice's different attitudes towards life: intellectual force drives Clive, whereas Maurice seems to act more through human and physical reactions. The figures he sees in his

dreams at school are inscribable in the same logic: he dismisses the two figures of Jesus and a Greek God for just a man. At this point Maurice decides to confess to Clive that he also loves him back. At first Clive does not allow him to talk and apologises for disrespecting him, assuring him that he has done nothing wrong and that it was him who "mistook your ordinary friendliness". When Maurice finally starts his confession he cannot find the right words to expand:

> "Durham, I love you."
> He laughed bitterly.
> "I do – I have always –"
> "Good night, good night."
> "I tell you I do – I came to say it – in your very own way – I have always been like the Greeks and didn't know."
> "Expand the statement."
> Words deserted him immediately. He could not speak when he was asked to.
> "Hall, don't be grotesque." He raised his hand, for Maurice had exclaimed. "It's like the very decent fellow you are to comfort me, but there are limits; one or two things I can't swallow."
> "I'm not grotesque – "
> "I shouldn't have said that. So do leave me. I'm thankful it's into your hands I fell. Most men would have reported me to the Dean or the Police." (50).

In this passage, what is striking is Maurice's inability to structure an argument for lack of a language. Again he is left speechless by the absence of an interiorized language to express his same-sex desire. When he tries to articulate a discourse he does so by referring to Plato, in a lame attempt to echo Clive's words which are his only source of same-sex expression. In her analysis of the relationship between language, power and women, Butler argues that "[w]ithin a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*".[44] If sexuality is substituted for gender, we can argue that in male heterosexist language, the homosexual represents the unrepresentable and therefore Maurice does not know how to articulate it.

Later in the novel, Forster reinforces Maurice's disinterest in – and ultimately distrust of – Hellenism:

[44] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 14.

> Maurice had no use for Greece. His interest in the classics had been slight and obscene, and had vanished when he loved Clive. The stories of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, of Phaedrus, of the Theban Band were well enough for those whose hearts were empty, but no substitute for life. That Clive should occasionally prefer them puzzled him. (91).

If for Maurice the contact with Greece means eroticism, Clive uses it because of its opposite, because, as Raschke claims, "[for] Plato, the body and all the materiality become a position of illusion and nontruth".[45] Greece is not a vital element in Maurice's psychology, whereas in Clive's personality it becomes a substitute for living experience:

> Maurice hated the very word [Greece], and by a curious inversion connected it with morbidity and death. Whenever he wanted to plan, to play tennis, to talk nonsense, Greece intervened. Clive saw his antipathy, and took to teasing him about it, not very kindly. (92).

Clive connotes Greece as a vehicle for understanding his life, whereas for Maurice it is an obstacle to living his daily life. Furthermore, as Papazoglou points out, because his lack of intellectualism: "Maurice could not associate his personal situation with Hellenism, or, for that matter, find any consolation in it".[46]

Paradoxically, Clive ends his conversion to heterosexuality in Greece. All those idealized places are revealed to be places of desolation:

> Clive sat in the theatre of Dionysus. The stage was empty, as it had been for many centuries, the auditorium empty; the sun had set though the Acropolis behind still radiated heat. He saw barren plains running down the sea, Salamis, Aegina, mountains, all blended in a violet evening. Here dwelt his gods – Pallas Athena in the first place: he might if he chose imagine her shrine untouched, and her statue catching the last of the glow. She understood all men, though motherless and a virgin. […]
> But he saw only dying light and a dead land. He uttered no prayer, believed in no deity and knew that the past was devoid of meaning like the present, and a refuge for cowards. (97).

Real contact with those places Clive had considered the explanation of his nature, leaves him cold. Although the idea of the whole novel is that

[45] Raschke, *Breaking the Engagement,* 153.
[46] Papazoglou, *The Fever of Hellenism*, 160.

sexuality cannot be chosen, nevertheless the way Clive's conversion is dramatized seems to suggest an explanation linked to a desire to conform, or better the incapacity to engage with an outlawed condition. Clive now sees Greece as an empty dream, and the temple is nothing but a land of death and desolation. The cultural support he had had from the reliance on ancient Greece, and that had allowed him to claim a social justification for same-sex desire, disintegrates with the encounter with this waste land, and once this idyll ends, all of Clive's beliefs disappear with it. Greece becomes only a nostalgic idea of a golden age that has lost all its potential and it is opposed to the dream of the greenwood, which, on the contrary, can be seen as a possible space for intelligibility of desire. Greece is only a sterile idea of intellectualism, whereas the greenwood gives a possibility for same-sex desire outside society – and therefore is linked to the realm of feelings as opposed to that of the cold intellect.

Clive is Hellenism, and his very attitude towards physical love is informed by his reading of Plato; as suggested by Summers, he "distorts the Greek ideals of moderation into abstinence in order to justify his conventional distaste for sexuality."[47] In the relationship with Maurice his suspicion towards bodily contact is expressed from the very beginning. On the day Clive and Maurice spend together in the countryside, Clive refuses to get naked to bath as if he were afraid of his body, whereas Maurice says he needs to bath "properly", meaning without clothes.[48]

Maurice's and Clive's different attitudes towards physical love are shown in more than this episode. Their relationship does not comprise any physical sexual contact but Forster makes it clear that this is entirely Clive's decision. After they have spent the whole day in the countryside, Maurice regrets they have not spent the time in each other's arms:

> In the afternoon he had a collapse. He remembered that Clive and he had only been together one day! And they had spent it careering about like fools – instead of in one another's arms! Maurice did not

[47] Claude Summers, *E M. Forster*, 159.

[48] This episode recalls the 'Sacred Lake' scene in Forster's *A Room with a View,* (150) where three characters – Mr Beebe, Freddy and George – bathe in a lake. The scene recalls the bathing boys in Whitman's Section 11 of *Song of Myself,* in Walt Whitman*, Leaves of Grass,* New York-London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973, 38. The episode is a sexual revelation and liberation in all of the contexts.

> know that they had thus spent it perfectly – he was too young to detect the triviality of contact for contact's sake. Though restrained by his friend, he would have surfeited passion (66).

This episode reinforces once again the opposition between Clive's Hellenic attitude towards physical contact and Maurice's desire. The narrator's words underline that Maurice would have spent time in Clive's arms, if Clive had been willing, thus suggesting that in his youth Maurice did take into consideration "contact for contact's sake" as a possibility. Rather than sharing Clive's attitude, the "triviality" that the narrator dismisses refers to the mere physical contact, as opposed to a real love affair. In other words, youth in *Maurice* means lustful thoughts and sexual desire that, the narrator suggests, are to be included in a love affair only as part of perfection, not by themselves. A further suggestion is the fact that the relationship between Maurice and Clive is not real love. The denial of physical love is decided by Clive and reiterated in another episode before Clive's departure for Greece. After Clive's crisis at Maurice's place, they spend the night together and the event is emblematic of their antithetic attitudes towards the body. After an argument neither of them can sleep and Clive knocks on Maurice's door asking him to sleep in his bed:

> "Can I come into your bed?"
> "Come along," said Maurice, making room.
> "I'm cold and miserable generally. I can't sleep. I don't know why." Maurice did not misunderstand him. He knew and shared his opinion on this point. They lay side by side without touching. Presently Clive said, "It's not better here. I shall go." Maurice was not sorry, for he could not get to sleep either, though for a different reason, and he was afraid Clive might hear the drumming of his heart, and guess what it was (95-96).

Maurice understands Clive's feelings and at this time Clive is the only possible model of same-sex desire and for this reason the narrator says he shares his view.

As I have said above, the negotiations to accept, understand and constitute a homosexual subjectivity are in a continuous flux, and it takes time for Maurice to create his own model and to unlink his understanding of same-sex desire from Clive's. In other words, as Maurice becomes aware of his own sexuality his conception is mediated through Clive, although the omniscient

narrator makes it clear from the very beginning of the novel that his nature is different from Clive's. The episode above is a clear example of such differentiation, as the reasons why Maurice and Clive cannot sleep together chastely are exactly the opposite: Maurice is afraid Clive could guess his excitement, whereas the vicinity of another body disturbs Clive.

Clive is unable to split same-sex desire from Hellenism as the Hellenic model is the only one he could find an explanation for his desires and therefore in Greece he chooses to abandon both. His negotiation between social conformism and personal desire seems to privilege the former and through Clive's example Forster makes his point about the inefficacy of Hellenism as a valid model to understand – and live – same-sex desire.

Clive's conversion means the end of the relationship with Maurice and Maurice's gradual development of a personal independent understanding and experience of his sexuality, which finds its best expression in his love affair with Alec Scudder, Clive's gamekeeper. Between social conformism and desire Maurice chooses the latter, and finally abandons the vacuity of Hellenism. The message that Forster wants to give is that, as Raschke notes, "in order to for the bodily fulfillment of the Alec-Maurice relationship to transpire, Platonism […] must be relinquished".[49]

After a series of misunderstandings between Maurice and Alec, which are mainly due to inexperience in handling a love affair within social requirements, the two characters finally find a formula for their identity to be fully lived by abandoning the symbolic. Forster paradigmatically sets the episode of their union in the Phidias room at the British Museum, a place that stands for the British cult of Greek culture. The Assyrian bulls and the other statues serve to contrast the physical and human aspects of Alec and Maurice and therefore their relationship: "[Alec's] colouring stood out against the heroes, perfect but *bloodless*, who had never known bewilderment or infamy" (194, my emphasis).

The contrast between real life and a fake cult is taken to an extreme and the coldness of the statues echoes the dead spirit of Hellenism Clive finds in Greece. The total rejection of Hellenism is, in the economy of the novel, an important cultural and aesthetic statement of Forster's, and a necessary

[49] Raschke, *Breaking the Engagement,* 160.

evolution towards the achievement of the ideal of masculine love and the theorization of same-sex desire he proposes in the relationship between Maurice and Alec.

4.4 Outside class: masculine love and the possibility of queer

After the end of his relationship with Clive, Maurice experiences the emergence of sexual desires that he had to suppress in the previous relationship. These lustful feelings are important insofar as they pave the way for the process of Maurice's growth that the narrator calls "*the flesh educating the spirit* (128)", a step in the development of the relationship between Alec and Maurice. It is in the relationship between Maurice and Alec that Forster formulates his ideas of "masculine love" as expressive of a possible queer rejection of the social order.

I have already analysed in 2.4 the issue of class in same-sex relationships as understood by Symonds and Carpenter, and also through the influence of Whitman.[50] In a rigid class system like the British one in the Edwardian period, homosexual men seemed to articulate their sexuality around an infraction of this system. According to Sedgwick, in the English (homo)sexual system "bourgeois men had sexual contacts only with virile working-class youths",[51] in a sort of paradigm. Forster's debt to Symonds and Carpenter, both in his life and his writing, is especially evident in *Maurice*.

In an entry in his diary dated 10th of January 1912, Forster acknowledges his admiration for Symonds:

> J.A. Symonds. Feel nearer to him than any man I have read about – too near to be irritated by his flamboyance, which I scarcely share. But education (Classics, Renaissance, Eng. Lit.) – health (tendency to phthisis) – literary interest in philosophic questions, love of travel, inclination to be pleasant, and, above all, *minorism;* true, he married, but he had better not have. […] He was a brave and intelligible man, and I am proud to be in some ways so like him, and mean to think of him in difficulties, though having a weaker brain and a stronger sense of humour, I may get through life more easily. […] 'Rough handsome young men'. It's odd. He has met Walt Whitman by now, if the dead

[50] See 2.4.
[51] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 204.

> are meetable […] I too shall meet them, and though Whitman will have most to say to me, I shall have most to say to Symonds.[52]

Forster draws a parallel between Symonds and himself based on their belonging to "minorism", which is a term he uses to refer to homosexuality throughout his private writing. His comment on Symonds's marriage also casts a new light on Clive's marriage and therefore we can read his conversion to heterosexuality in the novel as a clear attempt to conform to social predicaments. The reference to '"rough handsome young men" could be linked to Forster's own words in his diary written in 1935 where he adds to the roughness a social class. He writes: "I want to love a strong young man of the lower classes and be loved by him and even hurt by him. That is my ticket".[53] These words allow us to connect Symonds's and Forster's sexual preferences, and at the same time, help to explain the importance of the demolishing of social class barriers in Forster's depiction of the love affair between Maurice and Alec.

The other strong idea at the basis of Forster's investigation of sexuality is the notion of comradeship theorized by both Symonds and Carpenter, again through a specific reading of Whitman. I have already mentioned how Symonds praised Whitman for his depiction of masculinity in love between comrades.[54] Symonds also tried to put into practice this kind of relationship and he claims to want to live respecting Whitman's "ideal of comradeship".[55] It was through Whitman that he learnt to "appreciate the working classes".[56] Symonds also lived also this ideal in his comradeship with a Venetian gondolier, Angelo Fusato.[57]

---

[52] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", diary manuscript, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. Now published in E.M.Forster, *The Journals and Diaries of E.M. Forster,Vol. 2 The 'Locked diary' (1909-67)*, Ed. Philip Gardner, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.
[53] E. M. Forster, "Section Memoir. Sex", AMs memoir in the "Locked Journal" diary manuscript, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. It is a section where Forster comments on his first sexual impulses. It is divided into four sections and the quotation above is from the final section entitled "My Writing". The comment was written in 1935 in response to the possibility of a scientific analysis of his books proposed by the sexologist Norman Haire.
[54] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, 115. See 2.4.
[55] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 191.
[56] Symonds, *Memoirs*, 191.
[57] See Bristow, *Effeminate*, 141.

The search for a friend, as presented by Forster in Maurice's early dreams, eventually finds its evolution in the notion of comradeship whose debt to Carpenter is acknowledged by Forster in the "Terminal Note":

> *Maurice* dates from 1913. It was the direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe. Carpenter had a prestige which cannot be understood today. He was a rebel appropriate to his age. […] He was a socialist who ignored industrialism and a simple-lifer with an independent income and a Whitmannic poet whose nobility exceeded his strength and, finally, he was a believer in the Love of Comrades, whom he sometimes called Uranians. It was this last aspect of him that attracted me in my loneliness. For a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble.[58]

From Carpenter and Symonds Forster takes the idea of the presence in same-sex relationships of a disruptive force for the social class system. In his Whitman-like poetry collection entitled *Toward Democracy*,[59] and published in 1883, Carpenter advocates the importance of a society freed from any constraints and based on the concept of democracy, by which he means a sort of radical way of life where class and social barriers do not exist. This model of democracy is what Carpenter establishes at Millthorpe with his partner George Merill.[60] Forster writes that Carpenter "discarded his own [class] and gained happiness by doing so"[61] which explains his own vision in *Maurice*. Homosexual subjectivity configures itself, in this view, as a challenge to the social order and presents what Edelman has called "the negativity opposed to every form of social viability".[62] It is in opposition with the system of sex/gender/sexuality.

In the structures of the novel, Alec is the final fulfilment of Maurice's early dreams: the figure he saw becomes a real person. The first time Maurice sees Alec is at Penge, during a visit to Clive and his wife. Maurice sees Alec "dallying with two of the maids, and felt a pang of envy" (142). They are giggling and Maurice imagines them kissing: "all over the world girls would meet men, to kiss them and be kissed; might it not be better to alter his temperament and toe the

---

[58] Forster, "Notes on *Maurice*", 215
[59] Carpenter, *Towards Democracy.*
[60] In a similar way, Symonds lived a long affair with a Venetian gondolier called Angelo Fusato. See Symonds, *Memoirs*, 271-283.
[61] Forster, "Edward Carpenter" in *Two Cheers For Democracy*. Abinger Edition, ed. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1972, 206.
[62] Edelman, *No Future*, 9.

line?"(142). Forster positions this encounter with Alec while Maurice is going through an attempt to convert to heterosexuality. Left alone after the end of his relationship with Clive, Maurice tries to overcome his sadness by following Clive's example and conforming to mainstream society. His rational attempts are troubled by lustful encounters and by a growing sense of impotence towards his feelings. Once again Forster tries to highlight the gap between feelings and social requirements thus paving the way to a full understanding of his choice to place the affair between Maurice and Alec outside society.

It is on the same night at Penge that Maurice feels restless after Clive's visit to his room:

> [Maurice] drew the curtains and fell on his knees, leaning his chin upon the window sill and allowing the drops to sprinkle his hair.
> "Come!" he cried suddenly, surprising himself. Whom had he called? He had been thinking of nothing and the word had leapt out. (151-152)

This episode echoes Maurice's calling in his earlier dreams of the garden boy, George, when the same uncontrollable and unconscious urge forced Maurice to call for someone. Maurice's last attempt to convert to heterosexuality is to try hypnosis with Mr Lasker Jones:

> He [Maurice] wanted a woman to secure him socially and diminish his lust and bear children. […] during the long struggle he had forgotten what Love is, and sought not happiness at the hands of Mr. Lasker Jones, but repose. (155).

Once again the narrator intervenes to explain Maurice's choices and to underline that, having being unable to find happiness or a guide, Maurice searches for security and the comfort that Clive seems to have found in the easiness of a heterosexual relationship. Clive is, at this point, the only model Maurice feels he can look to in order to find guidance.

The following day Maurice goes to London to see the hypnotizer just to leave that meeting even more troubled by the impossibility of a conversion. He decides then to return to Penge and during a walk through the park at night Maurice meets Alec and he stops to have a conversation with him. Maurice

asks questions about Alec's imminent departure from Penge, of which he had heard about from Mr Borenius, the rector of Penge.

On his return to his room Maurice feels again restless for all the events of the day, last but not least, the conversation with Alec:

> He moaned half asleep. There was something better in life than this rubbish, if only he could get it – love – nobility – big spaces where passion clasped peace, spaces no science could reach, but they existed for ever, full of woods some of them, and arched with majestic sky and a friend…
> He really was asleep when he sprang up and flung wide the curtains with a cry of "Come!" The action awoke him; what had he done that for? (165)

The vision Maurice has here, the dream of a queer space which is not defined by the logic of the heteronormative society, is what he will construct by fracturing the social order with Alec when, returning to bed, he materializes as if answering Maurice's call:

> The head and the shoulders of a man rose up, paused, a gun was leant against the window sill very carefully, and someone he scarcely knew moved towards him and knelt beside him and whispered, "Sir, was you calling out for me?... Sir, I know…I know," and touched him. (166)

Maurice is again surprised by his own action, and the series of calls he had uttered in his earlier dreams, which remained unanswered, finally find a resolution with the arrival of Alec. All previous episodes concluded with "nothing" or "nobody" whereas at the end of the novel, for the first time, a real person answers the call and engages Maurice in his first sexual relationship. This final episode of Maurice's restlessness results this time in the rejection of all constraints and in the sexual act between Maurice and Alec. If the relationship with Clive is built upon intimacy that does not involve any physical dimension, the relationship with Alec starts with sexual activity. Maurice and Clive do not sleep together, while Alec and Maurice "woke deep in each other's arms" (170). Physical love at first causes Maurice some perplexity only because he relates it to his previous relationship with Clive: "Whither was he tending, from Clive into what companionship?" (170). It is only when Maurice completely rejects Clive's model of same-sex Platonic passion, together with its social

patterns, that he can fully understand the new dimension of this relationship and he can read same-sex desire through a new lens.

When Maurice and Alec play cricket together later in the day Maurice starts thinking about the possibility of their union:

> His mind had cleared, and he felt that they were against the whole world, that not only Mr. Borenius and the field but the audience in the shed and all England were closing round the wickets. […] They intended no harm to the world, but so long as it attacked they must punish, they must stand wary, then hit with full strength, they must show that when two are gathered together majorities shall not triumph. (174-175).

The choice of this language of war is worth commenting upon as it gives the idea of a battle between a minority under siege, whose reaction could be violent if needed, and an enemy world. The dichotomy between the private sphere and the public domain is soon amplified by Clive's intervention, which represents conventional social order. The idea of two male-outlaws and the possibility of such a union are suggested in Maurice's thoughts, although in this particular moment it remains within society's boundaries.

It is Alec who takes the initiative to contact Maurice after he leaves Penge through a telegram he invites him to meet at the boathouse. At first Maurice is afraid he is facing a possible blackmail situation: "A nice situation! It contained every promise of blackmail, at the best it was incredible insolence […] he had gone outside his class, and it served him right" (179). The blackmail issue is a reference to the situation created by the scandals of the end of nineteenth century and reiterated by the Wilde trials, which I have already mentioned.[63] Maurice is still forming his homosexual subjectivity, negotiating between his desire and his belonging to social conformity and he is uncertain of what to choose. His reaction recalls the one he had after Clive's declaration of love: he is unable to develop a personal understanding. Maurice's mediocre mind finds itself a spokesman of society thus adhering to a position, which is not really his. The socially conservative structure of Edwardian society of Maurice's time sees as an abomination every possible challenge to such a system, as I

[63] See my analysis on the issue of blackmail I have already mentioned in 2.4.3. See also Nadel, "Moments in the Greenwood" in Hertz- Martin eds., *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*.

have explained. In his first reaction Maurice's thoughts are filtered by this conventionality, which is due to an ignorance of different models and his incapability of processing valid alternatives.

Despite the fear of blackmail, Maurice is driven by a force he cannot control through his mind and reason, a force similar to the one which compelled him to call out of the window:

> But all that night his body yearned for Alec's, despite him. He called it lustful, a word easily uttered, and opposed to his work, his family, his friends, his position in society. In that coalition must surely be included his will. For if the will can overleap class, civilisation, as we have made it will go to pieces. But his body would not be convinced. Chance had mated it too perfectly (179).

The pressure of social constraints is overcome by the strength of his body as something he cannot change, thus reinforcing again the idea of homosexuality as an innate state and underlining the importance of physical expression in same-sex relationship. There is a juxtaposition between the body on the one hand and society on the other, the latter also including the will. The possible impact of the classes overlapping is, in Maurice's view at this time, a collapse of civilization.

Since he receives no reply from Maurice, Alec decides to write a second letter where he confesses his longing to sleep with him again:

> Mr. Maurice. Dear Sir. I waited both nights in the boathouse. […] So please come to "the boathouse" tomorrow night or next. […] Dear Sir, let me share with you once before leaving Old England if it is not asking to much. I have key, will let you in. I leave per S.s. Normannia Aug 29. I since cricket match do long to talk with one of my arms round you, then place both arms round you and share with you, the above now seems sweeter to me than words can say. I am perfectly aware I am only a servant that never presume on your loving kindness to take liberties or in any other way.
> Yours respectfully,
> A. Scudder. (179-180).

The stress of Alec's words is on the physical, on the sexual drive because, contrary to Clive who distrusts the body through his Platonism, he believes that the body is where truth lies. If Clive has an intellectual approach towards same-sex desire and Maurice's mediocrity makes it hard for him to find

a model to understand his feelings, Alec is free from any social and cultural constraints. Being lower class he has not been exposed to cultural models neither directly – like Clive – nor indirectly – like Maurice through Clive. His approach to life is direct and so is his approach to desire. In the novel we are given no account of his childhood and we are not given details of when he is first aware of same-sex desire, as in the case of Maurice and Clive.

After his sexual affair with Alec, Maurice is more confused and worried about his situation, and even more determined to find a remedy to his sexuality through hypnosis. He decides to consult again Mr Lasker who suggests that he goes abroad where homosexuality is not punished by law:

> "I'm afraid I can only advise you to live in some country that has adopted the Code Napoleon," he said.
> "I don't understand."
> "France or Italy, for instance. There homosexuality is no longer criminal."
> "You mean that a Frenchman could share with a friend and yet not go to prison?"
> "Share? Do you mean unite? If both are of age and avoid public indecency, certainly."
> "Will the law ever be that in England?"
> "I doubt it. England has always been disinclined to accept human nature." (183)

Forster dramatizes the debates on the legal situation in this dialogue and focuses on the difference between England and the European countries. It is an important criticism of the injustices of the English legal system that Forster – influenced by both Symonds and Carpenter as I mentioned above – makes against English society and also another statement on the natural condition of homosexuals. Moreover, the use of the term "share" echoes Alec's words thus signifying the beginning of a process of identification Maurice starts with Alec.

The stress on the legal situation is reiterated by Forster's use of language to describe the effects of the physical act on Maurice:

> By pleasuring the body Maurice had confirmed – that very word was used in the *final verdict* – he had confirmed his spirit in its perversion, and cut himself off from the congregation of normal man (185, my emphasis).

Echoing legal language, Maurice's condition is called a final verdict on a pre-existing nature, a force which cannot be controlled and that leads him to an outlawed condition. The juxtaposition between homosexuality and mainstream society is dramatized in a procession of the Royal family Maurice bumps into on his way home from the hypnotiser:

> […] when he stopped outside the park, because the King and the Queen were passing, he despised them at the moment he bared his head. It was as if the barrier that kept him from his fellows had taken another aspect. *He was not afraid or ashamed any more*. After all the forests and the night were on his side, not theirs; they, not he, were inside a ring fence. He had acted wrongly, and was still being punished – but wrongly because he had tried to get the best of both worlds. "But I must belong to my class, that's fixed," he persisted. (185-186).

This episode allows Forster to remark on the legal situation homosexuals had to experience. Maurice is troubled in front of the Royal family, the emblem of British society, as he first bares his head only to feel repulsion for these symbols of convention. A growing sense of identity develops in Maurice's mind, and yet his acceptance of his love for Alec is not complete as Forster underlines by making the remark about the class issue, which is the last piece of social constraint to be demolished.

Only after this episode, which reinforces his status as an outlaw, does Maurice decides to meet Alec, and only once at the British Museum does, Maurice quickly realizes that Alec's attempt at blackmail was "a blind and – a practical joke almost – and concealed something real, that either desired" (193). The two characters meet Mr Ducie, Maurice's former schoolmaster at the British Museum and the process of identification with Alec that Maurice started with the hypnotizer finds its completion when Maurice pretends to be Scudder. The episode is also important because Mr Ducie is the one who introduced Maurice to the mystery of sex while in school. On the same occasion he invited Maurice and his future wife for dinner in ten years' time to prove Maurice's remark about his intention not to get married wrong. Ironically, Forster makes Mr Ducie meet Maurice with Alec and while the schoolmaster is trying to remember his name, Maurice appropriates Alec's name: "'No, my name's Scudder.' The correction

flew out as the first that occurred to him. It lay ripe to be used, and as he uttered it he knew why." (194)

Once again Maurice's words precede his rational awareness, yet on this occasion it takes him no time to understand why he has pronounced them. The identification of the young men is complete. Only by approaching Alec as a comrade, as an equal, and by rejecting the class system that is linked to the social norms from which he calls himself out, embracing a "resistance to the viability of the social" to use Edelman's expression,[64] is Maurice able to win Alec's love and to start a real and fulfilling love affair. Faced with a choice between living in society and leaving it for desire, Maurice and Alec choose the latter then, retreating into the greenwood. When they leave the British Museum their negotiation between their personal wills gradually shifts into a mutual compromise:

> [Alec] held out his hand. Maurice took it, and they knew at that moment the greatest triumph ordinary men can win. Physical love means reaction, being panic in essence, and Maurice saw now how natural it was that their primitive abandonment at Penge should have led to peril. They knew too little about each other – and too much. Hence fear. Hence cruelty. And he rejoiced because he had understood Alec's infamy through his own – glimpsing, not for the first time, the genius who hides in man's tormented soul. Not as a hero, but as a comrade, had he stood up to the bluster, and found childishness behind it, and behind that something else. (196).

Maurice starts to read Alec's last behaviour through his own, as a sign of a growing maturity: until now he had interpreted himself through others, now he starts understanding others through himself. He also analyses how fear is nothing but a component of love, and that in order to overcome such fear, they had to become comrades, i.e. to perceive each other as equals. It is at this point that Alec tells Maurice of his first relationships, and the dialogue between them while they decide about their future is revealing as regards the rejection of class barriers:

> "Stop with me."
> Maurice swerved and their muscles clipped. By now they were in love with one another consciously.

[64] Edelman, *No Future,* 3.

> "Sleep the night with me. I know a place."
> "I can't, I've an engagement," said Maurice, his *heart beating violently*. A formal dinner party awaited him […]
> "I have to leave you now and get changed. But look here: Alec; be reasonable. Meet me another evening instead – any day."
> "Can't come to London again – father or Mr. Ayres will be passing remarks."
> "What does it matter if they do?"
> "What's your engagement matter?'
> They were silent again. Then Maurice said in affectionate yet dejected tones, "All right. To Hell with it," and they passed on together in the rain. (197, my emphasis).

Their love becomes conscious, and Maurice's renouncement of his social engagement is a further step towards the achievement of equality which is at the base of Forster's theorization of same-sex desire and which occurs through mutual sacrifice. In return he asks Alec to make a renouncement and to stay with him in England:

> "Why don't you stay on in England?"
> Alec whizzed round, terrified. […] "Stay?" he snarled. "Miss my boat, are you daft?"[…]
> "It's a chance in a thousand we've met, we'll never have the chance again and you know it. Stay with me. We love each other." (200).

Alec as well takes his share in sacrifice when he decides not to leave for Argentina, and the union is sealed by the words of the narrator while the two characters are in the boathouse:

> Maurice went ashore, drunk with excitement and happiness. […] They must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death. But England belonged to them. That, besides companionship, was their reward. (207).

The necessity of the refusal of hierarchy echoes once again the concept of Carpenter's democracy, and also Symonds' theorization in his *Memoirs*, and inserts same-sex relationships in a new dimension. Despite being outside England's society and laws, England belongs to them. Forster seems to present a future made by people like Maurice and Alec who have the courage to reject social conventions, and to create a new world where same-sex desire can find a place. England belongs to them because they are shaping the future; they are not passively taking what England is offering them, they are active forces to use

again Grosz's terminology.[65] Forster charges the relationship between Alec and Maurice with a positive political strength in giving it a happy ending. As he says in the "Terminal Note":

> A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood.[66]

Forster also suggests that the only possible viable space for two men is outside society, as outlaws. By doing so, he acknowledges the antisocial component of homosexual subjectivity, what Edelman has called the death drive, that rejection of the narrative of futurity within a certain symbolic system[67]. Forster's words in the Terminal Note also make a statement about the absurdity and injustice of such a system that compels homosexuals to choose between society and desire. Maurice and Alec are brave enough to face the situation and abandon social norms, as opposed to Clive, who decides to conform and seems to reject his homosexuality in favour of social conformity at the expense of real happiness.

4.5 Conclusion

In my analysis of the novel, I have argued that the aesthetic and cultural investment in creating a character like Maurice as a mediocre man is one of Forster's great achievements in *Maurice*, together with his presentation of a different model of possible homosexual subjectivity and identity.

Maurice's mediocrity and "normality" is contrasted with Clive's intellectualism, which leads him to the ultimately sterile models of same-sex identity/desire that are found in Hellenism and Platonism. In this way, Clive hopes to charge his desires with respectability and honoured models. Clive's intelligence also means that he looks for models by himself and his changes in the novel occur in solitude. On the contrary, Maurice's dull mind implies that he needs some external stimuli from other characters to start any changes and

[65] Grosz, "Experimental Desire", 200.
[66] Forster, "Notes on *Maurice*", 216.
[67] Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

therefore his crises are all initiated by other circumstances– i.e. George, Clive's confession, and Clive's conversion.

Forster seems to suggest that intellectualism could be counterproductive for a full acceptance of same-sex desire in life and therefore Clive, too preoccupied to find cultural models, fails to accept his sexuality and chooses a heterocentric future by marrying a woman. Alec, instead, who is completely free from the influence of intellectual environments, seems to be the only character who finds same-sex desire a natural condition.

In the depiction of Maurice and his evolution towards a mature comradeship, Forster embarks on a critique of diverse social norms and institutions as well as a rejection of previous models for same-sex desire. The Wildean model based on aestheticism is fully rejected and so is Hellenism in its link with homosexuality. Maurice is presented through his discovery of his sexuality while he goes through a series of dichotomies internal to the social order: secrecy/disclosure, subjectivity/social forces, class/desire. While exploring the relationship between normative society and same-sex desire, and the friction implicated by the social and legal order, Forster also borrows from the sexological and cultural ideas expressed by Whitman, Symonds and Carpenter and draws his model of masculine love and comradeship that finds its best expression in the novel in the relationship between Maurice and Alec. The notion of democracy developed by Carpenter seems particularly useful in providing Forster with a model based on the rejection of class-barriers and a relationship founded on mutual sacrifice rather than on the class system. What seems to entail a search for identification by finding the right model, results in what Bredbeck has called "a poetic of *dis*identification – a strategy of embedding identifications within an epistemological framework that questions the entire apparatus of 'identification', 'identity', 'politics'".[68]

The rejection of the very system is total and characterized by the survival of the *jouissance*, the desire over the "paternal metaphor of the name".[69] If, as Butler argues "the symbolic is understood as the normative dimension of the constitution of the sexed subject within language"[70] then the rejection of

[68] Bredbeck, "Queer Superstitions", 56. Emphasis in the original.
[69] Edelman, *No Future,* 25.
[70] Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 106.

language also means the rejection of the social order. The alternative Forster proposes is, as argued by Cregan-Reid, a mode of silence as "their escape into the greenwood, to a life outside investments and good marriages, does not represent the opposites of these facets, but their complete absence".[71] There is no language to express where they are, and therefore the *Epilogue* included in the first version in 1914, where Maurice's Kitty meets the two comrades in the greenwood, would mean a return to the social order. The silence is queer exactly in its refusal to engage in the symbolic order, and what *Maurice* entails is to paraphrase Edelman's words a queer oppositionality to politics, where politics is the framework in which we experience social reality.[72]

[71] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 455.
[72] Edelman, *No Future,* 3.

CHAPTER 5

Sex/Sexuality/sexology: Italian *questione sessuale* in the nineteenth and twentieth century

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I want to reconstruct the main lines of the Italian debates on sexuality and same-sex desire in the years when Saba was active as a writer. In chapter two, I have analysed the British context in which Forster was active in order to contextualise *Maurice* within the discourses around sexuality and I intend to do the same for *Ernesto.*

As regards the Italian context, the situation is problematized by the fact that Italian political unification occurred only in 1861. Territorial fragmentation meant also different notions of sexuality and regulations on it. Furthermore, Trieste, where Saba was born in 1883, was annexed to the Italian territory only after the Treaty of London in 1915 while previously it had belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In order to contextualize *Ernesto* it is necessary to identify Trieste's different cultural milieu. Owing to its political and cultural attachment to Vienna, Trieste was particularly receptive to psychoanalysis and is generally credited for having brought it to Italy. Saba himself was fascinated by psychoanalysis and openly indebted to Freud and his methods. Moreover, since *Ernesto* was written in 1953, we must consider ideas of non-normative sexualities as they were conceptualized by Fascism, and which became crystallized in public opinion thus creating a rigid system of gender and sexuality whose legacy is still somehow present in contemporary Italy. Saba's notions of sexuality, and the representation of sex acts presented in the novel, derive from different discourses and I will analyse them in this chapter before moving on to my close reading in chapter seven.

5.2 Cesare Lombroso and Paolo Mantegazza: the Posivitist School

When talking about the discourses around sex, sexuality and gender, critics generally use the term *questione sessuale*.[1] While "sexology" is a specific

[1] The translation into English could be "Sexual Issues".

scientific discipline, this expression includes all the debates around sex, sexual identity and gender: scientific but also moral, religious and cultural.

If German sexology had an impact in Britain on the way public opinion and cultural debates were constructed around sexuality at the end of nineteenth century, as I have shown in chapter 2,[2] in the Italian context authors like Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis failed to achieve any public importance. This was because of the presence of the doctor and hygienist Paolo Mantegazza's (1831-1910) theories, that rather than proposing a scientific explanation on sexualities, created what Luisa Tasca has defined an "enciclopedia erotico-sentimentale" (Erotic-sentimental encyclopaedia).[3] Until the 1920s, the interest in sexuality was mainly related to issues of sexual hygiene and only in heterosexual marriage.

In one of the few publication on the history of sexuality in Italy between 1860 and 1945, Bruno Wanrooij claims that sexology had not yet been granted a scientific status in the 1930s and "there were also other disciplines – theology, sociology, anthropology – which claimed to possess special expertise in this field".[4] Therefore I argue that, in order to understand the debates on sexology in the twentieth century in the Italian context we need to go back to anthropology, and especially to the doctor, hygienist and pathologist Paolo Mantegazza and the anthropological criminologist, Cesare Lombroso (1835-1904). As noted by Wanrooij, Mantegazza and Lombroso conducted their study of sexuality from difference sources: history, mythology, ethnology and physiology. Their "construction of the categories of 'normal' and 'abnormal' human sexuality derived from the analysis of court cases regarding sexual crimes and from the examination of condemned criminals and of the inmates of lunatic asylums".[5] They offered rigid sexual categories and established a link between social

[2] See 2.2.

[3] Luisa Tasca, "Il 'Senatore Erotico'. Sesso e matrimonio nell'antropologia di Paolo Mantegazza", in Bruno P.F. Wanrooij, *La Mediazione Matrimoniale: Il Terzo (in)comodo in Europa Fra Otto E Novecento,* Fiesole: Villa Le Balze, Georgetown University, 2004, 310. I will come back to Mantegazza in the next pages. All translations from Italian are mine and I will indicate it if otherwise.

[4] Bruno P.F. Wanrooij, "The History of Sexuality in Italy (1860-1945)", in Perry Wilson, ed., *Gender, Family and Sexuality. The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860-1945,* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 174. In the entry for sexology (sessuologia) in the *Treccani Encyclopaedia* still in 1936 – where there was no entry for sexuality – there is a reference to reproduction thus making the Catholic influence explicit but also demonstrating the assumption of the natural link between procreation and sexuality.

[5] Wanrooij, "The History of Sexuality", 176.

classes and sexual behaviour whose legacy remained for decades. In *Ernesto*, for example, the eponymous character's mother, Mrs. Celestina, as I will show in chapter eight, links the homosexuality of her son's lover and his social class.[6]

I will present Lombroso's theories on sexuality and sexual behaviour and then I will focus on Mantegazza.

5.2.1 Cesare Lombroso

Before the First World War, Positivists such as Mantegazza and Lombroso contributed to the growing attention to sexuality. Lombroso maintained that unrestrained sexuality was related to a state of primitive development and an early stage of civilization, and he discussed the history of sexuality as a continuum from incontinence to restraint. According to him, biology and history were closely connected, and in the second half of the nineteenth century he elaborated his criminal anthropology theories based on this connection. He offered an explanation of the pederast as psychiatrically deviant and degenerate. In his first intervention on the subject, in 1881, Lombroso explained homosexuality ("l'amore invertito") [7] through Charles Darwin's theory of primordial hermaphroditism. He also claimed that this "inversion" is present in the first early months, in the foetus and in "quell'analogia dei due sessi che io scopersi nei delinquenti".[8] ("In that analogy that I discovered in criminals").

In later works, such as *L'uomo delinquente*,[9] Lombroso tried to convey the idea of correspondence between somatic deformities and criminality, and in the same way he made a connection between somatic traits and homosexual behaviour. Pederasts were included into the category of criminals and were divided into two types, based on their social class: upper class individuals were characterized by a sense of effeminacy in their way of dressing, and they would choose typical feminine jobs; the lower classes instead loved dirtiness and were generally inclined to crueler crimes.[10] Criminals were associated with certain physiognomic traits and also with sexual anomalies especially "pervertimento

[6] I will come back to this in chap 8.
[7] Cesare Lombroso, "L'amore nei pazzi", *Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale, Volume Secondo,* Torino: Loescher, 1881, 31-32.
[8] Lombroso, "L'amore nei pazzi", 31-32.
[9] Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente in rapporto all'antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie,* Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1889, 452.
[10] Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente*, 452-453.

sessuale" (sexual perversion) and "precocità sessuale" (early precocity).[11] Lombroso developed this theory in the last years of his career, and he finally created a link between homosexuality and innate criminality in 1906.[12] He drew a parallel between inborn criminals and inborn inverts based on the specificity of physiognomy and he claimed that there was a large number of "omo-sessuali con delle caratteristiche speciali che sono tipiche dell'altro sesso" (homosexuals with characteristics typical of the other sex) and that some of them showed a "fisionomia effeminata"(effeminate physiognomy).[13]

The homosexual was also characterized by negative psychological traits such as amorality, selfishness, jealousy, gossip and vanity. Lombroso recognizes also an aesthetical taste and claims that this was "si notano tra di loro un gran numero di persone di teatro, ed anche dei grandi artisti, pittori e musicisti". (There are among them many people working in theatre, artists, painters and musicians). [14]

The same connection between artistic temperament and homosexuality was made by German sexology and, as I have already mentioned in chapter 2, by Symonds and Carpenter[15]. Despite the parallel between inborn criminals and inborn homosexuals, Lombroso felt that the latter's crime deserved less severe juridical treatment than the former's because their criminal acts "cesseranno colla perdita dell'attività sessuale" (will stop with the loss of sexual activity).[16]

As noted by Duncan, one of the revealing aspects of Lombroso's article, is that "the homosexual is defined in terms of an ontology that appears to exclude any consideration of sexual practice as an *a priori* determining factor in the attribution of something like a sexual identity".[17] In other words, Duncan argues, the homosexual is presented in an essentialist way, as a type that shares psychological traits with the criminal, but in defining a sexual identity, sexual behaviour and sexual practice are not taken into account.

---

[11] Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente*, 593.
[12] Cesare Lombroso, *Del parallelismo tra l'omosessualità e la criminalità innata.* Originally published in French with the title *Du parallelisme entre l'homosexualité et la criminalité innée*, "Archivio di psichiatria", XXVII 1906, 378-381. Italian translation originally published in *Sodoma* 2, II, 1985, 72-7. Available at: http://www.giovannidallorto.com translated into Italian by Giovanni Dall'Orto (Accessed: 18.08.2014)
[13] Lombroso, *Del parallelismo*.
[14] Lombroso, *Del parallelismo*.
[15] See 2.4.
[16] Lombroso, *Del parallelismo*.
[17] Duncan, *Reading,* 19.

Lombroso's theories deeply influenced the Italian scientific debates of his time. He was the founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology and his authority in the debates of sexuality ruled. According to Wanrooij, "he has often been accused of having contributed to the relative isolation of Italian scientists",[18] due to his biological approach in the study of the origins of crime, when outside of Italy crime started to become associated with the social environment. Nevertheless, he has the merit to have brought Krafft-Ebing and Ivan Bloch's theories to Italy and to have published the first journal entirely dedicated to sexuality issues, called *L'archivio delle psicopatie sessuali,* founded in 1896. Wanrooij argues that despite their claim of being scientific, the Positivists' conclusions in those years were often moralistic and reiterated the values of society, often using science to confirm already-available beliefs. In their work, sins became pathologies and part of a campaign against pornography, which aimed to establish a direct connection between certain illnesses and deviant sexual pleasure.

5.2.2 Paolo Mantegazza

The anthropologist and pathologist Paolo Mantegazza intervened in the debates about sexuality and he showed a compassionate attitude towards homosexuals whom he perceived as unfortunate individuals. In *Igiene dell'amore*,[19] published in 1903, Mantegazza gave an example of two different men who felt sexual urges towards other men (he did not use the word homosexual) whom he saw as affected by what he classified as "a psicopatia sessuale"[20] (a sexual psychopathology). He talks about two different cases, one of a chaste man and one who instead "finí per amare gli uomini collo stesso ardore con cui noi amiamo le donne" (ended up loving men with the same passion as we do love women) and he suggests as a remedy a re-education, in search of "quella figlia di Eva che potrà guarirli" (that Eve's daughter who will be able to heal them) or "le olimpiche gioie della castità" (the Olympic joys of chastity).[21]

[18] Wanrooij, "The History of Sexuality", 176.
[19] Paolo Mantegazza, *Igiene dell'Amore. XVI edizione accuratamente riveduta dall'autore con molte aggiunte,* Firenze: Bemporad, 1903.
[20] Mantegazza, *Igiene,* 149.
[21] Mantegazza, *Igiene,* 149.

Being a pathologist and hygienist, Mantegazza had a drive to educate and, as noted by Luisa Tasca, "biasimava ma non criminalizzava tutte le forme di sessualità estranee allo schema ammesso",[22] (he pitied rather than criminalized any form of sexuality other than the allowed system) and offered a cure or solution rather than a punishment. In the case of homosexuality, Mantegazza suggests abstinence and sublimation of the sexual drive in some other activities. Secondly, he advises therapy through sexual activities with women.

In certain cases Mantegazza recognised homosexuality as an innate condition (although he condemned homosexual practice, defining it as a vice) but in other cases he was inclined to believe that it was a consequence of lust and considered pederasty, sodomy and tribalism "cancrene sessuali, che divorano uomini e donne dei più bassi fondi sociali, facendo rabbrividire e nauseare" (sexual gangrenes that devour men and women in the gutters of society thus making shiver and repelling).[23]

Like Lombroso, Mantegazza also establishes a connection between lower social class and non-normative sexual behaviour that became part of the mainstream notion of homosexuality. He also presented a mapping of homosexual practice, which called "amore Greco" (Greek love), that saw it especially spread over warm countries, because of the exposure of naked bodies.[24] However, the second reason he adds was due to a particular deterioration of the tissues in female genital organs due to the heat that made heterosexual sex less appealing to men, diverting them to engaging in sex with other men. In order to make this "vizio infame" (abominable vice)[25] disappear he suggested moral education and genital hygiene. This parallel between warm weather and sexual activity between men is very important because it is at the base of the misreading of geopolitical mapping of desire between men, especially in Italy.

---

[22] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore Erotico'", 312. Tasca also analyses the revolutionary aspect of Mantegazza's theories compared to the existing discourse on marriage and female sexuality. She also claims that Mantegazza acknowledged a female sexuality and also a sexual instinct in women who were therefore entitled to sexual pleasure.
[23] Mantegazza, *Igiene,* 149-150.
[24] Mantegazza, *Igiene,* 150.
[25] Mantegazza, *Igiene,* 150.

Both Mantegazza and Lombroso linked crime to non-normative sexuality and also drew a parallel between the lower classes and homosexuality. Both the criminal and the homosexual were, in their accounts, characterized by physical and psychological recognizable traits based on physiognomic and Darwinian hermaphroditism.

Lombroso and Mantegazza were often considered a threat to morality because the act of discussing sexuality was, in itself, considered an immoral act. As noted by Tasca, for his ideas about marriage, for recognizing women as possessing a sexual life, and above all for differentiating between the role of the doctor and the one of the confessor, Mantegazza's ideas were considered immoral by the Church.[26] Mantegazza, for instance, had to add to the tenth edition of *Igiene dell'amore* a preface arguing that scientific research should be free from moralistic commentary to defend himself from accusations of immorality.[27]

In post-unification Italy, science and religion were often opposed and the Catholic Church claimed rights on moral and sexual issues until the Ventennio Fascista when couples were still advised to choose as a family doctor "un uomo di coscienza cristiana" (a man of Christian moral code).[28] In this way, the Church was expanding its control over morality through doctors and creating a link between moral theology and science.[29]

5.3 *La Voce* and the Convegno per la questione sessuale (1910)

In 1910, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Mafarka il futurista* was put on trial for "oltraggio al pudore" (gross indecency) but surprisingly the book not condemned, thus creating a disappointment in the associations for ensuring morality such as the *Lega contro la pornografia* and the *Lega per la moralità*.[30]

Also on 10 February 1910, the journal *La Voce* organised a conference in Florence on *la questione sessuale* that aimed to gather different views on

[26] Tasca, "Il 'Senatore Erotico'", 306. According to the Church, all the sexual issues and especially moral ones, were the territory of the confessor.
[27] Mantegazza, *Il pudore nella scienza*, "Prefazione alla decima edizione (1889)", in *Igiene*, 5-10.
[28] Rodolfo Bettazzi, *Il Casto Talamo. Al giovane sposo cristiano*, Torino: Marietti, 1937, 97-98.
[29] See also Marco Bernabei, *Educazione del sesso,* Milano: Albrighi, Segati and C., 1933.
[30] These two associations were founded at the end of the eighteenth century to fight against pornography and obscene art. See Bruno P.F. Wanrooij, *Storia del Pudore. La questione sessuale in Italia 1860-1940,* Venezia: Marsilio, 1990, 57.

sexuality. The conference was well attended by a wide range of names such as Mario Nesi who proposed a more liberal approach to sexuality, Gennaro Avolio, editor-in-chief for *Battaglie d'oggi* who had a more conservative view; doctors such as Luigi Maria Bossi, Robert Michels and Alfonso De Pietri Tonelli were invited to talk about Neo-Malthusianism; Teresa Labriola and Valeria Benetti expressed their feminist positions; physiologist Pio Foà and the doctors Giulio Casalini and Paolo Orano were invited too. This showed a variety of views on morality and sexuality and initiated a constructive dialogue among those who believed in a need for sexual education.[31] The committee argued for a need to speak clearly and without prudery about the complex *questione sessuale* in order to teach future generations of men to adopt a more respectful moral attitude towards women, especially within marriage. [32] At the conference, only heterosexuality was discussed and as part of the sexual relations between wife and husband, without touching upon same-sex issues.[33]

The conference made a point about the importance of breaking the silence on sexuality and created lively debates on the issue. For example, in the socialist journal, *Critica Sociale*, Rodolfo Monolfo condemned the sexual act in itself on the basis that it could reduce one of the participants to a simple tool, and argued for true love and the value of pre-marriage chastity.[34] Filippo Turati, the founder of the journal, responded against the dichotomy between "animalism" and "humanity", which, in his view, echoed the jargon of the old fashioned spiritualism.[35] Turati was also suspicious about pre-marriage chastity arguing that this would inevitably encourage prostitution and criticized the double moral standards towards men and women that socialism, in his opinion, should fight.

---

[31] *Convegno per la questione sessuale. Appello del Comitato ordinatore del Convegno,* in "Battaglie d'oggi", VI, 11, 1910, 461-463. See also *La Questione Sessuale,* Firenze, Libr. della Voce, 1915 for the all the interventions at the conference.

[32] *Convegno per la questione sessuale. Appello del Comitato ordinatore del Convegno,* in "Battaglie d'oggi", VI, 11, 1910, 461-463. See also *La Questione Sessuale,* Firenze, Libr. della Voce, 1915 for the all the interventions at the conference.

[33] Another important outcome of the conference was the translation of the eight volumes of pastor Sylvanus Stall's *The Successful Selling of the Self and Sex Series* on sexual education that were reprinted several times. See Sylvanus Stall, *The Successful Selling of the Self and Sex Series*, Philadelphia: the Vir, 1907.

[34] Rodolfo Monfoldo, *"*Ancora sulla morale sessuale, in *Critica Sociale,* xxii, 20, 1912, 309-310.

[35] Ille Ego (pseudonym of Filippo Turati), "L'immortalità della "morale sessuale". Replica a Rodolfo Mondolfo, in *Critica Sociale,* xxii, 24, 1912, 373-76.

This brief account is necessary to highlight that sexual issues and morality were debated only in relation to heterosexuality, whereas to see discussions about same-sex desire we need to wait until the 1920s. Meanwhile in Britain the renovation of the nation at the end of nineteenth century created a homophile England, as I have argued in chapter two.

5.4 Aldo Mieli's *Rassegna di Studi Sessuali:* homosexuality on the scene

In 1921, Aldo Mieli, a positivist scientist and activist for homosexual rights, founded the *Società italiana per lo studio delle questioni sessuali* (Italian society for the study of sexual matters) that aimed at discussing the diverse aspects of sexuality and sexology. At the same time, Mieli founded the journal *Rassegna di Studi Sessuali* (Sexual Studies Review) that published in the 1920s most of the German sexological studies. As Benadusi notes, Mieli wanted to "inaugurate an extensive debate on sexual issues capable of getting the general public involved and influencing the government's policies with the drafting of laws and measures on the subject".[36] The contributions to this bimonthly journal included thoughts coming from different backgrounds; however, the scientific focus prevented the involvement of more general public opinion in the debates.[37] According to Benadusi, "[t]he absolute novelty of Mieli's message was precisely his desire to consider homosexuality a completely natural fact, not something to cure but to be analysed with a high degree of objectivity".[38] Mieli maintained that science had been focussing too much on effeminates and hermaphrodites, without paying enough attention to "normal" homosexuals. Therefore, he argued for an investigation into masculine homosexuals and also insisted on homoeroticism as a necessary sign of civilization, relying especially on ancient Greece.

Proteus – whose real identity still remains uncertain[39] – was a collaborator of the journal and shared with Mieli the interest in the "normal" homosexual. Both argued that sexual inversion was just one of many ways in which nature expressed itself. Carpenter and his theories on intermediate sex

[36] See Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 62.
[37] Wanrooij, *Storia del Pudore* 96, and Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 62. For a detailed account on Aldo Mieli's life, activity and background see Benadusi, 62 and ff.
[38] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 65.
[39] For possible theories about the identities of Proteus see Wanrooij, *Storia del Pudore*, 212.

were particularly well received by the journal, especially the link between emotions and homosexuality and the focus on the masculinity of homosexuals.

However, as noted by Benadusi, the most important influence for the journal was German sexology and especially Hirschfeld who "considered sexual inversion a physiological factor, not to be judged unnatural",[40] and who started a battle for the decriminalization of homosexuality. Mieli also admired the "Institute for Sexual Science", founded in Berlin, in 1919, and he participated as the Italian representative in the first congress of the World League for Sexual Reform, organised in Berlin in 1921. He was impressed by the quality of the work carried out by German sexology and also by the presence of associations that fought for homosexual rights, despite the presence of the article 175 of the German code, which legally punished homosexuality. His attitude towards the presence of bars and clubs where people could meet up – a reality absent from the Italian scenario – was ambivalent: Mieli was concerned that this sexual scene could destabilize respectability and therefore compromise the image of homosexuals. [41]

Advocating a strongly biological approach, Proteus and the *Rassegna* were also critical of psychoanalytical understandings of homosexuality, thus contributing to the relative absence of Freudian theories on sexuality in the Italian context. Mieli himself, however, appreciated the Freudian investigation of the effects of repression of homosexuality could cause. In 1928, Proteus maintained that homosexuality was an endocrinological consequence due to, as noted by Benadusi, "inherited, individual, organic and constitutional factors".[42] This scientific approach hugely critiqued and dismissed any moral judgment coming from the Church and other moralists.

From the very beginning, the Fascist government expressed interest in sexuality and sexual matters, especially as they regarded the fight against prostitution, venereal diseases and Neo-Malthusianism, all issues that Mieli

[40] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 71.
[41] See Aldo Mieli, "Un viaggio in Germania. Impressioni e appunti di uno storico della scienza", in *Archivio di Storia della Scienza,* 4, 1926, 342-81. According to Benadusi, the impact of his trips to Berlin and the direct contacts with Hirschfeld convinced Mieli to organize the second World Congress of the League for Sexual Reform, scheduled on 22 June 1922, but eventually held in Germany for financial reasons. See Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 73
[42] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 66.

regarded as positive and on which he spoke in Berlin.[43] He also knew that he had to make some changes to the journal to meet the Government interests and he first added the word "eugenics" to the title in 1924; in 1927 the journal became *Rassegna di studi sessuali, demografia ed eugenica* (Journal of Sexual, Demographic and Eugenic Studies). The typesetting of the journal changed and had to adhere to the Regime and even praise it in different ways. In 1928, Mieli moved to Paris and the journal underwent a complete transformation: "the matter of homosexuality had become increasingly marginal and the issues ever more sporadic".[44] Mieli was investigated for "sexual abnormality" and in 1939, being a Jew and a homosexual, he feared Nazism and fled to Argentina, where he became a professor at the University of Buenos Aires. In Italy, the publication on sexual topics continued in a series published by Edoardo Tinto from the end of 1920s, and called *Biblioteca dei curiosi* (A library for the curious). This publication had two main aims: to reach a wider audience (thus it was sold at a prize of 1 lira per volume) and to devote space to anomalies in sexology. Tinto also published a *Dizionario di sessuologia a dispense* (Dictionary of sexology in installments). However, as noted by Benadusi, "'the desire for knowledge' clashed with the Fascists' desire to control. Sexuality, and particularly pederasty, could not escape the regime's ever watchful eye, ready to censor and silence free discussion of such delicate issues".[45] Mieli had published all his contributions mostly thanks to his own financial means, but by the 1930s science had lost its autonomy under Fascist totalitarianism, and anything that did not conform to Fascist ideology was censored.

Before analysing the impact of Fascism on ideas of masculinity, virility and the notions of homosexuality, I want to remark that the work published in the *Rassegna*, as noted already, did not reach the masses but was confined to an elite and therefore differed from, for example, the situation in Britain, at the end of nineteenth century, which I analysed in chapter two.

[43] See Aldo Mieli, "Legislazione sessuale", in *Rassegna di Studi Sessuali*, 4, 1926, 346 and ff.
[44] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 75.
[45] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 77.

5.5 Legislation on sexuality: from the Napoleonic code to the Rocco Code

Most of pre-unification Italy adopted the Napoleonic Code (1804) and, as noted by Benadusi, its circulation, in its "absolute distinction between religion and law, and morality from law",[46] contributed to relegate sexuality to private life, as something, which the state did not need to legislate. As a result, sodomy was no longer punishable, unless it occurred without consent. This exclusion was motivated by a necessity to leave such vices outside the public domain, thus avoiding giving bad examples as "criminal law on such filth would not instill moral doctrine in the population" as claimed by the jurist Giuseppe Raffaelli.[47]

After unification, the Savoys's government decided to extend to the whole of Italy the code that had been used in the Kingdom of Sardinia, including article 425, which punished homosexual relationships. In 1861 however, the Commission of Deputies decided to eliminate article 425 in the territory of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and to introduce the Neapolenic criminal code – in which there was no punishment of homosexuality – where it had been used before. The result was a differentiation of legal punishment in the South and in the North, creating a geographical dichotomy that shaped public response and attitudes towards sexuality. In other words, in the South homosexuality was not punished, whereas in the North it was sanctioned. Benadusi argues that this differentiation reflected a pre-existing attitude within Southern society, where same-sex acts were tolerated in adolescence, especially if the sexual partner took an active role. Same-sex relations were thus read through a heterosexual lens, and negative connotations were associated with the passive/female/inferior partner. As I have noted before, this geographical differentiation of sexual activities was already present in Lombroso and it seems to be a recurrent feature in the Italian context.

In 1889, the so-called "code Zanardelli" decriminalised homosexuality and was introduced and applied throughout the Italian nation. The justice minister, Giuseppe Zanardelli, separated the notion of crime from that of sin, claiming that it was up to the Church, not the courts, to define moral issues. According to Giovanni Dall'Orto and other scholars, the fact that Catholic countries were legally less strict than Protestant ones, is a sign that

[46] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 88.
[47] Giuseppe Raffaelli, "Nomotesia penale", Napoli: Tip. Cataneo, Vol. 2, 1820-1826, 113 and ff.

governments delegated to the Church the task of repression.[48] Zanardelli's justification for eliminating the punishment for homosexual acts evoked, once again, a wish that the vice remained unmentioned. Libido concerned the private sphere and this was where it had to remain. As noted by Benadusi: "the debate over the criminalisation of pederasty eventually quieted down. The silence that results from its decriminalisation, however, also blocked the possibility of creating a movement for homosexuals' rights".[49] According to Dall'Orto, by leaving private sexual acts silent and unpunished, the State could guarantee that the heteronormative was not openly questioned.

In the next paragraph, I will chronologically move back and will give a brief summary of the situation of Trieste when Saba was born. As I have mentioned in the introduction, Trieste's peculiar situation needs to be investigated in order to locate the author of *Ernesto* and to understand his writing.

5.6 Trieste: crossroad of cultures

When Saba was born, in 1883, Trieste was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thanks to its port and its geographical position between Italy and Austria, the city had been granted an autonomous status. The image of Trieste that Saba presents in *Ernesto* dates back to the end of nineteenth century, where the emphasis is on the commercial activity of the city, and this is why it is relevant to present a detailed analysis of the city.

One of the major differences regarding same-sex acts is the Empire Criminal Code of 1852, in articles 125-130, which punished homosexuality under the rubric of "libido against nature" with the interdiction of lechery. The crime was threatened with prison sentences of one to five years – or up to ten, when rape occurred. The Austro-Hungarian criminal code of 1803 had less severe regulations against unnatural libidinous acts including imprisonment –

[48] Giovanni Dall'Orto, "La 'tolleranza repressiva' dell'omosessualità", in *Quaderni di critica omosessuale*, Vol.. 3, 1987a, 37-57. See also Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 93.
[49] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 95. For a full analysis of the legal debates see Dario Petrosino, "Omosessualità e diritto: un percorso tra storia, modelli culturali e codice in Italia", *Rivista di Sessuologia*, Vol.. 2, 1992, 150-162.

from six months up to one year – and was in use in the Kingdom of Sardinia, Lombardo-Veneto region and Trieste.[50]

Culturally, Trieste was unique. Its cultural life attracted many influential intellectuals from abroad, who contributed to make it a distinct place.[51] The fact that German was spoken by a large part of population, and that it was part of the Empire, also meant that it was permeable to discourses and influences by theories before they were translated into Italian. This included, importantly for the purposes of my study, the works of Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud, which were widely read in Trieste, thus influencing the intelligentsia.[52] Trieste has always been considered a home of psychoanalysis, and rightly so, because it was Freud's disciple, Edoardo Weiss, who started to practice in the city in 1919.[53] Saba himself started his psychoanalysis with him in 1929 to cure a neurosis.[54]

Most of the writers from Trieste lived the liminal position as a problem. Saba wrote that "Dal punto di vista della cultura, nascere a Trieste nel 1883 era come nascere altrove nel 1850" (from a cultural point of view to be born in Trieste in 1883 was like to be born elsewhere in 1850). [55] As noted by Mario Lavagetto, in one of the most lucid studies on Saba, this was a common declaration from Triestine writers who would use the peculiarity of the city as a sort of manifesto for their style, but who also felt a sense of backwardness, due to the presence of different cultures, ethnicities and languages that resulted in a profound fragmentation and a sense of periphery and otherness.[56] Saba called Trieste "un crogiuolo di razze" (a racial crossroads) because it was populated by

---

[50] Since the 1870s, the comma 129 has been applied not only when the acts happened but also for any attempted same-sex activity. Austrian police were very rigorous in monitoring and applying the law. See Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*, Oakland University of California Press*,* 2004, 21.

[51] Many writers spent part of their lives in Trieste: Stendhal was sent as a console in 1831, Rainer Maria Rilke lived at the Castle Duino, near Trieste between October 1911 and May 1912, James Joyce stayed between 1905 and 1915, just to mention a few.

[52] See 5.7.1, 5.7.2.

[53] See Anna Campanile, *The Torn Soul of a City. Trieste as a Center of Polyphonic Culture and Literature,* in Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Volume II, Amsterdam: J. Benjamins: 2004, 145–161. See also Giorgio Voghera, *Gli anni della psicoanalisi,* Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1980.

[54] Saba's neurosis was not cured by the psychoanalysis but the influence it had on his life and his poetry was fundamental. See Arrigo Stara, "Cronologia", in Umberto Saba, *Prose,* ed. Arrigo Stara, Milano: Mondadori, 2001, LXII.

[55] Umberto Saba, *Storia e Cronistoria Canzoniere* in Saba, *Tutte le* Prose, 115.

[56] See Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 211.

local native Italians and Slavics, but also by Germans, Jews, Greeks, and "Turchi col fez rosso in testa" (Turkish wearing a red fez).[57]According to Saba, the co-existence of so many different ethnicities is the reason for the neurosis of its citizens.[58]

Another important writer from Trieste, Scipio Slataper, shared the same idea of doubleness as a natural condition, a destiny, and he analysed how Triestine writers struggled to achieve a true synthesis of these cultural differences. "Ogni cosa è duplice e triplice a Trieste, cominciando dalla flora e finendo con l'etnicità" [59] (everything in Trieste is double, triple, from flora up to ethnicity) and he recognizes in this plurality the anxiety of the culture of the city.

Despite all the criticisms by the writers from Trieste about the fragmentation, Lavagetto argues that it is the very fragmentation, the co-existence of different races and ethnicities that gives the city a unique status where "cultura mitteleuropea che si irradia da Vienna" (the Mittel-European culture that irradiates from Vienna) [60] creates intersections with the rigour of the Italian tradition.

Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris suggest that we consider the possibilities of such a vague concept as Trieste's particularity.[61] According to them "Trieste è stata contemporaneamente un amalgama di gruppi etnici e culturali diversi […] e un arcipelago in cui questi gruppi restavano isolate e chiusi gli uni agli altri". (Trieste has been at the same time an amalgam of ethnic and cultural groups […] and an archipelago where these groups remained isolated).[62] The interesting point highlighted by Ara and Magris is the projection of these different ethnic and cultural groups towards their motherland as a fantastic projection, an idealized place. In this light, also "[g]li italiani guardavano come gli irredentisti, all'Italia" ("the Italians looked at Italy as if they were irredentists) as if they were separated from it.[63]

---

[57] Saba, "Inferno e Paradiso di Trieste", in Saba, *Tutte le Prose,* 982.
[58] Saba, "Inferno e Paradiso di Trieste" in Saba, *Tutte le Prose,* 982.
[59] Scipio Slataper, *Scritti politici*, Milano: Mondadori, 1954, 93.
[60]Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 214.
[61] Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera,* Torino: Einaudi, 2007. For a history of Trieste see also Angelo Ara, *Fra Nazione e Impero. Trieste, gli Asburgo, la Mitteleuropa*, Milano: Garzanti, 2009; and Marina Cattaruzza ed., *Trieste, Austria, Italia tra Settecento e Novecento studi in onore di Elio Apih*, Udine: Del Bianco, 2006.
[62] Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 16.
[63] Ara and Magris, *Trieste*, 17.

The layout of the town pushed its inhabitants to choose an identity, to look at roots that were felt as spatially distant, and to emphasize the essence of such cultural roots. Saba said of himself: "io non sono un poeta triestino ma un poeta italiano, nato […] in quella grande città italiana che è Trieste" (I am not a Triestine poet but an Italian poet born in that great Italian town of Trieste)[64] who used the language and metre of the Italian tradition. He attributed to the Italian language a sort of cement function that kept together all the cultures and that became the most spoken language owing to a natural process.[65]

According to Lavagetto, the isolation of the different groups had its roots in immigration and power balance.[66] Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the Slavic labour from the areas nearby arrived, the newcomers lived in very poor conditions at the margins of society. Therefore their political fight was a complete refusal of any form of assimilation, clinging especially to their language. Triestine bourgeoisie understood the danger of this political statement and responded by perpetrating the hegemony of the Italian culture, through what is known as Italian irredentism.[67] Therefore, Lavagetto notes, the socially cohesive function that Saba recognises about Italian, is an illusion and resembles more or less an irredentist position. I agree with this reading and I think that Saba portrays a sort of irredentism in *Ernesto*. A certain aversion for one of the characters, Mr Wilder, and Ernesto's mockery of his strong German accent, is traceable in the typical attitude of Italians in Trieste, who tried to emphasize their Italian identity.[68]

Rather than Italian, perhaps, the language that became the signifier of belonging was dialect. Ara and Magris note how at the beginning of the twentieth century the "dialetto triestino, diffuso in tutti i ceti sociali, [era] veicolo di ogni rapporto familiare e professionale" (Triestine dialect, spread through all social classes [was] vehicle of each familiar and professional relation).[69]

---

[64] Saba, "Discorso per il settantesimo compleanno", in Saba, *Tutte le Prose*, 1059.
[65] Saba, "Inferno e Paradiso di Trieste", in Saba, *Tutte le Prose,* 982.
[66] Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 214.
[67] On irredentism in Trieste see C. Schiffer, *Le origini dell'irredentismo triestino (1813-1860),* ed. E. Apih, Udine, 1978.
[68] See chapter 7 and Saba, *Ernesto*, 12.
[69] Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera,* Torino: Einaudi, 2007.

Saba showed a conflict, never really resolved, between the use of Italian and dialect, the forging of a language in *Ernesto* that is a combination of the two in order to keep the authenticity in the dialogue, to represent the city and its culture in a way that Triestines would recognize as faithful to their identity.

As I will show in chapter seven, Ernesto speaks dialect with the man but also to the other characters, and the only characters who impose Italian on him are his mother and his uncle who embody the moral order. In the novel, Italian becomes the embodiment of an imposing moral prescription, whereas dialect is the language of natural behaviour. The sex acts, which are described through the use of dialect, are not considered sinful or indecent but natural; they become such only in the confession to the mother who imposes Italian as the language of communication.[70]

The impact of this peculiar status of language and culture on literature is well explained, once again, by the words of Lavagetto, who reveals how it produces "forme spurie, parabole irregolari" (impure forms, irregular parables).[71] The literary effect of Trieste's multi-ethnicity is traceable in the way Saba uses grammar and syntax, in the double urge to surpass, and at the same time, to be attracted to the norm. This is one of the peculiarities that Saba showed in his poetry and in *Ernesto*.

A final important issue to appreciate the diversity of Trieste is the presence of a large Jewish community and its relationship with the rest of the city's inhabitants. Saba's mother, Felicita Rachele Cohen, who was Jewish, married Ugo Poli (Abramo, after his conversion to Judaism) and was abandoned by him before Umberto was born. As noted by Lavagetto, this put Saba in a very uncomfortable position with respect to the Jewish community, thus adding another isolating element.[72] Saba himself commented quite often on this issue and recognized the presence of the Jewish ghetto in the centre of town as a sign of the diffidence that historically characterised Jewish populations.[73] Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite the absence of legal discrimination, Jewish families would still choose to live in the ghetto. Perceived as the "Other" by the other citizens, Jews developed an even

[70] See chapter 7
[71] Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 221.
[72] Lavagetto, *La Gallina,* 228.
[73] See for example Saba, "Il Ghetto di Trieste" in Saba, *Tutte le Prose*, 377-380.

stronger sense of community. Economic reasons were accompanied by psychological ones because, as Lavagetto writes, the Ghetto "è il luogo di un mercato specifico, il mercato delle cose usate" (is the place of the specific market, the market of second-hand things) [74] that allows the town to survive the end of the free port. This new economical setting, continues Lavagetto, created some tension between the Jewish community and the rest of the middle-classes but never really translated in anti-Semitism because Jewish businesses tended to be seen as lucky competitors rather than enemies. According to Lavagetto's analysis, class struggle was mainly directed against the Slavic population, considered as part of proletariat, whereas Jews, as part of the middle class, could potentially contribute to the formation of the nation. Hence, in Trieste, the racism was limited mostly to isolated cases, for reasons which Saba saw in the city's more general attitude towards strangers: "la popolazione aveva un carattere già troppo meridionale perché la malattia Nordica dell'antisemitismo vi potesse attecchire" (the population had too much of a Southern character for the Northern illness of Anti-Semitism to spread).[75] Nevertheless, the situation remained dangerous, and Jews created even stronger and closer communities, with the result that mixed marriages between Jews and Christians were tolerated but not recognised by the committee of rabbis.[76] This aspect is particularly relevant for Saba's family and to understand his position towards Jewishness. Saba's neurosis, his interest in psychoanalysis, his origins in a mixed marriage, his being Triestine and his homosexuality are the elements that (in Lavagetto's reading) constitute his peculiarity.[77] I disagree in seeing a homosexual identity in Saba, as I will explain in the next chapters. However I agree in acknowledge the importance of all the other elements into account when approaching Saba's works.

Returning to the cultural multi-ethnicity of Trieste, as Ara and Magris suggest, the different languages and cultures somehow managed to remain separate and did not merge. German was spoken mainly by the intellectual

[74] Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 224-225. Lavagetto is referring to the end of nineteenth century.
[75] Umberto Saba, *Prose*, ed. Linuccia Saba, Milano: Mondadori,1964, 25.
[76] Lavagetto shows how, at the end of nineteenth century in Trieste, mixed marriages were exceptional events, and article 64 of the "Codice Civile" stated that one spouse had to renounce their religion, Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 228.
[77] See Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 230-231.

upper middle-class elite.[78] Mittel-European culture was a combination of specific elements: the influence of the Habsburg and German monarchies, and the fact of being part of a wider geographical context, which was thought to transcend national cultures and consequently was endowed with tensions and conflicts that gave the city a privileged perspective, compared to other Italian cities. This allowed Trieste to be more receptive of central European intellectual influences, especially its connection to the "prestigiosa tradizione dell'università di Vienna, dove studiano generazioni di medici triestini" (prestigious tradition of the University of Vienna where many generations of doctors from Trieste studied).[79]

Since the scope of my thesis is to see the connection between discourses on sexuality that influenced the novels I am analysing, I am particularly interested in how, in Trieste, discussions of sexuality coming from the Austrian context intertwined with notions that originated in Italian debates. I will now proceed to give an overview of Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century focusing on the ideas of sexuality developed by Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud, which are the main influence on Saba's understanding of same-sex desire.

5.7 Fin de siècle Vienna's notions of sexuality: Otto Weininger and Sigmund Freud

At the end of nineteenth century, Vienna was a lively cultural environment where a clear sense of change permeated the town. As noted by David Luft, Vienna's "great intellectual innovators – in music and philosophy, in economics and architecture, and of course, in psychoanalysis – all broke, more or less deliberately, with the historical outlook".[80] Debates on sexuality and eroticism also permeated the intellectual spheres of the capital.[81] Matti Bunzl argues that "it was […] the period when homosexuals emerged as a clearly marked threat to the social order".[82]

---

[78] Ara and Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera*, 45.
[79] Ara and Magris, *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera*, 45-46.
[80] David Luft, *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna. Weininger, Musil*, *Doderer*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2003, xviii. On the fin-de-siècle Wien see also Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture*, Knopf: New York, 1961.
[81] See Nike Wagner, *Spirito e sesso: la donna e l'erotismo nella Vienna fin de siècle,* Torino: Einaudi, 1990.
[82] Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*, University of California Press*:* Oakland, 2004, 19. By the same author on this debate see a Matti

5.7.1 Otto Weininger

One of the most prominent figures in Vienna was Otto Weininger (1880-1903) whose controversial *Sex and Character*, published in 1903, permeated cultural debates about sexuality and gender that mark modernity.[83] Despite his very short life – he committed suicide at 23, in 1903, the same year this book was published – and the fact that his synthesis of biology and philosophy made his work unreliable,[84] Weininger intervened in most of the modern discussions concerning prostitution, the role of women, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Because of the highly misogynistic and anti-Semitic content of the book, his radical positions on sexuality were often dismissed. Yet, as noted by Bristow, "despite its numerous offensive passages, the twisted logic of Weininger's inquiry intriguingly challenges the stark contrast earlier sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing and Bloch made between men and women, heterosexuality and homosexuality".[85] In this context, I am especially interested in presenting Weininger's notions of sexuality, which influenced Saba in writing *Ernesto*.[86]

Weininger did not share the predominant view of homosexuality advocated by Krafft-Ebing who considered homosexuality a perversion.[87] Despite distinguishing two different kinds of perversion – "innate" and "acquired" – Krafft-Ebing believed both to be somehow hereditary and a deterioration of normality. As noted by Chandak Sengoopta, Weininger, instead based his theories on biomedical notions and attempted to prove that male homosexuality was neither a disease nor a vice, but the consequence of natural human bisexuality.[88] Bisexuality is, in his view, the norm, and homosexuality a natural sexual inclination of those individuals situated in the middle of the male/female

---

Bunzl, "Queering Austria for the New Europe" in Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Dagmar Herzog eds., *Sexuality in Austria*, Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 2007, 131-144.

[83] Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character, An Investigation of Fundamental Principles,* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.

[84] See Wagner, *Spirito*.

[85] Bristow, *Sexuality,* 38.

[86] For further information on Weininger see also Bristow, *Sexuality*, p 37-44. For the influence of Weininger in Italy see Alberto Cavaglion, *Otto Weininger in Italia*, Roma: Carucci, 1983.

[87] On Krafft-Ebing's theories see my chapter 2, and Bristow, *Sexuality*, 26-33.

[88] Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger. Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna*, Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2000.

spectrum. He claimed that "[f]rom the outset all are *bisexual,* that is, capable of sexual intercourse with both men and women"[89].

The exclusiveness of the choice for one sex or the other is therefore a later choice in certain cases influenced by external conditions and, in any case, "bisexuality […] continues to reveal its temporarily suppressed existence again and again".[90]

Thus Weininger posits that all sexualities are part of a natural continuum, opposing the prevalent understanding of the time that homosexuality is an undeveloped stage, and refuses the idea that homosexuality could therefore be acquired in certain conditions in the same way that heterosexuality is.[91] According to his theory, the homosexual is situated in the middle of the spectrum of sexuality, between two imaginary poles of absolute masculinity and femininity, and both men and women show sexual characteristics of the other sex. According to his "Law of Sexual relations", a balanced couple should be the combination of feminine and masculine traits. Weininger believed that among "the innumerable gradations, or intermediate sexual forms […] we can also posit an ideal Man M and an ideal Woman W, neither of whom exists, as sexual types",[92] and that science has precisely the duty of creating this type. Homosexuality, for Weininger, is simply a natural variant, an innate condition, not a pathological issue. He was well aware of how controversial his position was in considering it "a sexuality of intermediate sexual forms within the continuity of intermediate sexual forms, *which it regards as the only forms occurring in reality, while the extremes are only ideal cases*".[93]

Weininger also establishes a link between bisexuality/homosexuality and young age based on the lack of "unidirectional sexual development" which would explain therefore "those rapturous "juvenile friendships" that are never entirely devoid of a sensual aspect".[94] Weininger claims that there is an element of sexual instinct in each friendship between young people of the same sex that

[89] Weininger, *Sex and Character,* 43.
[90] Weininger, *Sex and Character,* 43.
[91] See 2.2. The terms of the enquiry were posited in the juxtaposition between acquired homosexuality and innate homosexuality and most of the theorists accepted this distinction that Weininger instead refuses.
[92] Weininger, *Sex and Character,* 13.
[93] Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 43. Emphasis in the original.
[94] Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 43.

can be explained through the presence of biological specificity. This is especially true in certain contexts like boarding schools, where the absence of women makes the sexual urges divert to same-sex activities. From an endocrinology point of view, Weininger's explanation of puberty marks the threshold of sexual differentiation: it is when individuals choose their sexual orientation, shifting to univocal sexuality. Weininger therefore endorses the idea of common pre-pubertal same-sex activities. In conclusion, according to his theory "sexual inversion is not an exception from the natural law, but only a special case of the same*".* According to this same law, an individual who is half -man and half-woman desires another individual with roughly the same proportions of both sexes".[95]

By claiming that sexual inversion is part of the natural and biological system, Weininger is also claiming the injustice that these individuals were forced to endure by society. He suggests that "one sexual invert should be guided to another sexual invert, the homosexual to the tribade".[96] However, the purpose of this recommendation can only be to make it as easy as possible for *both* to obey the laws banning homosexual acts still in existence (in England, Germany, Austria), which are ludicrous, and to the abolition of which these lines are also intended to make a contribution.[97]

Sex and Character is mainly known for Weininger's controversial misogynistic theories and his anti-Semitic views.[98] As I tried to show here, however, his views on sexuality were quite innovative for his time, and relevant in this context, because there are some parallels with the way Saba presents his ideas on sexuality. We know that Saba read Weininger when the Italian translation was published in 1912.[99] Giacomo Debenedetti recognises Saba's debt to Weininger, accusing Saba of choosing "cattivi maestri" ("bad

[95] Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 44.
[96] Weininger, *Sex and Character,* 45.
[97] Weininger, *Sex and Character,* 45.
[98] Weininger believes in the utter supremacy of the male intellect over female sensuality, and he only links genius to masculinity. He saw in women only two different possible paths: motherhood and prostitution, and advises men to the ideal of chastity in order not to be corrupted by women's pure sensuality and sexuality. Weininger was also a self-hating Jew who converted to Protestantism and expressed negative and offensive study of the Jews. For a brief account see "See also Lavagetto, "Fra gli stessi Ebrei", in Lavagetto, *La Gallina,* 239-251.
[99] See Saba, "Storia e Cronistoria del Canzoniere", in *Tutte le Prose,* 166 and Lavagetto, *La Gallina,* 248. Lavagetto mentions an entry in Aldo Fortuna's diary when he refers to Saba's remark.

teachers)".[100] In his study of Weininger's influence on the Italian intellectual milieu, Alberto Cavaglion[101] dedicates a chapter to writers from Trieste, who were active at the beginning of twentieth century. He disputes the importance of Weininger for Saba and attributes the idea of his influence to Giacomo Debenedetti. Saba himself tried to dissociate himself from an uncomfortable writer such as Weininger in a letter to Debenedetti.[102] However, I think some of the ideas on sexuality combined with Saba's his reading of Freud is traceable in *Ernesto* as I will discuss in my reading of the novel in the next chapters.

5.7.2 Sigmund Freud and the theories of sexuality

The theory of the existence of an unconscious mind that functions independently from the conscious mind is one of the most important ideas proposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). If the conscious mind is regulated by the structure of culture, the unconscious is a psychic component formed through the processes of repression: a necessary path for the subject to function in the world. Repression intervenes to hide desires that the conscious mind forbids in the process of a negotiation with culture. The unconscious appears through slips, memories of dreams and gestures, which is what psychoanalysis wants to examine. Freud's theory of the unconscious also provides the starting point for his investigation on sexuality.

In 1905 Freud published *Three Essays on Sexuality,* in which he defines the unconscious as the place of sexual drives, to be repressed in order for the subject to acquire a certain sexual identity recognizable by culture. This process of repressing different sexual drives is divided into different phases, starting in infancy, going through latency and then into puberty. In infancy the process is straightforward. According to Freud, biological instincts are sufficient to become a sexualised body, however there is a process of sexualisation that involves how the infant's psyche responds to his/her perception of different anatomies in the sexes. The infant, in Freud's explanation, goes through different identification processes while forming her/his sexuality and Freud identifies two

[100] Giacomo Debenedetti, *Intermezzo,* Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1972, 42.
[101] See Cavaglion, *Weininger*.
[102] Debenedetti, *Intermezzo,* 42.

different, interdependent structures: the Oedipus complex and the castration process.

One of Freud's main innovations was his claim that it is impossible to distinguish between congenital and acquired forms of inversion, because homosexuals and heterosexuals in early life present the same sexual experiences. Freud rejected the inversion model proposed by Ulrichs,[103] and instead he saw inversion as a form of psychic bisexuality, combining feminine and masculine elements. Freud also separated the sexual instinct from the sexual object claiming that it is disposition of the subject to determine whether a part of the body is loved, hated or repulsed. Freud also turned to fetishes to reinforce the idea of a separation between the sexual instinct and sexual object as for example in masochism and sadism:

> As regards active algolagnia, sadism, the roots are easy to detect in the normal. The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness* – a desire to subjugate; […] sadism would correspond to an aggressive component of the sexual instinct which has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position.[104]

Neither masochism nor sadism are biologically functional, yet they could be aligned with extreme masculinity (activity) and femininity (passivity). Therefore Freud describes them as constitutive of sexuality. Furthermore, Freud adds that "[s]adism and masochism occupy a special position among the perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life". [105] The consequent conclusions are that "sexual instinct has to struggle against certain mental forces which act as resistances"[106] (shame and disgust), and which the subject tries to regulate through repression. Such regulation is not always successful in leading to a "normal" sexual life and the perversions show that sexual instinct has diverse sources, and that it is explainable as deriving from a single place. Freud was interested in how the subject operates to regulate and limit sexual

[103] See 2.2.
[104] Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on Sexuality; The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Vol. vii, trans. Lytton Strachey, Anna Freud, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953, 157-158.
[105] Freud, *On Sexuality*, 159.
[106] Freud, *On Sexuality*, 162.

instinct, and how sexual instinct established connection between different elements.

In *The Ego and the ID* (1923)[107] and in "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924) [108] Freud analyses the boys' path towards adhering to the figure of the active, masculine, heterosexual male that society expects, and he argues that this process is harder for boys than for girls. With his notion of the Oedipus complex, Freud takes from Sophocles the episode of Oedipus, who kills his father and lies with his mother without knowing she is his mother. In the first phase, the boy develops a transfer of erotic energy to his mother – what Freud calls object-cathexis – and combines this attraction with identification with his father. The two relationships develop side-by-side until the boy sees his father as an obstacle. Here the Oedipus complex starts and the relationship with the father becomes ambivalent. The demolition of the Oedipus complex is necessary to develop the personality and to consolidate the masculinity of the boy's character. In the heterosexual dynamic the boy cannot love his mother because that is his father's role, and the boy will therefore have affection for his mother and will identify with his father, thus diverting his libido to another female object to secure his identity. If the boy identifies with authority and his father's side, then he will be heterosexual. The explanation of the myth, for Freud, lies in the fact that the infant discovers his mother, which inhibits his infantile masturbation and thus serves as a symbolic castration.

In the model proposed by Freud, then, the absence of a father figure makes it almost impossible for the boy to identify with authority and to follow the heterosexual path. Saba presents the same model in *Ernesto*, where the eponymous character grows only with his mother, with no father, which is the reason why he starts his relationship with another man. As noted by Wagner, Freud includes homosexuals among those who do not submit to the sexual discipline imposed by civilisation. Freud ascribes serious effects to repression to the extent of psychoneurosis caused by abstinence and limitations in sexual

[107] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works, The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Vol. xix, trans. Lytton Strachey, London: Hogarth Pr. and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961, 13-19.
[108]Sigmund Freud, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" in Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* 173-183

pleasure.[109] As I have already mentioned, the same-sex acts experienced in adolescence do not interfere, in Freud's reading, with the development of adult heterosexual identity and this seems to be a concept shared by Saba in the characterisation of Ernesto, as I will discuss in more detail in my reading of the novel[110].

5.8 Fascism, virility and homosexuality

In this section I want to discuss fascist ideas of homosexuality and also the discourse on masculinity, virility and the new man that the Regime produced. I share Barbara Spackman's notion, according to which Italian Fascism is a "discursive formation whose principal node of articulation is virility".[111] In *Ernesto*, Saba present ideas about virility and respectability that I argue crystallised during Fascism.

The fascist attitude towards masculinity and virility was quite contradictory and Duncan has noted how Fascism promoted the cult of the male bodies and their powerful imagery excluding any contact with women thus operating on the border of suspicion of effeminacy.[112] John Champagne argues that "the proximity of the homosocial to the homoerotic is of necessity a problem for fascism" because of its reliance on "the misogynistic notions of virility to produce the collective sense of national identity".[113]

George Mosse's traces the origin of modern masculinity to the beginning of the nineteenth century when the middle-class idea of respectability started to be linked to sexuality as a mechanism of controlling society.[114] He argues that nationalism had a strong influence "in the development and maintenance of bourgeois respectability".[115] Nationalism, in his view "helped control sexuality, yet also provided the means through which changing sexual attitudes could be

---

[109] Wagner, *Spirito*, 115.
[110] See chapter 7.
[111] Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy,* Minnesota: University of Minnesota: 1996, ix.
[112] Duncan, *Reading,* 43.
[113] John Champagne, *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy,* London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 14.
[114] George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe, New* York: Howard Fertig, 1985, 4.
[115] Mosse, *Nationalism*, 2-3.

absorbed and tamed into respectability".[116] Respectability created a strict classification of normality and abnormality, which applied to roles in society that maintained that men were active and women were passive, or in other words, passivity was associated with femininity, and activeness was associated with masculinity. Those who did not respect these boundaries, trespassing "the circumscribed limits of male or female activity were considered abnormal – strangers outside the tribe – and judged to be a threat to society". According to Mosse, the label of abnormality applied to "[h]abitual criminals or so-called sexual perverts" but also to foreigners and "Jews, who were sometimes accused of confusing gender roles".[117] This categorization is relevant to the way the homosexual/gay body is read in Italy and the attribution of value to the roles adopted in sexual practices, even in homosexual acts.[118]

In order to define the ideal of masculinity, modern society needed an anti-ideal model that Mosse calls the "countertype" and "that reflected, as in a convex mirror, the reverse of the social norm".[119] The homosexual belonged to this counter-category because he did not adhere to the sanctioned type of masculinity and virility. According to Mosse, Fascism gave masculinity a privileged space, connoting it as a catalyzer of diverse forces and "[m]anliness was a principle that transcended daily life."[120]

Mosse's reading of the connection between respectability and Fascism has been criticized for not considering the anti-bourgeois component of Fascism. According to Emilio Gentile, fascist respectability was different from bourgeois respectability because it was based on the ideal of the man-soldier.[121] Sandro Bellassai claims that this figure of the virile, masculine and powerful soldier was contrasted to that of the bourgeois man who was characterized by a lack of virility.[122] In his view, the anti-bourgeois attitude of Fascism was exactly a response to this model of effeminate man.

---

[116] Mosse, *Nationalism*, 10.
[117] Mosse, *Nationalism*, 24.
[118] This distinction is fundamental for my analysis of sexual acts in *Ernesto*. See chapter 7.
[119] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 56.
[120] Mosse, *Image of Man,* 1996, 155.
[121] On this issue see Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo: storia e intepretazione*, Roma: Laterza, 2007, especially 239 and ff.
[122] Sandro Bellassai, "The Masculine mystique: anti-modernism and virility in fascist Italy", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 10, 3, 314.

According to Benadusi what is missing in Mosse's analysis is a differentiation of the "hyper-virile, aggressive Italian *squadrista* […] and the middle-aged man".[123] Benadusi analyses how the creation of the new man was part of the totalitarian project initiated by Fascism that involved a redefinition of masculinity. The aim was an "attempt to transform the Italian people physically and sexually", therefore, Benadusi continues, "[t]he history of homosexuality in this phase of Italian history, then, is constantly correlated with virility, making it possible to better reconstruct the image of man promoted by Fascism".[124] In his view the concept of virility "reached its climax in the Ventennio"[125] by adapting traditional values to the characteristics and needs of the modern world. According to Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "totalitarian treatments would toughen and discipline a population that, the Duce claimed, had been "feminized" and "disarmed" by centuries of foreign occupation".[126]

The big novelty was an emphasis on aggressiveness: the new man was supposed to be theoretically ready for a possible war at any times. The fascist man had to be a soldier, physically fit, ready to sprint into action – the opposite of the bourgeois man characterized by passivity and decadence. The ideas of Lombroso were used to identify the homosexual according to "the degree to which it corresponded to stereotypes established according to characteristic signs to be deciphered and catalogued by an anthropologist."[127]

The new man and the ideas of virility and sexuality proposed by Fascism were, according to Benadusi, somehow welcomed by the Church. The fascist interest in saving the social order through traditional morality was shared by the Church, which the regime happily left in charge of moral social behaviour. The new man proposed by the regime and the man of church shared certain values, like reproduction as the goal of sexual intercourse and a misogynist attitude towards women, considered as inferiors. Nevertheless, the new man was built around warrior values and Catholic pacifism was perceived as effeminate. The Church's demands for curing sexual perversions and the discretion through which it treated those subjects, was particularly appealing for the regime. In the

[123] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 293.
[124] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 8.
[125] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 9.
[126] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 6.
[127] Benadusi, *The Enemy*, 41.

case of homosexuality, the Church used to push homosexuals to confess, proposing to give absolution but in fact creating a state of isolation, because all remained within the confessional.[128] Homosexuality was relegated to a state of secrecy, and homosexuals, despite feeling absolved and understood, were in fact made to feel more guilty and isolated. The Catholic Church condemned homosexuality in the Canon Law together with intercourse with animals and masturbation.

According to Mosse, in its reading of the homosexual body, the Catholic Church had put emphasis on:

> what role the man had played in the act (men taking female positions were often punished with greater severity than those who had taken the male position), and, most important, whether the act had been consummated.[129]

Protestantism did not differentiate between acting and contemplating, whereas in Catholicism there was a gradation of sin.

This emphasis on the role in the sexual act is important to understand the specificity of the Italian perception of same-sex desire and acts. Both Benadusi and Duncan analyse an episode that happened in 1936, in Catania, where there was an investigation carried out to verify homosexuality through medical examinations of the anus, thus ascribing homosexuality to passive penetration. This reading of the homosexual body confirms this separation about being active and passive in a homosexual act that is a fundamental aspect in *Ernesto*.[130]

5.9 Homosexuality and the law

When Fascism came to power it had to find a strategy to deal with homosexuality, not least because the idea of not having any regulation seemed to collide with the virilization of the nation promoted by fascist values.[131] It was

[128] On the confession see Foucault, *Sexuality, Volume 1*, 61-62. On the relationship between Church Fascism see Cecilia Dau Novelli, *Famiglia e modernizzazione in Italia fra le due guerre,* Rome: Studium, 1994. For a thorough analysis of the Church and its politics see Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
[129] Mosse, *Nationalism*, 25-26.
[130] See 1.7.
[131] For a brief but exhaustive analysis of Fascism and homosexuality see also Duncan, *Reading*, 42-48.

necessary to take a stance in order to preserve the moral rigour. The debates about how to change the Criminal Law started in 1925 and the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Rocco, argued for the necessity of integrating prevention and repression, showing to the world Italian decisiveness and supremacy in its upholding of strong moral values. As noted by Benadusi, another important purpose was the conciliation of the traditional juridical school of thought and the Positivist school, the latter promoting a more repressive attitude.[132]The aim to reinvigorate the importance of family, public morality and the integrity of the race was threatened by homosexuality. Hence the proposed article 528 read that whoever "performs libidinous acts on persons of the same sex, or consents to such acts, is punishable by imprisonment from six months to three years if the events cause public scandal". [133]

The punishment repressed the "unnatural sexual acts" that were an insult to morality. The protection of public morality took priority over individuality and intrusions into the private sphere were justified. As Benadusi argues, these principles introduced a new subject to preserve, i.e. "the physical and moral health of the race".[134] Generally speaking, public debates were in favour of this proposed code and the Church praised it for transcending both the Positivist school, with its materialistic vision of sexuality, and the classic one that argued against punishment on the grounds that no crime was committed.

Proteus was critical of this law because it ignored all the theories of sexologists, and feared that it might allow people to be blackmailed for nothing else other than having different sexual dispositions.[135] The proposal was analysed and the commission decided to eliminate the article because including a specific law against homosexuality would have been an admission by Italy of the substantial presence of this "vice". The Church was left in charge of preventing homosexuality and the best way to fight homosexuality consisted in denying its existence. The justification given by the Chair of the Commission for

[132] Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 96.
[133] Ministero della Giustizia e degli affari di culto, *Lavori Preparatori del Codice Penale e del Codice di Procedura Penale,* Rome: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1928, 2, 206. Quoted in Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 97.
[134] Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 98.
[135] Proteus, "Intorno ad un articolo del progetto del nuovo codice penale," in *Rassegna di Studi sessuali demografia ed eugenica (Genesis), 3,* 1927, 212.

the elimination of the code is reported by Benadusi in its length and it is worth quoting in full:

> a) It is not necessary to provide a measure for this crime because fortunately Italy can proudly say that this abominable vice is not so widespread among us as to justify legislative intervention.[136]

Although the new criminal code, voted into law in 1930, did not include the Rocco Code, this did not mean the end of the debates. Dario Petrosino notes how the concept of race ("stirpe"), introduced for the first time by the Codice Rocco, reappeared in 1938 in the *Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti*, thus establishing an explicit connection between physical and psychological traits. Petrosino thus claims, that between 1938 and 1941 "fu comminato agli omosessuali, il confino politico al posto di quello comune" (homosexuals were sent to political rather than common confine). [137] The shift from one type of *confino* (relegation to a different part of Italy or of the Italian colonies) to another meant that homosexuals were considered both enemies of the race and political opposers of the regime. Petrosino notes how the accusation of homosexuality was used to denigrate enemies even without checking whether the person was actually homosexual. Some homosexuals were sent to the *confino* to the colonies.[138]

5.10 The Postwar years: 1945-1953

After the Second World War, Italy was free from Fascism and the Nazi occupation, but the sense of liberation did not create a sudden change in the attitude towards homosexuality and same-sex desire. Gnerre reports a story by the writer Giovanni Commisso (1895 -1969) which has as its protagonist a painter, Filippo de Pisis, which can explain the attitude in the years after the end

---

[136] Ministero della Giustizia e degli affaru di culto, *Lavori Preparatori del Codice Penale e del Codice di Procedura Penale,* Rome: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1928, 2, 215. Quoted in Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 104.

[137] Dario Petrosino, "Traditori della stirpe. Il razzismo contro gli omosessuali nella stampa del fascismo" in Alberto Burgio and Luciano Casali eds., *Studi sul razzismo italiano*, Bologna: CLUEB, 1996, 94.

[138] For a full analysis of the type of punishment for homosexual behaviour see Benadusi, *The Enemy,* 111-184. Some homosexuals were sent to the islands of Termiti. On that see Giovanni dall'Orto "Ci furono *femmenelle* che piangevano quando venimmo via dalle Trémiti!" Intervista a un omosessuale confinato nel periodofascista: Available at: http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/fascismo/peppinella.html (Accessed: 10.07.2014)

of the war.[139] In 1945, de Pisis organizes a party in Venice where only beautiful people would be invited and they would be only wearing shells on which the painter would paint during the party. According to Commisso, de Pisis decided to exclude one of his models who, irritated by this rudeness, reported to the Communist Party local office that de Pisis was organising an orgy and all the participants were taken to the police headquarters by the Partisans.[140]

According to Andrea Pini, the forms of social control over sexuality were still present in a country where morality was controlled by the church and the state which meant "Democrazia Cristiana, cioè, nella migliore delle ipotesi, perbenismo, ossequio al Vaticano e tradizione" (Christian Democracy, that is at its best respectability, obeisance to Vatican and tradition).[141]

The Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) started governing in 1944 and stayed in power for nearly fifty years. At the very beginning, most of the repressive laws on moral issues including the gross indecency act, the corruption of underage (at that time 21 years old) were maintained and especially used, Pini, argues against homosexuals.[142] Homosexuals stopped by the police had their names filed in a special list of "third sex" with possibilities to have a criminal record.[143] No law regulated homosexuality because, as Giovanni dall'Orto argues, "né la Chiesa né la Dc volevano che si facesse troppo 'chiasso' attorno all'argomento" (neither the Church nor the DC wanted to make too much fuss about the issue).[144] At the same time, the biggest party of the opposition in Italy, the PCI (the Communist Party), claimed to represent the masses and the farmers who, as Fabio Giovannini argues, were closely attached to the Church and therefore it had no interest in discussing homosexuality.[145] Gianni Rossi Barilli investigates the trials for indecency that

---

[139] Giovanni Comisso, *Mio sodalizio con de Pisis*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1993, 111 and ff. quoted in Gnerre, Francesco. *L'Eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano*. Milano: Baldini e Castoldi, 2000, 147.
[140] Comisso, *Mio sodalizio*, 111 and ff.
[141] Andrea Pini, *Quando eravano froci. Gli omosessuali nell'Italia di una volta,* Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011, 14.
[142] Pini, *Quando eravano froci*, 14. On the history of DC see Maurizio Cotta and Luca Verzichelli, *Il Sistema politico italiano,* Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008.
[143] Pini, *Quando eravano froci*, 14.
[144] Giovanni dall'Orto, "'La 'tolleranza repressiva' dell'omossesualità. Quando un atteggiamento legale diviene tradizione", http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/tollera/tolle2e.html Accessed: 23.10.2013)
[145] Fabio Giovannini, *Comunisti e diversi. Il Pci e la questione omosessuale,* Bari: Dedalo, 1980. See especially 54-57 on Pasolini and PCI.

books and films underwent in those years:[146] Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) underwent 33 trials for indecency since 1949 and this gives an idea of the climate in those years.[147] Pasolini lost his job as a teacher and was expelled by the Communist Party after 1949 when he was found guilty of "atti osceni" (gross acts) with a group of young men in Friuli.[148] The Communist Party newspaper, *Unità*, commented on the episode talking about "degenerazione borghese il vizio dell'omosessualità" (bourgeoisie degeneration the vice of homosexuality).[149]

According to Petrosino, the 1950s were characterised by a new presence on debates on sexuality especially in the French magazine *Arcadie* founded in 1954 that was widespread in Italy because of the presence of a column called *Nouvelles d'Italie* dedicated to Italy.[150]

Giovanni dall'Orto, in 1987, published an interview with Gino Olivari (1899-1988), a gay activist, in which he narrates an episode from 1951 that involved two young boys who committed suicide because they were found together in a motel. Olivari quotes some of the headlines from newspapers such as "Il fetido fiore dell'omosessualità" (the fetid flower of homosexuality) or "Torbida tragedia in un pensionato" (turbid tragedy in a motel)".[151] The comments of the press on the suicide give us a clear idea of the panic caused by homosexuality and the public attitude in the 1950s. Olivari underwent a trial for his defence of the suicidal boys and censorship was widespread in the press.[152]

Despite the presence of magazines that dealt with sexuality such as "Scienza e Sessualità" (1950-1953) and "Sesso e Libertà" (1953) homosexuality was still a stigma.

---

[146] Gianni Rossi Barilli, *Il Movimento gay in Italia,* Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999.
[147] On Pasolini's trials see David Barth Schwartz, *Pasolini Requiem,* New York: Pantheon, 1992, 220-229.
[148] See also Francesco Gnerre "Pier Paolo Pasolini e il panico dell'omosessualità" in "Testo e senso", n. 8, 2007, http://www.pasolini.net/saggistica_PPP_panico-omosessualita.htm (Accessed: 02.02.2014)
[149] Ferdinando Mautino, in *Unità,* 29 October 1949.
[150] Dario Petrosino, "Crisi della virilità e 'questione omosessuale' nell'Italia degli anni cinquanta e sessanta", in Bellassai and Malatesta, eds. *Genere e mascolinità,* 325.
[151] Giovanni dall'Orto, Interview Gino Olivari., "Gino Olivari: erano anni difficili", first published in *Babilonia*, n. 64, February 1989, 51-53, now in http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/olivari/olivari.html
[152] Petrosino, "Crisi della virilità", 320.

In 1953 the magazine *Ulisse* dedicated a monograph on homosexuality,[153] however public opinion was still far from accepting it as a topic of discussion.

5.11 Conclusion

Culturally and politically Saba inhabited a very complicated position: a Triestine who claimed to be an Italian poet, he found himself influenced by stimuli coming from different contexts. His ideas on sexuality, which are the main topic of my work, were therefore developed in a complex context – the Viennese/Austro-Hungarian intellectual inheritance, and Italian Fascism, both in turn reflecting, as I have shown above, a very varied history and a large spectrum of scientific, intellectual, cultural, religious and social positions. All of these need to be taken into account to understand the milieu in which Saba wrote about same-sex activities and desire in *Ernesto.* The climate in which Saba started writing *Ernesto,* in 1953, was dangerous for discussions about same-sex desire, and the threat of censorship and trial was a reality.

[153] *Ulisse, number 18, 1953,* quoted in Petrosino, 326.

CHAPTER 6

Literary Review on Saba's *Ernesto*

6.1 Introduction

Umberto Saba started to write *Ernesto* in 1953 while he was trying to cure his psychological anxieties in a clinic in Rome. He compared the act of writing the novel to giving birth, thus making a remark at the same time about a natural process but also an avoidable one. After completing the first four episodes, Saba started writing a fifth which remained incomplete.

The plot is simple: Ernesto is a sixteen year old boy who lives with his Jewish mother, Signora Celestina, in Trieste, where he dreams about writing and playing the violin and instead works as a commercial trainee in a flour business, which imports flour from Hungary. His father has abandoned his family before Ernesto's birth and the only male figure in his life is his uncle. The first and second episodes narrate Ernesto's encounter and consequent sexual relationship with a twenty-eight year old "bracciante avventizio" (day-labourer) who is only mentioned as *l'uomo*, (the man). The relationship ends because of Ernesto's tiredness, after Ernesto, in the "Terzo Episodio" episode, goes to the barber who furtively – and symbolically – shaves him for the first time. This phase of maturation is also marked by Ernesto's heterosexual initiation with a prostitute and leads to the central part of the novel, the "Quarto Episodio", in which, in order not to see the 'man' any longer, Ernesto writes an impertinent letter to his boss, Mr Wilder, thus succeeding in his attempt. His mother's reaction and her enquiries compel Ernesto to confess the real reason for desiring to leave his job. "Quasi una conclusione" is a section when the narrator explains his impossibility to continue the story due to the author's tiredness and old age. Nevertheless, there is a further episode, "Quinto Episodio", in which Ernesto meets, at a violin concert, a boy called Ilio, a good violin student to whom Ernesto feels attracted. *Ernesto* ends after a first conversation between the two boys and an arrangement of a future meeting.

The novel remained unfinished for reasons that Saba attributed to his tiredness and neurosis, however he saw the publication of the novel as impossible, because of the language used "La non pubblicabilità del racconto

non sta tanto nei fatti narrati quanto nel linguaggio che parlano i personaggi" (the non-publishability of the story is not in the plot but in the language the characters speak).[1]

The issue of language was therefore pivotal for Saba but what he precisely meant with *linguaggio* (language) is open to different interpretations. The novel is written with a combination of Italian used by the narrator and an Italianized version of Trieste's dialect used by the characters. The novel was finally published posthumously in 1975 thanks to Saba's daughter, Linuccia. Many of Saba's closest friends and family members had already read the manuscript, and its publication in the year of Pasolini's death cast a new light on the issue of same-sex desire in Italian literature. It also raised for the critics a number of questions regarding the relationship between this novel and Saba's previous writings, especially because his fortune was mainly related to his activity as a poet and the publication of the different versions of *Il Canzoniere*[2] rather than to prose.

Before giving my reading of the novel in chapter seven, I will focus here on existing critical interpretations, trying to follow their evolution over the years when possible. In the case of Forster, there is a wide range of essays that are rooted in gay studies and queer theory, whereas in the criticism on Saba, the lack of gay studies and the almost complete absence of queer theory in the Italian context denote a largely negative attitude towards same-sex desire and its representation in literature.

Like Forster, Saba is a well-known author, a poet, whose poetry is described as unconventional and odd. Like Forster, Saba decides not to publish his novel in his lifetime, but, unlike *Maurice*, *Ernesto* remained incomplete and this aspect has been analysed by criticism. Despite the simplification that this will entail, I want to try to identify first the main trends in the criticism on *Ernesto* since its publication, and then examine the details of what I regard as the most important and influential readings.

---

[1] Saba, Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953 in Umberto Saba, *La spada d'amore: lettere scelte 1902-1957,* ed. Aldo Marcovecchio, Milano: Mondadori, 1983, 250.
[2] Saba, *Tutte le poesie*.
.

The first publications on *Ernesto* in the late 1970s and early 1980s are articles and essays included in monographs on Saba. They all read the new publication as an appendix to *Il Canzoniere*, a sort of final chapter to Saba's canon. Most of these publications made explicit Saba's debt to psychoanalysis and Freud in *Ernesto*. The majority of essays published in the 1980s follow the same interpretation using *Ernesto* to explain Saba's peculiarity as a poet and the biographical presence in both his novel and poetry. *Ernesto* remains a minor work in the eyes of critics, as is shown by the volume that gathers the papers given at an important conference on Saba in 1984, which does not include anything on *Ernesto* and mainly focuses on his poetry.[3] The only exception is Francesco Gnerre's essay on the "homosexual" character in Italian literature, published in 1981, which, in line with the Anglo-Saxon gay studies, focuses primarily on the issue of same-sex desire in *Ernesto*.[4]

After a long gap in the critical publications on Saba in the 1990s, in 1998 Gregory Woods recognizes a pattern of boys and boyhood in the Italian tradition of narrating same-sex desire. In his view, in *Ernesto* Saba "merely renders in more or less explicit prose some of the erotic themes which he had already dealt with more subtly in his poetry".[5] Woods is the first critic in an Anglo-Saxon context to include Saba in a history of gay literature, nevertheless, in what seems to echo the Italian evolution of criticism on *Ernesto*, he links the novel to Saba's poetry. Woods recognizes a leitmotiv in the non-publication of most of the Italian novels dealing with same-sex desire.

In the first half of the 2000s, the trend established by Gnerre's work and confirmed, in the Anglo-Saxon critical context by Woods, was reiterated by Gnerre's second edition of his book.[6] Gnerre traces a common pattern in the Italian production in the representation of the "homosexual" character in authors such as Aldo Palazzeschi, Giovanni Commisso, Mario Soldati, Pier Vittorio

---

[3] *Atti del Convegno Internazionale 1984. Il Punto su Saba, Trieste, 25-27 marzo 1984*, Trieste: LINT, 1985.

[4] Francesco Gnerre, *L'Eroe Negato. Il personaggio omosessuale nella narrativa italiana contemporanea,* Milano: Gammalibri, 1981.

[5] Woods, *History of Gay Literature*, 321.

[6] Francesco Gnerre, *L'eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano,* Milano: Baldini e Castoldi:, 2000. As admitted by the author himself, the second edition is a completely different book, which focuses not only on the analysis of the homosexual characters but also on the characters whose characteristics allude to homosexuality or, in other words, the device of the mask used by authors in the representation of same-sex desire.

Tondelli, as well as Saba. The influence of the Anglo-Saxon gay studies approach is evident in the emphasis on the homosexual identity presented in the characters. Gnerre also reiterates how the majority of the Italian authors whose works dealt with same-sex desire chose not to publish their works, endorsing an operation of self-censorship. Italian criticism does not include gay studies as a discipline, therefore there are only sporadic publications following this approach generally confined to personal interests.

The same hesitation applies to queer theory, as I have already mentioned, and queer theory is a theoretical approach only in a few limited publications. *Queer Italia*,[7] published in 2004, includes an essay on the film adaptation of *Ernesto*. The most recent publications of the late 2000s are extensive essays on Saba in which *Ernesto* is analysed as one of the most important keys to the understanding of all of Saba's production. The focus is mainly on the biographical aspect in Saba's works and the Freudian and psychoanalytical approach remains the dominant one.

I will now briefly present the more significant publications in more detail to show how *Ernesto* has been read and how, in most cases, the approach is similar.

6.2 *Ernesto* as the final chapter of *Il Canzoniere*: essays 1970s-1980s

In 1976, Sergio Campailla published an essay on *Ernesto* in which he analysed the relationship between Saba's and Ernesto's biographies revealing both similarities and differences. In his view, Saba creates a character that is very much like him presenting some elements of his life – the absence of a father, oppressive maternal figures – and filling the gaps and incongruities of his biography. Saba presents Ernesto as a lighter version of himself and a character who experiences something Saba felt he had missed in his adolescence, namely Eros.

A considerable section of Campailla's essay focuses on the Freudian model and the lack of the paternal figure which shapes Ernesto's life: "La storia di Ernesto […] acquista significato nella ricerca di una figura paterna" (the story

[7] Cestaro, *Queer Italia*.

of Ernesto acquires meaning in the search for a paternal figure).[8] Campailla reads the affair between Ernesto and the "bracciante" (day-labourer) as a search for replacing the gap left by the absent father, after the uncle turns out to be an unfruitful substitute. In his view, the man asks Ernesto questions about his family, and only when he finds out he does not have a father, does he trick him in order to sodomize him. Campailla's reading fails to recognize the possibilities of sexual desire in the novel that, as I will argue in my reading, are one of the fundamental points of the book. When it comes to the incompleteness of the novel, Campailla maintains that Saba, following the Freudian example, locates the time to solve the psychological problems in childhood, hence the lack of interest and the impossibility of dealing with the characterization of an older Ernesto. Ernesto heals, as it were, the illness of Berto, the young Saba, and after this moment Saba's writing, as Campailla sees it, loses its focus and stops.

Psychoanalysis is also the key to understanding the potential scandal of *Ernesto* as perceived by Saba in case of publication. The eponymous character, according to Campailla, belongs to a new world: the world after psychoanalysis, which Saba understands as a revolution, a world of liberation of social relationships and also of new explorations. The very emphasis on sexuality is read by Campailla in the light of this new world where human beings would be able to be liberated from old taboos, and woes will be replaced by joy, which is the aim of psychoanalysis as understood by Saba.[9] Ernesto is part of this liberated world; an anticipatory character of a future world he can, therefore, pronounce words that others could not. Hence the use of dialect and the explicit language used by Ernesto. Joy is, in Campailla's reading, the essence of Saba's research in life and *Ernesto* is its ultimate contribution.

The Freudian reading and the influence of psychoanalysis is analysed and questioned by Mario Lavagetto in 1978.[10] In this collection of essays on Saba, Lavagetto dedicates a short but significant section to *Ernesto* in which he reads the novel in connection with *Il Canzoniere* and warns against the simple Freudian model. For Lavagetto, Ernesto is a development of Berto, the

[8] Campailla, "Il testamento", 234.
[9] Campailla, "Il testamento", 252.
[10] Lavagetto, "Conferme da Ernesto", in Lavagetto, *La Gallina*.

character of *Il Canzoniere*, whose traits have a strong autobiographical component. It is in Saba's biographical material (letters, diaries) that Lavagetto finds the evidence to support his argument: *Ernesto* and *Il Canzoniere* were competitors in Saba's mind. As Lavagetto explicitly claims in the title of the first section, *Ernesto* is "l'ultimo tentativo compiuto da Saba per scrivere, o riscrivere, il primo capitolo del *Canzoniere*" (Saba's last attempt to write, or re-write, the first chapter of *Il Canzoniere*).[11] Lavagetto then analyses the implications of this action in Saba's writing, and in his life, and suggests that the poems of *Il Canzoniere* are meant to be read in parallel with the episodes lived by Ernesto. In this light, *Poesie dell'adolescenza* (1900-1903) can be considered Ernesto's poems as his adolescence coincides with those years in the novel. *Ernesto* is meant to give coherence to Saba's plan of writing Berto's life, whose resemblances with Saba's life are repeatedly underlined by Lavagetto. The impossibility of finishing the novel lies exactly in the difficulties Saba experiences in keeping Ernesto outside *Il Canzoniere*, in order to avoid a possible obscuration of a lifelong work. The reasons for incompleteness are, therefore, internal to the text rather than only caused by Saba's tiredness and age.

According to Lavagetto, taboo and scandal, which were subtly present in *Il* Canzoniere, are overtly expressed in the sexual relationship between Ernesto and the man in the novel. Ernesto's explicit words before the sexual affair with the man are the breaking of all taboos and this is why, in Lavagetto's reading, Saba abandons the screen of dialect. This is how Saba presents the "parabola della propria anomalia poetica, della sua irriducibilità alla norma" (the parable of his own poetic anomaly, his impossibility to conform to the norm).[12] At the same time this frankness allows Saba to highlight how nature is the place for truth. *Ernesto* is a glossary and a key that Saba gives the reader to understand *Il Canzoniere*, to fill the gaps and the incongruities left open there, a sort of confession. This link allows Lavagetto to move onto the analysis of the reader of both works, which he sees as constructed in the same way by Saba. Relying on Foucault, Lavagetto analyses the dynamics of confession as a desire for absolution that are present in the novel and in Saba's life. Firstly Saba presents

[11] Lavagetto, "Conferme da Ernesto, 201.
[12] Lavagetto, "Conferme da Ernesto, 204.

it in the episode when Ernesto confesses his sexual acts with the man to his mother; secondly the confession reappears in the desire, expressed in a letter, of reading from the unpublished novel during the ceremony of his degree *honoris causa* at the University of Rome. [13] Ernesto needs to talk in order to find absolution and Saba, Lavagetto suggests, seems to want free the audience (and the reader) through the act of confession, which gives liberation. Lavagetto's study remains one of the most complete and interesting because it analyses the aporias in the texts and the close connection between *Ernesto, Il Canzoniere* and Saba's biography.

The importance of biography to understand *Ernesto* is reiterated in 1982 by Elvira Favretti.[14] She claims that because the events in the novel emerge from Saba's autobiography it is difficult for him Saba to contain them in the structure of the novel. She finds evidence for this interpretation in Saba's letters, especially one to Linuccia, Saba's daughter, where the author promises to show her Ilio's house. Moreover, she identifies autobiography as the source and guarantee for authenticity as a common element in other writers from Trieste, such as Italo Svevo, Scipio Slataper, and Giani Stuparich.[15]According to her, *Ernesto* is the work through which Saba narrates the part of his life he had not told before in the *Canzoniere.* The impossibility of presenting same-sex desire in the years of *Il Canzoniere* is explained by Favretti through the ghost of racial impurity persecuted by Fascism. *Ernesto* is therefore Saba's confession and this is why he left the novel incomplete: it could not confess during his life. Autobiography and incompleteness are, in this reading, the same thing, and incompleteness is to be seen as a choice – therefore the novel should perhaps not be seen as incomplete at all.

The rest of Favretti's essay focuses on the use of language and Saba's declaration about the impossibility of publishing the novel for language issues. The use of dialect is reflected in Saba's intention to be as faithful as possible to the language an adolescent such as Ernesto would use in real life. Dialect becomes a vehicle of truth although, paradoxically, the actual Trieste dialect he

[13] See chapter 8.
[14] Elvira Favretti, *La Prosa di Umberto Saba. Dai racconti giovanili a Ernesto*, Roma: Bonacci, 1982.
[15] According to Favretti, all these authors from Trieste shared a belief that the use of autobiography, either directly or transposed into a character, was a guarantee of authenticity.

uses is a fake one, as it does keep the social class nuances, but it is a neutral language. The dialect spoken by the *bracciante* and the one spoken by the prostitute Tanda, when Ernesto has his first heterosexual initiation, are deprived of any typical expression that we would expect from working-class people, especially in the literary context of the 1950s when Naturalist and Neorealist experimentation with the dialect dictated a strict adherence to the real dialect[16]. Favretti contradicts Saba's explanation about the scandalous effect of the language of *Ernesto* arguing that, that as a typical neurotic, Saba is unable to judge his own writing; in fact, she claims, the language is not scandalous at all, rather it is a screen used to soften reality. Her argument is that the dialect has to be understood as a return to the origins for the poetic rhythm of the dialogues where the dialect is especially used. The alternation of dialect and Italian is, in Favretti's view, coherent and not scandalous as claimed by Saba. The dialect is, in both Lavagetto's and Favretti's view, a screen.

Two years later, in 1984, Giorgio Baroni dedicated a section to "Saba minore" (minor Saba) in an essay on writers from Trieste.[17] For Baroni too *Ernesto* is a useful key to understand Saba's previous production and his poetry. Following on from Lavagetto, he starts by noticing how Saba has been perceived as the poet who narrates love and friendship, and how his trajectory towards a search for affection has not been conventional in any way. Baroni analyses how sincerity and respecting truth are essential parts of Saba's character and production, and how they pervade the texture of *Ernesto* as well. Sincerity and truth that critics have mistaken for naivety, is nothing but the old Saba who considers "con occhio benevolo ogni sorta di perversione" (benevolently considers any sort of perversion).[18] In fact, in his affair with the *bracciante* – which Baroni refuses to consider love – Ernesto shows signs of guilt and awareness of perversion; Ernesto's ingenuity is only pretend, his affair is a juvenile perversion. Baroni's reading focuses on guilt, perversion and normality, underlining that Saba perhaps does not really believe in the fact that such an experience was not amoral.

---

[16] Favretti mainly refers to the example of Pier Paolo Pasolini's novels *Ragazzi di vita* (1956) and *Una vita violenta* (1959) where the author, following a Neorealist urge to be faithful to real life, reports the dialect spoken by people.

[17] Giorgio Baroni, *Umberto Saba e dintorni. Appunti per una storia della letteratura giuliana,* Milano: Istituto Propaganda Libraria, 1984.

[18] Baroni, *Umberto Saba,* 84.

In the second part of his short essay, Baroni, like Campailla, analyses Ernesto's "homosexuality" – which he claims to be temporary – through the Freudian model and claims that it is a result of an absent father and an over-present mother. Baroni argues that the Freudian model can already be found in Saba's poetry, especially in *Autobiografia*,[19] which already includes all the themes and the plot of *Ernesto,* except for the same-sex intercourse. Baroni's reading of same-sex desire only as an additional theme fails to acknowledge the structural role same-sex desire plays in the novel. Since Saba is able to describe "profane love scenes" in his poetry throughout *Il Canzoniere,* Baroni is skeptical of a reading of *Ernesto* as a liberating novel for Saba's life.

As well as "homosexuality" and biography, the other important theme of the book is, in Baroni's view, socialism, that led many critics, including Elsa Morante in the first edition of the book, to identify in the novel, a liberating force. According to Baroni, in *Ernesto*, Saba presents an association between what is unnatural and bourgeoisie, while attributing a positive connotation to what is pure as coming from socialism. This is shown in the negative attitude towards the middle-class characters especially Mr Wilder, the embodiment of the exploitation of workers, and in the Marxist logic in the narration of the relationship between Ernesto and the man in which the latter wants to sexually exploit Ernesto by purchasing gifts and "pastries".

Maria Antonietta Grignani, who edited a new edition of the novel for the publisher Einaudi in 1995,[20] analyses Saba's alibis for not publishing the novel beginning with the language issue. According to her, Saba could not refer to the presence of dialect because in the same years other publications, like Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Ragazzi di Vita* (1956) were written in dialect without provoking any scandals. Dialect in 1953, she argues, was not scandalous and therefore Saba must have meant something else with *linguaggio*: "un colore, una tonalità" (a colour, a tone).[21] Her argument is that Saba thought it could have been difficult for readers to accept the proximity of the two languages used: dialect and Italian. The scandal Saba feared in case of publication lies in the relationship between the two registers: the frank tone and the dialect used by

[19] Saba, *Autobiografia,* in Saba, *Tutte le poesie,* 253-269.
[20] Maria Antonietta Grigrani, "Introduzione", in U. Saba, *Ernesto*, Torino: Einaudi, 1995, v-xxiv.
[21] Grigrani, "Introduzione vii.

Ernesto to narrate his sexual experience, and the Italian used by the narrator to comment and explain language, and the reasons behind Ernesto's actions without moral demonization. The dialect used by Ernesto and the other characters had to be frank and pure, as close as possible to the nature of things, whereas it was the Italian used by the narrator that separated the two registers.[22] This gap between the two languages, but at the same time the intimacy between them, was what Saba considered scandalous.

In 2000 Francesco Gnerre dedicates a chapter on *Ernesto* in the second edition of his essay on homosexuality and literature in Italy in the twentieth century.[23] His approach, as I have already mentioned, is influenced by gay studies and it is one of the first – and rare – examples of the use of such a critical approach in the Italian context. After tracing the elements of same-sex desire in the characters present in the poems of *Il Canzoniere*, Gnerre reads "homosexuality" not only as a theme but also as a range of references – linguistic, thematic and stylistic. In other words, Gnerre argues that all the allusions to same-sex desire in *Il Canzoniere* become explicit in *Ernesto*. Gnerre's project is to reveal a masked tradition of writing about homosexuality, therefore his attention is directed towards the issue of non-publication and of what the novel means to Saba. The liberated and liberating spirit Ernesto shows in the relationship with the *bracciante* directly derives from Saba's projection, and therefore the novel itself has a liberating effect on Saba's life. This theory is corroborated by Ernesto's attitude towards same-sex sexual acts as free from guilt and social pressure, whereas all the other characters see them as corrupted by sin and a sense of prohibition. As an example, Gnerre analyses the character of the day-labourer who lives his homosexuality as a condition of diversity with anguish and fear because of society. He is an excluded character and disappears from the novel and Ernesto's life while Saba focuses again on the "innocent" Ernesto. Gnerre argues that the presence of homosexuality in the novel is what prevents Saba from publishing it. In the same light, the use of dialect in the dialogue between Ernesto and the man is, as noted by Alberto Moravia, then Armando Balduino, a reminiscence of censorship. Unlike

[22] See Grignani for a detailed account on the variations Saba carried out before the final version.
[23] Francesco Gnerre, "Umberto Saba. Incauti amori e amicizie amorose", in Gnerre, *L'eroe negato*, 43-60.

Lavagetto, who believes that the reasons for the non-publication are structural, Gnerre argues that Saba's intention to continue the novel with the love of Ernesto and Ilio for the same woman is an attempt of "normalizzazione" (normalization) to transform the initiation into a "normal life".[24] An attempt which, according to Gnerre, fails because in this story of initiation, the author suggests that Ernesto becomes a homosexual for good. Gnerre is so concerned with the issue of identity that he wants to confine Ernesto to a fixed category; therefore he claims that in the book as we read it (beyond Saba's intentions) Ernesto can be perceived as a homosexual character.

In 2002, confirming the growing interest in sexuality in Italian criticism, Claudio Gargano published a book that is an overview of the representation of homosexuality in Italian twentieth-century fiction.[25] The chapters are organized by themes rather than chronologically, and Saba is included with Aldo Palazzeschi in a section dedicated to the Oedipus complex. Gargano starts by quoting Lavagetto's interpretation of Saba's works as "un complesso edipico al negativo" (negative Oedipus complex) in which the figure of the father is eliminated so that it is not an obstacle to the incest and the son repudiates the over-present mother. Gargano establishes a connection between Leonardo's figure in Freud and Saba as both, in the absence of the father, give their love to their mothers up to the point that they identify with her. Hence they both become homosexual, then slip into autoeroticism and therefore into the Narcissus complex, the Double. To support his argument Gargano notices that *Ernesto* is born, by Saba's own admission, under the Mother and the Double. Gargano's understanding of the non-publication is through the close relationship between Ernesto and Saba. Since Ernesto is Saba's alter ego deprived of any inhibitions (as noted by Pedullà) the publication of the book would have presented a naked Saba and the author was not ready for that in his lifetime.[26]

Ernesto's primitive attitude is expressed in his intercourse with the man and his naming the sexual act explicitly, as well as in his rebellion towards his mother. Gargano insists on the fact that throughout the episodes of the novel,

---

[24] Gnerre, "Umberto Saba", 56-57.
[25] Claudio Gargano, "Umberto Saba, Aldo Palazzeschi o del Complesso di Edipo" in Gargano, *Ernesto e gli altri. L'omosessualità nella narrativa italiana del Novecento, Roma:* Editori Riuniti, 2002, 31-44.
[26] Walter Pedullà, *Lo schiaffo di Svevo: giochi, fantasie, figure del Novecento italiano,* Milano: Camunia, 1990.

the resistance to the mother remains a fixed feature: in the first episode Ernesto empowers his resistance by being a socialist, causing despair in his mother for opposition to her brother. The hostility is reiterated in the episode when Ernesto is ill and the *bracciante* is sent by Mr Wilder to his house and Ernesto is rude to his mother.

In Gargano's reading the third episode, when Ernesto has his first sexual experience with the prostitute Tanda, after shaving for the first time, is the climax of such rebellion because Tanda replaces the mother in a sort of incest. In the last episode, Gargano sees the celebration of the final victory of Oedipus over Jocasta. Ilio represents Ernesto's double and Ernesto meets him after he has liberated himself from the mother after the confession. In Gargano's reading, Ernesto liberates himself from the family burden and then he is able to see his double and start a new life. The strong impact of the Freudian structure is evident in this reading and it is what differentiates this study from Gnerre's.

In 2004, William Van Watson writes an essay on the cinematographic adaptation of *Ernesto*[27] directed by Salvatore Samperi in 1979. Before focusing on the film, Van Watson presents a short analysis on the novel and its scandalous material. In his reading, the scene at the barber, when Ernesto is shaved for the first time against his will, is linked to the Greek *paederastia*. Adolescent boys could only have sexual anal intercourse with males up until the moment they started growing their beards; therefore Ernesto's attempt to escape his first shaving is an attempt to reject this dynamic. Here lies the scandal of *Ernesto*: in the way the novel discards fixed sexual roles between Ernesto and the *bracciante*. The *bracciante*'s conception of a same-sex relationship is based on a Roman model, which justifies the affair only on the difference of age. On a personal level, Van Watson insists, Saba goes through "martyrdom to heterocentricity"[28] hence his neurosis and the therapeutic relief of *Ernesto*.

[27] William Van Watson, "Adapting to Heterocentricity: The Film Versions of Umberto Saba's *Ernesto* and Giorgio Bassani's *The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles*" in Cestaro ed., *Queer Italia*, 153-171.
[28] Van Watson, "Adapting to Heterocentricity", 154.

In the same publication, Sergio Parussa presents an analysis of the homoerotic novel in the twentieth century.[29] He argues the homoerotic presence in the texts in those years concerns the act of writing and also changes the "boundaries between literary genres"[30], therefore he proposes to identify a sort of separate genre for these kinds of novels. The substantial presence of unfinished texts in the Italian panorama is not only a sign of an effect of self-censorship, but it is mostly due to the fact that writers did not know how to include homoeroticism in the novel as a genre. More often than not, Parussa notices, the characters are more types rather than complex personalities, but they tend to have only an erotic function. This is corroborated by the fact that they often do not have first names but are designated by a category or addresses with nicknames. Although Parussa mainly focuses on the detailed study of Pasolini and only mentions *Ernesto* in the introduction, nevertheless his analysis includes Saba's novel as well especially in the characterization of Ernesto and the issue of non-publication.

In 2007, Alessandro Cinquegrani published a book, which analysed all of Saba's works.[31] He argues that Nietzsche and his theorization of the Apollonian and the Dionysian influenced *Ernesto*, a book in which the adolescence of the character is created on a model that reveals Saba's plan to evoke Weininger, Nietzsche and Freud. Cinquegrani considers the structure of this plan a version on a smaller scale of what Saba presented in *Canzoniere*. Saba's work, in his view, is a perpetual writing of some of the dichotomies that characterized his life: between being a poet and an employee, and the double nature of Trieste, located between Italy and the Austrian Empire.

In *Ernesto*, structural and thematic problems arose as Saba attempted to narrate an entire life echoing reality and therefore interruptions and gaps that compromised the integrity of the characters. The incompleteness, Cinquegrani argues, of the novel is not only the absence of the word "the end", but also the possibility of infinite additions to the episodes. "Si tratta, cioé, di un testo

[29] Sergio Parussa, "Reluctantly Queer. In Search of the Homoerotic Novel in the Twentieth-Century Italian Fiction" in Cestaro ed., *Queer Italia*, 173-186.
[30] Parussa, "Reluctantly Queer", 174.
[31] Alessandro Cinquegrani, *Solitudine di Umberto Saba. Da Ernesto al Canzoniere,* Venezia: Marsilio, 2007.

magmatico" (it is a magmatic text).[32] Everything is constructed around a subject's search for an identity, whether it is the protagonist, the narrator or a character. In the analysis of Ernesto, Cinquegrani focuses on the transition between homosexuality and heterosexuality as the turning point and the consolidation of his identity, and on Saba's source, namely Weininger. Cinquegrani is the first to speak and analyse the possible bisexuality in Ernesto as based in Weininger. Characteristic of bisexual people, in this view, is that at first they can have sex with both sexes before choosing one, therefore implying a necessity of sexual experiences in order to understand sexuality. In *paederastia*, according to Weininger, the young boy is conceived as a woman in the sexual act and Ernesto's affair with the *bracciante* can only last until Ernesto goes with a woman and reaches puberty. The *bracciante* has made his choice (active homosexuality), whereas Ernesto is portrayed in his process of transition before becoming heterosexual. In this reading, bisexuality is perceived as a transitory identity.

Freud is, nevertheless, the final and most important influence on Saba's perception of sexuality in his replacement of the dichotomy of masculine-feminine with active-passive. In this light, Cinquegrani reads Ernesto's passage from being passive with the man, to an active role with the prostitute as a determination of his sexual identify. The natural passive disposition and masochism that temporarily interests Ernesto in episode one with the man (and that Saba resists), claims Cinquegrani, are linked through Freud to castration, and in the Jewish tradition, circumcision is linked to castration. Cinquegrani establishes a connection between Saba's fear of circumcision – the main cause of his neurosis – to Ernesto's. The presence of guilt in Hebraism is what, in his view, differentiates it from Greek culture. This guilt requires a punishment (in order to be expiated) and that is circumcision.

I find this essentializing reading of "Hebraism" as a single, homogenous cultural phenomenon, and the reductive focus on circumcision and guilt offered by Cinquegrani, quite problematic. Ernesto aspires, in this reading, to reach an atmosphere evocative of ancient Greece that he finds in Ilio, who represents classicism. Ilio is the boy Ernesto wants to be rather than the one he wants to

[32] Cinquegrani, *Solitudine*, 31.

have. The following process towards identity requires abandoning objects and family and referring only to the absolute "I", in Weininger's analysis. So Ernesto has to get rid of his mother to try to define an identity, autonomy, solitude, without external pressure. Ernesto finds himself facing different choices: firstly, he has to choose between men or women, and secondly, he is called to choose between motherly love and carnal love with Tanda; finally he has to choose between Hebraism and Christianity. All these decisions participate in forming his identity and his position in the world. Once this is done, argues Cinquegrani, Saba's next step is to investigate his psyche in the "Quinto Episodio". After claiming that Ilio is a projection of Ernesto, Cinquegrani analyses how this character directly derives from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). The dimension of the dream to which Ernesto refers when he meets Ilio is linked by Cinquegrani to the Apollonian, the beautiful aura that covers the truth; but the reference to Ilio's animal instinct and his intercourse with a goat reveals the Dionysian as well, and Ilio stands for the reconciliation of the two.

In the last section of his book, Cinquegrani goes back to the issue of solitude and argues that, in Saba's conception, loneliness as departure from family and society is the conquest of man, the ultimate possibility for identity. This process is presented by Saba in both *Il Canzoniere* and *Ernesto*; thus there is no thematic difference between the two works. They both narrate the experience of a character, his relationship with his mother and the gradual liberation from her in order to achieve individuality.

The last essay I want to discuss is Marina Paino's study of lightness in Saba, published in 2009.[33] In the section dedicated to *Ernesto,* Paino insists on the symbolism of lightness and heaviness and she reads all the characters as taking one or the other position. In the same way, a major differentiation is proposed by Paino between the heaviness of the mothers and the lightness of the fathers. According to her, the lightness in Nietzschean terms – understood as an attempt to reach happiness – that characterizes both the novel and the protagonist is in contrast to the heaviness – as a predisposition to grief – of Saba's illness. *Ernesto* is Saba's confession of his own youth in Trieste but is also, Paino claims, part of a re-discovery of old Jewish tales. For Paino, this is

[33] Marina Paino, *La Tentazione della Leggerezza. Studio su Umberto Saba*, Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2009

an attempt to abandon the heaviness of the mother and her world and to rediscover the paternal voice. The novel is characterized by a symbolism of heaviness made of punishments, rules and prescriptions, and Ernesto's continuous attempts to escape from heaviness through transgressing the mainstream prescription imposed by the mother.

Like Cinquegrani's, her reading is deeply Freudian and she analyses Ernesto's growth and his lightness as a path towards the conquest of an identity. All the main episodes are read by Paino in this light until, in the characterization of the violin player at the concert as an "irredentista boemo" (bohemian irredentist)[34] like Ernesto's father, Ernesto finds a new dimension of his life: the signs of the rediscovery of his father and therefore lightness. The search for the father is a desire to escape the Oedipus complex characterized by the heaviness of the mother's prescriptions. The reason why the novel remains incomplete, in Paino's reading, is the threat of re-proposing a new Oedipal prison in the evolution of the fifth episode as sketched by Saba in his letters. Saba kills Ilio, and his death is at the same time a liberation from the Oedipus structure and the recreation of it, thus posing a difficulty for the development of the plot. Both Ernesto and Ilio belong, continues Paino, to the world of fantasy and dream typical of childhood in Saba's attempt to search for fantasy as the salvation force of a revolution that arrives "su ali di colomba" (on doves' wings). Paino underlines the overlapping of the fictional Ernesto and Saba's biography and, relying once again on Freud, she explains it as a process in which Saba becomes a projection of the young Ernesto, a sort of lighter and younger Ernesto. Paino shifts the attention from text analysis to biography running the risk of undermining the differences of the two critical approaches.

Both Cinquegrani and Paino mention the relationship between Ernesto the character and Saba, and especially how Ernesto enters Saba's life in the letters, but neither analyses this issue and its implications at length, which will be part of my analysis of *Ernesto*.

.

[34] Paino, *Tentazione*, 309.

6.3 Conclusion

The first criticism on *Ernesto* after its publication in 1975 focuses on the close relationship between the novel and Saba's previous publication, especially *Il Canzoniere*. They also introduce the analysis of the interconnections between Saba's biography and his works, especially using Freud to explain some of the dynamics. The climax of this evolution is already present as early as 1978 by Lavagetto who uses the analysis of *Ernesto* in relation to *Il Canzoniere* to explain the decision of non-publication by Saba, and the structural problems the author faces when the boundaries between biography and the two works become blurred. Lavagetto's study is a milestone as it is the first to give enough space to biographical issues and all subsequent criticism is indebted to this work. As part of my reading is focused on the analysis of the intersections between *Ernesto* and Saba's life I will follow Lavagetto's lesson in my investigation.

The studies published in the 1980s are examples of reassessing Saba's life and include him in a wider frame of Italian writers or writers from Trieste. I will look at how Trieste and how its peculiar geographical and cultural position impacts on Saba's writing, but I am mainly interested in tracing the cultural debates around sexuality rather than establishing his position in a canon. When it comes to the issue of censorship, as mentioned by Favretti, Fascism and its *diktat* on masculinity and maleness is worth investigating.

After an absence of publications in the 1990s in Italy, the first part of the 2000s sees two literary histories of 'homosexuality' in Italian fiction, which systematically investigate the peculiarity of the Italian representation of sexuality. The two publications by Gnerre and Gargano share the same intention of placing same-sex desire as a theme into context in Italian literature in the twentieth century, and, at the same time, they compel the reader to question the universality of same-sex desire. They are both influenced by gay studies in underlining the importance of identity in the characters that live same-sex relationships. In my reading, I am closer to the queer theory approach in refusing to read all sexualities as fixed identities, and I try to see instead the resistance to heteronormativity and how this dynamic is articulated around same-sex desire. For this reason my analysis is indebted to the only two queer readings of *Ernesto* included in *Queer Italia*.

The two last publications on *Ernesto,* by Cinquegrani and Paino, place the novel within a network of Saba's works and highlight the debt to Nietzsche and Freud. The Freudian and psychoanalytic approach remains, in Saba's studies, the most used and, although I do not deny such an influence, I will not rely on this approach in my analysis because I find it more fruitful to investigate the relation between sexual acts and roles, as I will explain in chapter eight.

CHAPTER 7

Ernesto and the possibilities of queer desire

7.1 Introduction

Ernesto was written in 1953, and left unfinished and published in 1975, almost twenty years after Saba's death in 1957. The explicit sexual activities that the eponymous character engages in with the day-labourer have been categorized as homosexuality or bisexuality by different critics in an attempt to read the nature of these acts through identity categories.[1]

Ernesto is presented while going through adolescence, however, in my reading the sexual acts he experiences with the man and the second encounter with Ilio do not define him in terms of sexual identity. Little has been said about the non-identitarian nature of such desire and acts, and I hope to argue that there is a specific queer aspect to them that resists identity categories and would in fact benefit from an analysis of how desire is presented in the characters. If in the case of *Maurice*, Forster makes a political statement about homosexuality and homosexual rights in society, Saba's writing does not assert an identity.

I investigate sex acts, their nature and how they challenge the normalizing mechanism of sexual intercourse both between men and women and between men. I am aware that embarking on such an operation might seem to embrace the understanding of queerness as being defined in opposition to the heteronormative and patriarchal matrix, nevertheless this risk must be taken if, as I intend, we seek to highlight the productive force of such desire and acts and how Saba challenges the status quo. This will also allow us to understand the reasons behind the difficulties Saba experienced in finishing the novel.[2]

I mentioned in chapter 1.2 Freccero's suggestion that in the investigation of subjectivity we should combine psychoanalytic tools with social studies. This seems to me an especially fruitful perspective, therefore I will rely on this multidisciplinary approach that Freccero calls "postqueer theoretical critical analysis of subjectivity".[3]

---

[1] See Gnerre, *L'eroe egato*.
[2] See chapter 8.
[3] See 1.2 and Freccero, "Queer Times", 23.

7.2 Desiring and acting: beyond identity

Desire is present in the novel in different shapes and forms: in the sexual activities between Ernesto and the man but also in the relationship between Ernesto and Ilio, which is not sexually experienced.

The first episode of the novel focuses on the development of a sexual relationship between Ernesto and the day-labourer whose name is never mentioned. The man has been desiring Ernesto for months at work, however, despite his strong sexual desire, he is troubled because of the potential scenarios of the boy's reactions:

> Gli era accaduto (o gli stava per accadere) quello a cui aspirava da mesi (dalla prima volta che aveva veduto Ernesto) ed era (se così può dirsi) felice. Ma la sua felicità non era senza preoccupazioni: il ragazzo avrebbe potuto pentirsi prima, oppure offendersi dopo, o anche raccontare stupidamente ogni cosa in giro.[4]
>
> (For months (since setting eyes on Ernesto, in fact) he had been hoping for what had just happened (rather, for what promised to happen soon) and he was (if anyone can ever call himself …) happy. But his happiness was not unqualified: might not the boy have second thoughts, or take offence afterwards, or foolishly spill the whole story to a third party?)

The man foresees three possible reactions Ernesto might have: he could regret the sex, feel offended or tell other people about it. In a heteronormative society where social norms present heterosexuality as a natural condition, thus stigmatizing and understanding any other sexuality and sexual act as deviant and immoral, any threat to norms of behaviour such as sexual affairs between two persons of the same sex could ensue in legal action and social stigmatization. The Austro-Hungarian city of Trieste at the end of the 1880s, when the story is set, is regulated by a strong hegemonic discourse on sexualities and any deviation comes with consequences for the lives of the

[4] Umberto Saba, *Ernesto*, Torino: Einaudi, 1975, 11. The translation is taken from Umberto Saba, *Ernesto*, trans. Mark Thompson, London: Paladin, 1989, 17. All references to the novel will be hereafter given in the body of the text.

subjects.[5] The man is well aware of these dangers and he relegates sexual desire to a private and secret domain.

Despite his fears and worries, when on the following day they find themselves alone, the conversation diverts to sexual innuendos (and then explicit suggestions), started by Ernesto:

> "Soli – disse finalmente – soli per un'ora".
> "In un'ora se pol far tante robe" incalzò, pronto, l'uomo.
> "E lei che robe el volessi far?"
> "Nol se ricorda più de quel che gavemo parlà ieri? Che el me gà quasi promesso? Nol sa quel che me piaseria tanto farghe?"
> "Mettermelo in culo" disse, con tranquilla innocenza, Ernesto. (13)

> (Alone, he said at last. Alone for an hour.
> There are lots of things you can do in an hour, the man added readily.
> What things do you mean?
> Don't you remember what we talked about yesterday? What you as good as promised me? Don't you know what I am so longing to do with you?
> You want to put it up my arse, Ernesto said with serene innocence. (19))

The man tamely refers to the previous conversation as "quell", "che", "quel che" ("that"), leaving the promise of sex suspended and unnamed, whereas Ernesto, in an act of verbal bravery, breaks the silence by naming the act of penetration. Ernesto says it serenely as if it were the most natural and acceptable act of speech, provoking shock and a sense of displacement and, once again, a fear of possible consequences. A shadow of heteronormativity is cast on the feelings of the man:

> L'uomo rimase un po' urtato dalla crudezza dell'espressione che, oltre a tutto, lo sorprese in bocca di un ragazzo come Ernesto. Urtato, ed anche impaurito. Pensò che il "mulo" (monello), già pentito della sua mezza accondiscendenza, lo prendesse ora in giro. Peggio ancora: che ne avesse già parlato a terzi o – eventualità temibile su tutte – si fosse confidato a sua madre. (13)

> The man was taken aback to hear this crude phrase from a boy like Ernesto. He was hurt as well – hurt and frightened. He thought the kid, already regretting his half-consent, was mocking him. Worse yet,

[5] Crossreference 5.6.

> he might have told somebody or – worst of all – confessed to his mother. (19)

The roughness of Ernesto's words does not match the idea and image the man has of the type of boys who like him. The expression "un ragazzo come Ernesto" assumes a conduct of proper behaviour expected from someone of Ernesto's social status, a respectability that the man links to social class.[6] Hence his surprise on hearing those words pronounced by one who should be educated and polite.

Ernesto's speech is characterized by a specific style: directness and a natural approach to things. He is free from social inhibitions and is presented as a sort of natural spirit who does not distinguish between things in terms of morality but in terms of authenticity:

> Con quella frase netta e precisa, il ragazzo rivelava, senza saperlo, quello che, molti anni più tardi, dopo molte esperienze e molto dolore, sarebbe diventato il suo "stile": quel giungere al cuore delle cose, al centro arroventato della vita, superando resistenze ed inibizioni, senza perifrasi e giri inutili di parole; si trattasse di cose considerate basse e volgari (magari proibite) o di altre considerate "sublimi", e situandole tutte – come fa la Natura – sullo stesso piano. Ma allora non ci pensava certo. (13-14)
>
> Without being aware of it himself, the boy's clear answer showed what many years later, after much experience and much suffering, would become his own 'style': his reaching to the heart of things, to the red-hot core of life, overcoming dogma and inhibition without evasion or word-spinning, whether he was treating low, coarse subjects (even forbidden ones) or those which people call sublime, putting them all on the same level, as Nature does. But none of this was on his mind at the time. (20)

Saba gives childhood and adolescence a special value in both his poetry and *Ernesto*, as the age where experience, which comes with grief, has not yet caused a distancing from nature.[7] In this paradigm, social consciousness comes with a cost: having to compromise with and adhere to certain social modes that regulate behaviours, at the expense of directness. If the man takes into account the different dangers linked to the sexual intercourse with the boy,

[6] See 5.2.
[7] See Lavagetto, "Introduzione", in Saba, *Tutte le poesie*, and also Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 175 and ff.

Ernesto is more worried about physical pain: “temeva di sentir male. Non aveva, in quel momento, altre preoccupazioni” (13-14) (he was afraid it might hurt. And this, just then, was all that frightened him (20).

The experiences that the twenty eight year-old man has lived lead him to feel the pressure of society, whereas Ernesto is ready to enjoy this experience with no social constraints. His curious nature makes him appreciate the whole experience: he wants to undress the man and touch him, and his only fear is that being penetrated might hurt. He asks the man about his experiences with other boys and then is attracted by his genitals:

> Lo sguardo di Ernesto cadde su una parte della persona dell’uomo visibilmente eccitata.
> “El lo fazi veder” disse.
> “Volentieri” disse l’uomo. E si accingeva ad accontentare sé e il ragazzo, quando questi lo fermò.
> “Ghe lo cavo for a mi – disse. –Posso?”
> “Certo che el pol” (14)
>
> Ernesto’s eyes were drawn to a part of the man’s body which was visibly aroused.
> Let me see it, he said.
> Happily. He was about to satisfy Ernesto’s wish and his own, when the boy stopped him.
> Let me take it out, he said. Can I?
> Of course. (20)

Ernesto wants to take the man’s member out and the dialogue lingers on the anatomical sex even if it is not mentioned; not affection but sexual desire is what is presented in this passage.

> “Grando – disse, tra spaventato e divertito; - el dopio del mio”
> “Perché el sé giovineto. El speti de aver la mia età; alora…”
> Il ragazzo aveva appena allungata la mano, che l’uomo lo fermò.
> “No, no con la man – disse; - se no el me fa vinir”.
> “E no sè quel che el vol?”
> “Sí, ma no in man”
> “Ah!” fece Ernesto. E ritirò pronto la mano, come da una cosa proibita. L’uomo gli si faceva sempre più vicino.
> “Gò paura” disse Ernesto.
> […]
> “Nol lo meti miga tuto?” disse Ernesto. (15)
>
> It’s big, Ernesto said half scared and half amused. Twice as big as mine.

> Because you're still a boy. Wait till you're my age, then …
> The boy put out his hand. The man stopped him.
> No, not with your hand, else you'll make me come.
> Isn't that what you want?
> Yes, but not with your hand.
> Ah! – Ernesto jerked his hand back as if from some forbidden thing. The man was edging nearer.
> I'm scared, Ernesto said.
> […]
> You won't put it all the way in, will you? (21)

The size of the man's penis compared to his own, and the possibility that the man might deeply penetrate him is what worries and, at the same time, fascinates Ernesto. The description and the emphasis on sexual details is what makes language an important component to analyse in *Ernesto*.[8] It is only a moment before the sex that Ernesto briefly and suddenly becomes aware of the significance of the act he is about to share with the man and that a vague sense of perdition arises, only to be promptly replaced by a physical warmth provoked by the man's penis on his body:

> "Sono perduto" pensò tra sé, in un lampo; ma senza nessun rammarico, nessun desiderio di tornare indietro. Poi provò una strana indefinibile sensazione di caldo (non priva, in principio, di dolcezza) come l'uomo trovò e stabilí il contatto. (17)

> All at once he thought *I'm lost*, but there was no regret, no wish to turn back. Then (and not at first without sweet pleasure) he felt a strange, unknown heat as the man found and made contact. (23)

Both Ernesto and the man find pleasure in the first sexual encounter and they come together. However after the sexual act the man sinks into a thoughtful mood, tormented by his doubts over Ernesto's (in)ability to preserve the private space of sexual activities from public exposure. He then decides to speak up and warn Ernesto:

> "Penso che devo dirghe una roba, che me dispiasi de doverghe dir. Forsi dovevo dirghela prima…Nol conterà miga quel che gavemo fato?"

[8] See chapter 8.

> "A chi el vol che ghe conti? No son miga stupido; so benissimo quel che se pol e no se pol dir". (19)
> I'm thinking there's something I must tell you and I don't like having to say it. Maybe I should have said it before … You won't tell anyone what we've done, will you?
> Who d'you think I might tell? I'm not that stupid – I know as well as you what you can say and what you can't. (25)

The discourse is constructed in terms of secrecy and disclosure, public and private space. The man mentions the danger of going to prison, but Ernesto claims to be aware of the division between what can be said and what needs to remain secret. The dichotomy of the private/public space of discourse defines the dynamics of sex acts in society, and the interactions that regulate, through heteronormative impositions, activities as well as acts of speech. While the man feels anguish, Ernesto is feeling physical discomfort: "me brusa" si scusò – come se fosse tutta colpa sua – Ernesto (21) (I'm burning hot, Ernesto said apologetically, as if he was to blame. (27))

Society imposes silence and privacy about sex, especially for non-normative relations. As noted by Sedgwick, since the end of nineteenth century knowledge has become synonymous with sexual knowledge and therefore ignorance became sexual ignorance.[9] In a homophobic society ignorance and secrecy of certain acts need to be preserved at all costs, and the man participates in the process of the policing of desire, so that sex can stay within prescribed boundaries. He has internalized a certain degree of homophobia as he is repulsed by the boys he has sex with as soon as the sexual act is over and only Ernesto is an exception: "Non provava per Ernesto nessuna avversione, quale gli accadeva di provare per gli altri ragazzi, dai quali si allontanava – fuggiva – non appena li aveva posseduti." (22) (he felt none of the revulsion he had always experienced with other boys, whom he left – fled from, indeed – as soon as he had possessed them. (28))

In order to reassure Ernesto, the man promises to bring, for their following meeting, a cocoa butter cone to help the penetration and prevent Ernesto from feeling pain. At this suggestion, Ernesto burst into laughter for the bizarre association of cocoa butter and the anus. In the second episode, the

[9] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 72.

man brings the cocoa butter but the experiment does not have any pleasurable effect on Ernesto and eventually, instead of being penetrated, he asks the man to masturbate him. The reluctant attitude of the man upsets and annoys Ernesto who is getting tired of the nature of the intercourse and the fact that he is always the penetrated person:

> "Son stufo – disse un altro giorno; – una volta volessi far anche mi."
> Era quello che l'uomo prevedeva e temeva. Temeva – come si è detto – le donne; avrebbe preferito che Ernesto si sfogasse con un suo coetaneo: il male, l'offesa gli sarebbe sembrata minore.
> "A chi?" disse.
> "A lei, per esempio". E guardò, ma anche questa volta con poca convinzione, l'uomo.
> L'uomo rise; ma di un riso che ad Ernesto parve cattivo. In realtà era il riso di una persona imbarazzata.
> "No sè bel – disse – far con un omo. Sè robe che se ghe fa solo ai giovineti, prima ancora che ghe cressi la barba, e prima (voleva dire, ma si fermò a tempo), che i vadi de le done. Che gusto la volessi provar con mi che gò, come che el vedi, i mustaci. (E vi passò sopra la mano). Se fussi un giovineto de la sua età, ben volentieri ghe dario el cambio". (26)

> I'm fed up, he announced another time. Can't I do it myself once?
> The man had been expecting this, and fearing it too. On the one hand he was frightened of women; on the other he would prefer Ernesto to find relief with a boy his own age. It would have seemed less sinful, less harmful.
> Who with?
> Why not with you? He looked at the man, but without much conviction.
> The man laughed, and Ernesto thought his laugh was horrid; but it was only embarrassment.
> It isn't good doing it to a man, he said. It's something you only do to boys before they start shaving, and – he was about to add *before they start going with women*, but stopped himself in time. – How could you want me with this moustache of mine? (he smoothed it as he talked). If I was a lad your own age I'd gladly take it in turn with you. (32)

7.3 On/against pederasty

This passage needs further analysis because it invites a reflection on the paradigm of sex acts proposed by the man in which age seems to play a fundamental role. The sexual relationship between Ernesto and the day-labourer seems to be ultimately based on a Greek model of pederasty strongly

influenced by a Freudian reading. Freud analyses this model and explains the possibilities of sexual intercourse within this paradigm:

> As soon as the boy became a man he ceased to be a sexual object for men and himself, perhaps, became a lover of boys. In this instance, therefore, as in many others, the sexual object is not someone of the same sex but someone who combines the characters of both sexes; there is, as it were, a compromise between an impulse that seeks for a man and one that seeks for a woman, while it remains a paramount condition that the object's body (i.e. genitals) shall be masculine. Thus the sexual object is a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature.[10]

In this structure the young boy becomes the sexual object of desire for an adult because he combines the traits, both physical and psychological, of both sexes. Hence, the loss of such a condition would result in a loss of sexual interest on the part of the adult. The age gap is linked, in *Ernesto*, to the dichotomy of active vs. passive penetration. There is a code that regulates sexual practices and that links them to age, a model that the man seems to embrace and that Ernesto instead rejects or at least questions. The man giggles at Ernesto's suggestion because it is incompatible with his understanding of sexual practices. Ernesto's attempt to redefine the terms that regulate sexual practices between a man and a boy can thus be seen as queer as it does not conform to the existing order.

If in *Maurice* the Greek pederasty model is presented as a cultural cliché and then rejected in the name of a more physical approach to sexuality, in *Ernesto* the Greek model is filtered through Freud, and is treated as a psychoanalytic model rather than a cultural one. The interest in Hellenism that pervaded late Victorian and Edwardian England is nowhere to be seen in the Trieste cultural milieu, which is instead pervaded by psychoanalysis.

Robert Aldrich analyses the specificity of sexual acts in the South of Europe and North Africa where social structures created specific spaces for permissiveness that are different from the North European models.[11] Specifically, men in the South of Italy would engage in same-sex acts without

[10] Freud, *On Sexuality*, 60.

[11] Aldrich examines how in the South of Europe men were more willing to experience same-sex activities among them, provided that certain roles where respected and this problematizes the understanding of sexuality and sexual identity. See his Aldrich, *The Seduction* and also Duncan, *Reading* especially "Introduction", 1-15.

questioning their virility or their sexuality provided that their role remained active. According to Aldrich this dichotomy between active and passive, born in ancient Greece and continuing through the Roman Empire, has survived in the Mediterranean model for same-sex sexuality.

The fact that Ernesto questions it, challenges the convention, hence the man's hilarity. Men need to preserve their virility by refusing to give up power that would be represented in this paradigm by penetration. Ernesto's timid suggestion of penetrating the man is another sign of dismissing the code of sexual acts, whereas the man perpetrates a model that, in effect, is homophobic. Passivity has always been linked to femininity since the Greek model for sexual activities. As noted by Leo Bersani, this link meant:

> not only that phallic penetration of another person's body expressed sexual activity and virility, while being penetrated was a sign of passivity and femininity, but, even more, that "the relation between the 'active' and the 'passive' sexual partner is thought of as the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior. 'Active' and 'passive' sexual roles are therefore necessarily isomorphic with superordinate and subordinate social status.[12]

More specifically, in Athenian society sex was strictly connected to social issues and one's position in society. David Halperin notes that sex was:

> a manifestation of personal status, a declaration of social identity; sexual behavior did not so much express inward dispositions or inclinations (although, of course, it did also do that) as it served to position social actors in the places assigned to them, by virtue of their political standing, in the hierarchical structure of the Athenian polity.[13]

In *Ernesto*, sex acts between Ernesto and the man do not resemble any social hierarchy and I want to argue for a problematization of the concept of "activity" in sexual acts so that we try to disjoin it from penetration. The way in which the novel has been read by the critics who focus on same-sex acts, recalls the same opposition between the passive/feminine/penetrated body on the one hand and the active/masculine/penetrator on the other. In order to explain my

[12] Bersani, *Homos,* 105.
[13] Halperin, *One Hundred,* 32.

argument, it is worth introducing another sexual encounter between Ernesto and the man where some S/M activities enter the scene.

After the unsuccessful attempt with the cocoa butter, Ernesto spends a few days sick at home and the man is sent by Mr Wilder, his and Ernesto's employer, to collect some documents. As soon as the man enters the house he feels guilty towards Ernesto's mother, and the secret of their sexual affair makes him feel particularly uncomfortable. Ernesto takes advantage of this vulnerability and plays a little sadistic game with the man. As the man is approaching the door, Ernesto reveals to him his intention to go back to work the following day shouting that the man can do what he likes with him, but without the cone: "el farà de l'anima mia quel che vol. Ma … […] ma senza cono" (32) (you can do what you want to me, but … but no more CONES! (37-38)). This provokes devastation and despair in the man who fears Ernesto's mother, who might have heard, could understand, ask questions, and ultimately force Ernesto to confess to their relationship. He spends the night worrying and he plans his revenge. On the following day, when Ernesto is back at work, the man realises his deep love for the boy, a love with a "piccola punta di sadismo" (33) (a shade of sadism (39)). After a sleepless night he wants to punish Ernesto and before they have sex again, he asks him how many strokes of the wand he deserves for his behaviour, while gently hitting Ernesto's flesh with his hand. Ernesto is irritated and bored and decides that it will be their last sexual encounter.

The following day the man brings a birch wand that he intends to use on Ernesto: "L'aveva scelta con cura e doveva fare, sulla carne nuda, un male del diavolo" (41) (he had selected this particular wand with loving care. Freshly cut and whippy, it would sting bare flesh like the devil. (47)) Ernesto however turns the situation around, and urges the man to give him the wand:

> "El me la daghi" disse Ernesto
> "Solo se el me prometi de tornarmela".
> "No prometo gnente. El me la daghi, ghe digo".
> Vinto dall'accento imperioso del ragazzo, l'uomo gliela porse.
> "E adesso" disse Ernesto "el me daghi la man. Cussí…" E tese, aperta, la palma della mano sinistra, come faceva alla scuola elementare, quando il maestro lo coglieva in flagrante delitto di disattenzione, e voleva punirlo.
> L'uomo obbedì ancora. Ernesto gli prese la mano per la punta delle dita e gliela tenne ben ferma spianata. Fece sibilare la bacchetta

(quasi a saggiarla) poi lasciò andare, senza troppi riguardi, un fiero colpo. L'uomo contrasse la faccia ad una smorfia di dolore, e ritrasse, come scottato, la mano. La agitava, per rinfrescarla, al contatto con l'aria. (41-42)

Give it to me.
Only if you promise to give it back.
I'm not promising anything. I said give it to me.
Humbled by the boy's imperious tone, the man gave him the wand.
Now your hand, Ernesto said, like this – and he held the man's left hand open, as the schoolmasters do in junior school when they catch someone not paying attention and want to punish him.
Again the main obeyed. Ernesto took his hand by the fingertips and held it open and steady. He flexed the birch wand to and fro (as if to test it) and let fly a cruel lash. The man's face twisted with pain and his hand flew back as if scalded. He shook his hand about to cool it on the air. (47)

The man's sadistic urges are frustrated and replaced by Ernesto's audacious and unexpected act of violence on him. According to Cinquegrani, in this way Ernesto refuses his passive sexuality[14] and embraces an active sexuality. This performance of sadism thus specifies the choice of his sexual object. As I will explain in the next few paragraphs, I am not entirely convinced by Cinquegrani's reading. Thereafter, Ernesto breaks the wand into pieces and therefore, in Cinquegrani's reading, also breaks into pieces his passive sexuality, ending the relationship with the man and choosing activity and therefore masculinity in the following liaison he has with the prostitute. Ernesto, "[s]empre ridendo, fece la bacchetta a pezzi, che buttò lontano, come, tempo prima, aveva buttai i frammenti del cartello attaccato al sacco di farina doppio zero". (41) (Still laughing, he broke the birch wand into small pieces and threw them away, just as once, their first afternoon, he had thrown away the shreds of the label from the sack of superfine flour. (47)) In a gesture that echoes their first sexual act when he threw away a note of a flour bag, Ernesto breaks the wand.

Freud associates S/M practices to same-sex desire by linking male subjectivity to aggressiveness as I have already argued and sadism to male sexuality.[15] What we have in *Ernesto* is a tame hint of a sadistic inclination

[14] Cinquegrani, *Solitudine,* 77.
[15] Freud, *On Sexuality,* 71. See 5.7.2.

where the only link between pleasure and sadism is in the man, whereas, while Ernesto refuses the model, this does not mean that he does not also start enjoying and finding pleasure in using violence.

The reversing of roles and attitude Cinquegrani speaks about seems to suggest that Ernesto becomes sadistic. In fact, he goes and consoles the man as soon as he realises he has hurt him, showing no sexual pleasure or interest in sadism. If, as claimed by Leo Bersani in *Homos*, "S/M raises, however crudely, important questions about the relation between pleasure and the exercise of power",[16] and S/M practices are linked to a certain degree of pleasure, then Ernesto is not taking part in it because he is finding any sexual pleasure in this scene.

Cinquegrani recalls Freud's explanation of the dichotomy of activity and passivity,[17] where masculinity and virility are linked to sadism, on the one hand, and femininity and passivity are linked to masochism, on the other. The situation is problematized in *Ernesto* because the man, who plays the active role in their sexual relationship tries to express such activity through sadism on Ernesto but the latter, who had already expressed his desire not to exclusively perform the passive role, refuses it and instead hits the man. However, it seems to me that Ernesto is refusing not only the position he is occupying in the model, but the model of active/passive itself.

Freud remains the most important model for Saba and the problem is how Saba could combine both Weininger and Freud, especially because, as noted by Cinquegrani, Freud was critical of Weininger's theory of bisexuality being everyone's condition.[18] According to Cinquegrani, Saba found a common space where Freud and Weininger's theories met, or, at least, are not opposed. Freud replaces the dichotomy of masculine versus feminine associated to bisexuality by Weininger with that of active vs. passive and more specifically with the notion of sadism-masochism. Only after puberty is it possible, according to Freud, to determine the decision of whether to be active or passive, a decision that will accompany adulthood. In Cinquegrani's reading, Saba clears the conflict by juxtaposing Ernesto and the man and associating to

[16] Bersani, *Homos*, 83.
[17] Freud, *On Sexuality*, 73.
[18] See Cinquegrani, *Solitudine,* 77.

each a precise set of sexual features. In this scheme, the man positions himself on the axis of activity, sadism and masculinity whereas Ernesto occupies the space of passivity, masochism and femininity.

Cinquegrani's insight of how Saba is interested in clearing the divergence between Weininger and Freud in terms of sexual positioning is fruitful. Nevertheless, I am not convinced by his conclusions that what happens is a reversal of roles in which Ernesto, by refusing to be hit by the wand and instead using it against the man, is eventually choosing activity over passivity for the rest of his life, positioning himself on the axis previously exclusively occupied by the man. The narrative of this binarism runs the risk of underestimating the importance of the sexual acts and to enforce a rigid dichotomy that does not seem to apply to *Ernesto*.

Instead, I challenge the equation between penetration and passivity as too heteronormative a notion that needs to be problematized. This notion has its roots in the idea that "being the passive partner in a love relationship" is "in some way demeaning".[19] If we pluralize and problematize the concept of passivity and activity thus avoiding a heteronormative reading of sexual acts as strictly linked to penetration, then we can argue that, in the relationship with the man, Ernesto has not been passive even before the episode of the wand. We have seen how Ernesto touches the man's member, does not lie passively waiting for the man to do everything, and certainly does not show any masochistic inclination. In other words: Ernesto is active in his attitude towards his sexual intercourse with the man throughout the first two episodes.

Before their first intercourse Ernesto is the one who initiates the flirtation, who touches the man:

> Ernesto sciolse dalla stretta, che si era fatta piú forte, la mano divenuta un pò molle e sudata, e la posò timidamente sulla gamba dell'uomo. Risalì adagio, fino a sfiorargli appena, e come per caso, il sesso. Poi alzò la testa. Sorrise luminoso, e guardò l'uomo arditamente in faccia. (9)
>
> Ernesto slid his hand from the man's grasp, which had tightened and become damp with sweat, and laid it timidly on the man's leg. He drew his hand up and along till, lightly and as if by chance, it brushed

[19] Foucault, "Interview with O'Higgins", quoted in Bersani, *Homos*, 82.

his sex. Then he looked boldly up at the man, a luminous smile on his face. (15)

After the episode of the wand, Ernesto decides that he wants to end his liaison with the man because of boredom and tiredness. The trigger for this decision is, in the third episode, Ernesto's visit to the barber's for a haircut where Bernardo, the barber, shaves him on the sly for the first time.[20] At that moment Ernesto imagines the man crying: "Gli passò per la mente – un attimo – l'uomo; lo vide, lontano, come se piangesse". (49) (For a second he seemed to see the man far off, weeping. (55)). Ernesto seems to recall the dialogue about the need of an age gap for their relationship to exist, a gap symbolized by the absence of beard in the youth: he realizes that having been shaved makes him enter the realm of adulthood and that therefore their sexual liaison has to end.

7.4 Heterosexual experience

This realization and the state of confusion Ernesto finds himself in – "aveva le lacrime agli occhi" (49) ([He had] tears in his eyes. (55)) – as well as the meditation on the meaning of such a change, makes Ernesto think about visiting a prostitute: "'Se mi sverginassi, oggi, adesso, subito!'" fu la conclusione a cui giunsero le meditazioni e le malinconie di Ernesto" (51) (Ernesto's pondering and gloom all led to one conclusion: *If only I could lose my virginity today – now – at once!* (57)). The idea of virginity is associated with heterosexual sex, and the activities with the man considered as different acts.

As I have already pointed out, Cinquegrani reads the break of the wand as the symbol of a passage from "un'indentità sessualmente femminile, nel rapporto omosessuale, a una maschile, nel rapporto con la prostituta"[21] (a sexually feminine identity, in the homosexual affair, to a masculine one in the intercourse with the prostitute), whereas in my view Ernesto does not embrace

[20] Lavagetto makes a connection between haircut and circumcision, Lavagetto, *La Gallina,* 209. Cinquegrani analyses how circumcision is linked to castration in Saba, an idea that he takes from Weininger according to whom Jews and women are linked by the same fear of castration. Saba repeatedly said how his nurse used to threaten him with the possibility of circumcision that he reads as castration and that this was one of his infantile traumas. See letter written by Saba to Joachim Flescher, 14 March 1949, in Saba, *Lettere sulla psicoanalisi*: *carteggio con Joachim Flescher 1946-1949: con gli scritti di Saba sulla psicoanalisi, le lettere di Saba a Edoardo Weiss, due lettere di Weiss a Linuccia Saba,* ed. Arrigo Stara. Milano: SE, 2013 (?). 39. Cinquegrani reads Ernesto's masochism as passivity, Cinquegrani, *Solitudine,* 87.

[21] Cinquegrani, *Solitudine*, 87.

an active male identity just when he penetrates the prostitute – in fact, the text shows Ernesto's passivity (in terms not of strict penetration or despite penetration), in his heterosexual initiation, where the prostitute is the one taking the lead.

If with the man Ernesto participates and takes the initiative, in the visit to the prostitute Tanda, she takes the lead: "'no sta aver paura – gli disse – fazo tuto mi. Ti intanto spoite'. E, cosí dicendo, la donna incominciò, per conto suo, a spogliarsi. Ernesto l'imitò". (55) (Don't be scared, she said, leave it to me. Take your clothes off now. The woman began to undress. Ernesto copied her. (61))
In this sexual intercourse Ernesto is less active than in the acts with the man, despite the penetration: "'Perché no ti te distiri sul letto, vizin de mi?' gli chiese la donna. Poi si pentí, e fermò con un gesto il ragazzo, che si accingeva a obbedirle." (56) (Why don't you come and lie down by me? she said, and he was moving to do so when she changed her mind and montioned him to stop. (61)). There is, in Cinquegrani's critical analysis, an association between passivity and being penetrated based on heteronormative assumptions. I agree with Jonathan Kemp that "what still characterises most of our understanding of the male body is what Derrida calls phallocentrism and phallogocentrism (Derrida 1987: 191), by which masculinist discourse insists on a binaric logic that subsumes the second term to the first both in terms of value and of status".[22]

To Ernesto, the pleasure he experiences with the woman is like a known, familiar desire, he felt "come un uomo che, dopo un viaggio avventuroso, ritorna nella sua casa" (57) (he felt like a man arriving home after a perilous voyage, (62-63)), whereas the sexual relationship with the man is compared to an adventurous journey before coming back home, to the known. The sexual acts with the man are born out of pleasure and curiosity whereas the visit to the prostitute could be linked to social prescriptions and pressure, to Ernesto's acceptance of the socially expected. Not only is this socially accepted, but it is suggested and, in the case of Ernesto, it is also financially supported with a florin by his uncle, who hopes that this will prevent his young nephew from indulging in an activity such as masturbation, considered unhealthy and

[22] Jonathan Kemp, "Schreber and the Penetrated Male" in Nigianni and Storr, eds. *Deleuze and Queer,* 150-151.

dangerous for the mind: "temendo per il nipote i vizi solitari, gli dava quel regalo settimanale a quel preciso scopo, ahimè, sottaciuto" (53) (fearing solitary vices gave his nephew the weekly present for just this purpose, but alas! without ever spelling it out (58)).[23] Compulsory heterosexuality, as noted by Sara Ahmed, "shapes bodies by the assumption that a body 'must' orient itself towards some objects and not others"[24] and "normativity is comfortable for those who can inhabit it".[25]

When he makes the decision to visit a prostitute, he feels this social pressure:

> ricordò, con una specie di rimorso, che molto suoi compagni c'erano già stati; e, parlando con lui, se ne vantavano. Davano tutti gli insegnamenti del caso, ed abbondavano in particolari. Anche il cugino coetaneo…c'era già stato; ed anche, a credergli, più di una volta. Perché lui sí e io no?" pensò Ernesto. (51)
>
> (With a sort of regret he remembered how many of his school mates had already done it, and bragged when they told him about it. They became experts overnight, and the lessons they gave were richly detailed … Even that cousin of his, who was only the same age as him (not exactly: he was three months older than Ernesto) had done it – and more than once, if he was to be believed. (57)).

Ahmed notes that "[t]he normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward 'the other sex' can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct, honest."[26] Not to conform to the imposed sexual object is to refuse a narrative of belonging and to have one's orientation understood as a "form of disobedience" [27] with all the social and psychic consequences of such a refusal. And this is what *Ernesto* is about: a character in the process of becoming a (queer) subject, presented while forming his subjectivity through different negotiations. As noted by Ahmed, "subjects are *required* to 'tend toward' some objects and not others as a condition of familial as well as social love".[28] What is the impact of this heterosexual experience on

[23] On masturbation see Sedgwick, *Tendencies,* Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993.
[24] Sara Ahmed, "Queer Feelings", in Hall and Jagose, *Queer Studies,* 423.
[25] Ahmed, "Queer Feelings", 425.
[26] Sarah Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, 70.
[27] Ahmed, "Queer Feelings", 423.
[28] Ahmed, *Queer phenomenology*, 85.

Ernesto's relationship to same-sex acts and specifically to the man? I have already mentioned how he felt bored by the relationship even before meeting Tanda, but the text also gives another reason:

> Forse il povero ragazzo non aveva trovato in quella relazione quel po' di protezione paterna, che egli, rimasto piú bambino della sua età e virtualmente senza padre (lo zio tutore contava solo per le sberle e il fiorino settimanale) inconsciamente cercava. (25)
>
> Perhaps the poor boy had not found the element of paternal protection he was unconsciously seeking; for he was younger than his years and effectively fatherless (the guardian uncle only counted for the clouting and the weekly florins). (31)

The explanation that we find in Saba's words display a Freudian matrix of the desire for a paternal figure in the search for affection in a same-sex relationship. Another important reason for Ernesto to cease the affair with the man are the repeatedly voiced fears of the social consequences of such acts by the two male figures: the man and Ernesto's uncle.

7.5 Heteronormativity and social pressure

After Ernesto first shaving at the barber's, his uncle treats him like an adult but does not discuss politics with him as he thinks age would make him see things differently. Only on one occasion does his uncle comment on a scandal linked to homosexual acts and that discussion, the narrator suggests, could play a role in Ernesto's decision to terminate his liaison with the man. While talking about a scandal that involved a famous person who engaged in same-sex relationships, his uncle gives a speech to Ernesto:

> "A un uomo che ha fatte di quelle cose, non resta più, se è un uomo, che spararsi". "El parla come l'altro – pensò Ernesto; - lui me parlava de butarse in mar per la vergogna, e sto qua de tirarme un colpo de revolver". Ma ad Ernesto piaceva (allora) vivere, e non aveva nessuna voglia di spararsi per così poco…E nemmeno il personaggio politico si sparò. Era rimasto vittima di una vendetta degli "austriacanti" (ce n'erano molti in città, anche in buona fede, ed avevano un loro giornale), e si accontentò semplicemente (in quelli anni era facile) di cambiare continente. Ma quelle parole dello zio e più ancora quello sguardo fisso su di lui (quasi avesse saputo, o sospettato ogni cosa) rimasero impressi nella memoria del

> giovanetto, e non furono forse una delle ultime cause dell'inevitabile, ma precipitata, rottura con l'uomo. (85)
>
> There's nothing left for a man who has done that but to shoot himself – if he *is* a man.
> He's talking just like the other one, thought Ernesto; he went on about drowning himself for shame, and now this was about shooting people. But Ernesto was (at that time, still) glad to be alive; he had no intention of shooting himself over such a little thing … Nor for that matter did that the member of parliament shoot himself: he fell victim to a crusade by the *austriacanti*, the Austrophiles (there were many in Trieste, not all of them time-servers, and they published their own newspaper) and made do with hopping to another continent (easily done in those days). But his uncle's words, and even more his firm gaze (as if he knew everything or at least suspected it) stuck in his memory and were perhaps not the least cause of the inevitable but sudden break with the man. (89-90)

This reference to social attitude towards same-sex acts is important in the process of negotiation that Ernesto, as a queer subject, goes through, and it is an interesting reflection on the possibilities for sexual outlaws. Society condemns same-sex sexual encounters as shameful, as a stigma, and interestingly Ernesto makes a link between his uncle and the man.

Ernesto is determined to end the relationship but he needs to decide how to do so, since they meet daily in the workplace. After the scene with the wand, Ernesto does not speak to the man who feels angry and profoundly rancorous towards Ernesto:

> "tutti i muli – pensava tra sé l'uomo – i sè compagni; dopo una o due volte i se stufa; se no ti li lassi ti, i te lassa lori per primi". Ma la ferita era più profonda. Sentiva troppo bene che Ernesto rappresentava nella sua squallida esistenza un'avventura unica; e che, una volta perduto, non lo avrebbe potuto più rimpiazzare, nemmeno con tutti i "muli" del mondo. (68)
>
> Kids are all the same, thought the man, they get bored after a few times and always leave you if you don't leave them first. But the wound lay deeper than this, for he knew too well that Ernesto was and would remain unique in his dismal existence; that once lost he could never hope to replace him, not with all the 'kids' in the world. (74)

The man seems to be in love with Ernesto and he is hoping their relationship could continue. He begs Ernesto for another sex encounter reminding him what

they did together and how they both enjoyed it. The way in which the man asks – "un "povareto" che chiede un'elemosina (73) (a true down-and-out begging for alms (79)) mixed with a hint of fear make Ernesto agree on a last sexual encounter, after which he comes to the conclusion that the only way to get rid of the man is to leave his job.

In order to do so, Ernesto writes a letter to his employer where he accuses him of being an exploiter. The effect is as expected: Mr Wilder finds the letter outrageous and fires Ernesto asking him to send his mother to collect the rest of his salary and to inform her of Ernesto's rude behaviour. The entire fourth episode is constructed so as to lead to Ernesto's confession to his mother of his relationship with the man. It starts with Ernesto's mother's reaction to the news of his layoff and her intervention in the matter. Mrs Celestina goes to see Mr Wilder hoping to convince him to re-employ Ernesto. In the meanwhile Ernesto thinks about his desire to go to a violin concert and how to get the money for it. His frustration when his aunt denies him the money forces him to reconsider his acts with the man, and his whole life:

> Un rimorso è la visione errata di un avvenimento lontano: si ricorda l'atto, e si dimenticano i sentimenti dai quali quell'atto è sorto; l'aria infuocata che ha determinato – reso inevitabile – l'accaduto. Visto nella sua materialità, questo può apparire facilmente mostruoso. Così Ernesto ricordava, o meglio non ricordava (perché li rivedeva in una luce falsa) i suoi rapporti con l'uomo: parole, atti, tutto assumeva adesso un colore diverso da quello che, nella scorrevole realtà della vita, aveva avuto. (89-90)
>
> Remorse is our deluded vision of a past episode: we remember the action and forget the emotions which brought it about, the blazing air that shaped whatever happened and made it inevitable. Seen as a bald fact, this can easily seem monstrous, and thus it was (because he reviewed it in a false light) that Ernesto remembered his relationship with the man: words, acts, everything now took a different colour to what it had had in the flowing reality of life. (95)

Social concerns, already aroused by his uncle's earlier conversation with him, are confirmed in Ernesto's fears at this point. Therefore, when his mother returns with the news that Mr Wilder has agreed to re-employ him, a confession appears to him as the ultimate and only possible way out.

Once again Ernesto associates the man and the uncle, whom he sees as sharing some common knowledge about sex and sexual activities, and about the social condemnation of homosexuality, implying that the man can be seen as a self-hating homosexual.

7.6 Confession/absolution

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of the act of confession, Lavagetto examines the episode of Ernesto's confession to his mother, emphasizing the need for a listener and linking this to Saba's autobiographical need for a confessor and absolution.[29] Foucault insists on the importance of the position of power inhabited by the confessor:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.[30]

Confessing is to perform an act of liberation, of justifying oneself in front of society and is an attempt to ask for forgiveness. The subject can be freed of the burden of secrecy through the logic of confession. Absolution is the hoped-for outcome of confession but the process itself is a mechanism that requires an important selection of linguistic, cultural and social reference that the confessor could understand. In other words, it is the person making the confession who has to negotiate according to what the confessor can understand. Sedgwick observes that "ignorance and opacity collude or compete with knowledge in

[29] Lavagetto, *La Gallina*, 209.
[30] Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, 61-62.

mobilizing the flows of energy, desire, goods, meanings, persons."[31] The cultural and linguistic negotiation enacted by the confessing subject is a complex act that demands a deep knowledge of the framework in order for the message to be conveyed. Ernesto's confession to his mother is no exception:

> Come dire *quella* cosa? Come dirla a sua madre? Con l'uomo, un ragazzo che, come Ernesto, non aveva peli sulla lingua, poteva parlar franco, ma con lei … […] il difficile era trovare le parole. (95)
>
> How could he *say* it? How could he tell his mother? A boy who liked to speak his mind, as Ernesto did, could talk openly to someone like the labourer – but to his mother? … […] The difficulty lay in finding the words … (100)

Ernesto cannot use his language, the one that he uses with the man, because it is a different language. He needs to paraphrase through what is already recognized within social discourse, mentioning a scandal in a newspaper, forging the language of his confession to make his mother understand. He abandons dialect, and refers to "cose", leaving it vague, renouncing the directness that has instead characterized his approach to the linguistic expression of sexual acts:

> "So che non puoi ancora capire; e forse…non capirai nemmeno dopo. Ma io devo parlare ugualmente. Ti ricordi […] quello che mi disse una domenica lo zio Giovanni, a tavola, prima di darmi il fiorino; Fu quando scoppiò in città quel maledetto scandalo intorno a quel deputato, di cui parlarono tutti i giornali. […] "Ad un uomo," mi disse "che abbia fatte di quelle cose, non resta più che spararsi un colpo di revolver". Ebbene, mamma, mammina, io e quell'uomo abbiamo fatto di quelle cose…" (97)
>
> I know you can't understand yet, and maybe – maybe you won't understand afterwards, but I must tell you all the same. Do you remember […] what uncle Giovanni told me one Sunday after lunch, before he gave me the florin? When there was that blasted scandal about the member of parliament in all of the newspapers? […] *There's nothing left for a man who's done that but to shoot himself*, he said. Well, mother, mummy, we did that, the man and I … (101-102)

[31] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 5. Sedgwick is talking about how in a political exchange between M. Mitterrand and Mr Reagan it is the latter's ignorance of French that forces the French president into a submissive position.

Ernesto mentions the article discussed in his house by his uncle but Signora Celestina had at the time thought Ernesto's embarrassed reaction to be due to an excess of prudery. Her ignorance in these matters is explained by the narrator who makes a connection between same-sex activities, dialect and the working-class:[32]

> Del resto, aveva solo un'idea vaga di "quelle cose", che considerava, come il dialetto, appannaggio esclusivo degli infimi strati della popolazione, del "basso ceto" Non aveva mai creduto che un deputato, un distinto personaggio, se ne fosse macchiato: tutto doveva essere una macchinazione dei suoi nemici. Quel personaggio era un signore. E anche Ernesto – malgrado la povertà e la dipendenza dalla zia – era un signore. (97-98)
>
> For that matter she had only a vague notion of what *that* was; she believed it to be the exclusive prerogative of the 'servant class' – like dialect – and had never really been convinced that a personage of distinction, a member of parliament no less, would sully himself like that; it must have been his enemies' plotting. He was a gentleman after all; and despite his poverty and his dependence on the aunt, Ernesto was a gentleman too. (102)

The connection between the working-class as characterized by sexual freedom, and freedom from the morality imposed on the middle and upper classes by religion, is a common idea in the understanding of Mediterranean homosexuality.[33] Mrs Celestina seems to adhere to this model of understanding of same sex activities, attributing them to the working class and questioning the rumours about the politician and the scandal brought up by Ernesto's uncle. In order to make his mother understand what he wants to say, Ernesto needs to use the mainstream language – that which his uncle had used, and not that which he would have used with the man – as when for example he uses the phrase "mettermelo in culo", leaving no space for innocence. Mrs Celestina does not have the psychoanalytical tools the narrator is endowed with (for example, Weininger's association of youth with bisexual urges)[34] and sees youth as the age of innocence, so she finds the event repugnant and hardly

[32] See 5.2.
[33] Aldrich quotes Lombardi Sartriani who claims that the working classes were less submitted to models imposed by the cultivated classes and by religion, because they were in a closer contact to nature and not inclined to be oppressed by censorship, Aldrich, *The Mediterranean,* 175.
[34] See 5.7.1.

comprehensible: “Il fatto – va da sé – le ripugnava e più ancora le riusciva – come si è detto – quasi incomprensibile”. (99) (The affair disgusted her, needless to say, but more than that it was, as we said, simply beyond her. (104))

In her view, the man is responsible for having corrupted Ernesto and therefore he is the only one to blame: “Mascalzone – esclamò, prendendosela, ad ogni buon conto, con l’uomo – mascalzone, assassino […] Al solo vedermi, deve buttarsi in mare dalla vergogna”, (98) (Villain! she cried, pouncing on the man. Blackguard! Murderer! […] He should jump into the sea for shame at the very sight of me (103)) she says by echoing what the man had told Ernesto in warning him to keep the secret from everyone. Not only is the man guilty of corrupting Ernesto’s innocence, but he is also doubly guilty for having disregarded social class and conventions, because, as noted by Gnerre, he is a character who embodies a double diversity: he is a homosexual and he also occupies the liminal space of society.[35]

The binarism of innocence versus moral corruption is redefined in this dialogue, and so is the binary opposition of predator and prey generally linked to age, overturned. Ernesto confesses that he had actually taken part actively in the sexual approach: “No – disse Ernesto – egli non ha tutta la colpa” (98), “gli sono andato incontro a piú di mezza strada. (99). (No, said Ernesto, it’s not all his fault […] but I met him more than half way. (103)).

Ernesto takes responsibility for his acts and he does not hide behind a screen, refusing to play the part of the innocent boy corrupted by an older man. The mother is unable to understand, to analyse Ernesto’s desire for the man in the absence of a father figure:

> Se no, avrebbe dovuto anche capire che il suo matrimonio sbagliato, la totale assenza di un padre, la sua severità eccessiva ci avevano la loro parte…Senza contare, ben inteso, l’età; e, piú ancora, la “grazia” di Ernesto, che forse traeva le sue origini proprio da quelle assenze. (98)
>
> otherwise she would have had to understand that her mistaken marriage, the total absence of a father, and her own needless severity had each played a part … even making no allowance for

[35] Gnerre, *L’eroe negato,* 58. See also Duncan, *Reading*, 6.

> Ernesto's age and, what was more important, for his singular 'grace', which may have sprung from those very same deprivations (103)

The narrator once again explains the inner consciousness of the characters and shows what constitutes Ernesto's acts. It is not just a single element that leads Ernesto to build a sexual relationship with the man. It is a combination of absences and presences but mainly the father's absence and his mother's extremely strict upbringing that construct Ernesto as a queer subject, in Saba's view. The grace of Ernesto has its origins in the absence of his father. The structure presented here resembles Weininger's theory and the division of feminine and masculine traits: because the father figure that embodies power, strength and vigour is absent, Ernesto is assimilated to grace, culturally associated with the feminine. Failing to understand the situation through rational analysis, Signora Celestina is left with a motherly choice and abandons for once her severity, showing Ernesto some affection: "[La signora Celestina] mandò al diavolo (cioè al suo vero padre) la morale e le sue prediche inette. (100) ([La signora Celestina] sent morality and its abject homilies to the devil (i.e. back to their true father). (104)). In this quotation the narrator, and Saba behind him, makes an interesting connection between morality and the devil, underlining the negative connotation of morality. Thus, he also creates a juxtaposition between morality and nature where the latter puts all things in place (13-14). The narrator also implies that the mother cannot understand for psychological reasons, as understanding would mean recognizing her own responsibility and guilt. In the mood for confession, and in the hope of reassuring his mother of his effective social conformity and assimilation, despite that act, Ernesto decides also to confess his heterosexual initiation and reveals that he has visited a prostitute, of which his mother is jealous. (101)

As I have shown, Foucault analyses the act of speech itself and its value in the system of power in which it is produced. However, we should also focus on the content of what the narrator calls confession. In the case of *Maurice*, what the eponymous character confesses to is an identity, homosexuality, of the Oscar Wilde sort, whereas Ernesto confesses to sexual acts. I think that the distinction between identity and action – overlooked by most critics – is an important one that points to the queerness of the novel. While Cinquegrani

thinks that the core of the novel is guilt, I argue there is not a single centre, and that the construction of the relationship between these two characters is what Saba finds problematic and this is why he interrupts his writing, an aspect that I will investigate in the final chapter of this dissertation.

7.7 Class difference

Mrs Celestina establishes a connection between same-sex activities and the lower classes and she claims that respectability is extraneous to any kind of non-conventional sex activities. Class repeatedly appears in the novel and there is a binary division between socialism and capitalism, as already noted by Cinquegrani.[36]

In *Maurice*, the only way to build a relationship is between two different people who belong to a different social class, and Forster makes the claim that only through rejecting social conventions and therefore class differences is it possible to be queer outside society.[37] In *Ernesto*, the relations between class and sexual involvement are not coherent. In the novel the narrator suggests that the end of the relationship between Ernesto and the man lies in their cultural and social distance from each other:

> se invece di essere un povero bracciante avventizio, fosse stato una persona colta, dello stesso ceto, almeno spirituale, del ragazzo; se avesse potuto, in altre parole, educarlo, chiarirlo a sé stesso, non lo avrebbe goduto gratuitamente. E la loro relazione, forse, sarebbe durata di piú. (35)

> if he had been of the same class as the boy – the same spiritual class at least – instead of a poor day-labourer; if in other words he could have educated him, helped bring him to self-knowledge, the rewards would not have been all on one side and the relationship might have lasted longer. (40-41)

This passage suggests a reference to the pedagogic model of Greek pederasty, which is however never fully embraced. The man himself thinks that Ernesto has ended their relationship because of the social gap, but the narrator seems to contradict the previous statement on the social class differences by highlighting Ernesto's socialism:

[36] See 5.2.2 and Cinquegrani, *La Solitudine,* 48 and ff.
[37] See chapter 4.

> "Ernesto – pensava – se comporta mal con mi perché lui el sè un sior, e mi un povareto. Ma, su questo punto, si sbagliava. Il ragazzo, oltre che considerarsi egli stesso un povero, era poco sensibile alle disparità sociali; e forse non avrebbe fatto con un "signore" quello che invece aveva fatto con un bracciante avventizio. (69)
>
> Ernesto treats me like this because he's one of the gentry and I'm a pauper, he would think at such moments. But he was mistaken; beside the fact that the boy thought of himself as a poor person too, he was hardly aware of the social differences; and perhaps he wouldn't have done with a 'gentleman' what he had done with a labourer. (74)

The man reads Ernesto's decision to end the relationship as the result of his social inferiority, but through the narrator, Saba explains that the opposite is true.

The issue of class is also linked to language and the use of dialect. Ernesto's preferred language for communication is dialect and he uses it with all the characters regardless of their social class. The only characters who do not use it are the mother and his uncle who embody the heteronormative society. Signora Celestina speaks in Italian because she "disprezzava il dialetto, come cosa appartenente al 'ceto basso', ai bassi strati della popolazione" (81) (she disdained the dialect as something belonging to the 'servant class'. (86)), making a direct association between the lower classes and use of dialect. Dialect is also a tool Saba uses to leverage the classes; it becomes a neutral device that breaks social classes. Ernesto and the man speak the same dialect therefore deleting the barriers which could be scandalous in itself.

Saba seems to be ambivalent about the class issue. Ernesto is said to be a socialist, he reads the socialist press; at the same he is upset that the man addresses him with the second person "tu" used in Italian in informal context (25; 31). As a mark of equality, he makes a remark about the intellectual class (as in the quotation above) as the requirement for a relationship.

7.8 The impossibility of delineating an identity: Quinto Episodio

In the final episode, Saba tries to delineate a relationship between Ernesto and a young boy, Ilio. Relieved by the motherly absolution that came with the money for the concert of the violinist Franz Ondričez, Ernesto meets Ilio, with whom he

develops a relationship whose definition is problematic. The novel ends precisely when Saba wants to shift the focus from sexual acts to the delineation of a relationship that implies affection between Ernesto and Ilio. Something that Ernesto cannot explain or control happens when he meets Ilio for the first time – "il destino lo colse […] al varco" (109) (fate waylaid him (112)) – and the boy's feelings seem to be ambiguous towards him. Instead of trying to define this relationship through sexual identity categories I will try to see how problematic and ambivalent it is and, in the next chapter, I will link it to Saba's choice not to publish the novel.

Whilst the physical appearance of the man is never mentioned, Ilio is described as a very handsome young boy and his looks make him belong to a superior dimension establishing a connection between features and psychological traits, typical of certain discourses of physiognomy:[38]

> Il fanciullo guardava fisso davanti a sé, e pareva immerso in un pensiero, non si poteva sapere quale, ma che certo escludeva tutti i presenti, Ernesto compreso. Doveva però essere un pensiero lieto: il fanciullo sorrideva – come si dice – agli angeli. Era davvero bellissimo. Era – Ernesto non ne dubitò un attimo – uno studente di violino, un futuro concertista che avrebbe, a suo tempo, ecclissati tutti gli altri. (109)
>
> Gazing straight ahead, the boy seemed lost in thought: about what we could not say, but it certainly excluded present company, including Ernesto. It must have been a happy thought too: he was smiling – as the saying goes – *at the angels*. He was very handsome indeed. Ernesto knew at first sight that he was a violin student, a future concert artist who would in time outshine all the rest. (112)

Ernesto starts idealizing Ilio from the first time he sees him, producing in his mind a false image that is rectified by inserted comments from the narrator. The pleasure that Ernesto finds in Ilio passes through the gaze and physical admiration and extends to an appreciation for his alleged talent in playing the violin. Ilio is well aware of Ernesto's gaze and he only pretends not to notice it as part of his superior nature: "Diciamo 'in apparenza' perché, in realtà, si accorse benissimo di essere guardato, e guardato da un suo innamorato." (110) (We say *apparently* because he knew very well he was being looked at – looked

[38] See 5.2.1.

at, what's more, by someone in love with him. (113)) Ernesto's pleasure in the sexual relationship with the man is replaced by "uno struggimento, una melanconia che non aveva ancora provato" (110) (an ache, a despondency such as he had never felt before. (113)) The translator translated "malinconia" as "despondency" but I think "melancholy" would be a more accurate option.

Judith Butler has analysed the impact of melancholy in the process of forming a character in relation to gender but also to the prohibition imposed by a heteronormative and homophobic society. [39] Relying on the Freudian interpretation of melancholia as the effect of renouncing a sexual object, she claims that "giving up the object becomes possible only on the condition of a melancholic internalization or […] a melancholic *incorporation*".[40] When Saba is trying to develop Ernesto's character, melancholy appears in the negotiation between the subject and the social impositions on sexuality and desire. Butler notes that "rigid forms of gender and sexual identification whether homosexual or heterosexual appear to spawn forms of melancholy"[41] and in the case of Ernesto this new feeling seems to derive precisely from this uncertainty about rigid forms of identity and categorizations. The nature of the relationship between Ernesto and Ilio becomes complicated and stratified with different feelings: envy, desire to be the object of admiration, indentification and possession (110; 113).

At the same time, the idealization of Ilio makes Ernesto re-think his life so far and his experience with the man, judging himself as the sinner and idealizing the other as the perfect subject:

> A questi pensieri – diciamo cosí, invidiosi, se ne soprapponevano altri, e d'altro genere. "Mai più – si rimproverava Ernesto – quel fanciullo si sarebbe trovato nella necessità di confessare a sua madre quello che ho dovuto confessarle io, oggi. Basta guardarlo per capire che mai si è abbandonato a fare quelle cose, né con donne, né con uomini […]". (111)
>
> These envious thoughts were joined by other, self-reproachful ones; *That* boy could never find himself having to confess to his mother

[39] Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused identification" in Jonathan D. Culler ed., *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 3, London: Routledge, 2003, 213-224.
[40] Butler, "Melancholy Gender", 214.
[41] Butler, "Melancholy Gender", 220.

> what I confessed today. You only need look at him to know he's never stooped to that, not with women or men. (114)

The idealization of this object of desire is counterpointed and rectified by the narrator's words, which emphasize the sexual activities Ilio engaged in: "Se fosse stato uno dei suoi amici, Ernesto avrebbe saputo che, trovandosi solo in campagna, le aveva fatte – come gli antichi pastori – perfino con una capretta e, per di piú, se n'era vantato)." (111) (If they had been friends Ernesto would soon have known that, finding himself alone and out of sight in the country one day, he had even stooped – like the shepherds of antiquity – with a little goat: *and* he had bragged about it. (114))

Ernesto is presented as being in love with Ilio, he wants to emulate him, he does not think he is good enough for this boy, he does not think he deserves his attention:

> A questa svalutazione di sé medesimo (propria, anche nei casi normali, agli innamorati adolescenti) si aggiungeva il desiderio di conoscerlo, di farsi, com'egli ammirava, ammirare da lui. Ma farsi ammirare per cosa? O almeno – dato che di più non era possibile – imporgli la sua ammirazione; vivergli accanto, di lui e con lui, aiutarlo (come se ne avesse avuto bisogno!; essere insomma "il suo migliore amico". Ma qui Ernesto sentí che alla parola "amico" il suo cuore ferito, e ferito per la prima volta, dalla bellezza, dava un significato che andava al di là di quello che si dà per solito a questa parola nell'uso corrente. Questa constatazione accrebbe la sua malinconia. (112).

> Added to this self-denigration (standard with adolescent lovers, after all, even in normal cases) was the desire to know the boy and make him return his admiration. But what was he supposed to admire? Well, if that much was impossible he would make the other boy accept *his* admiration; would live at his side – live with him and help him (as if he needed any help!); would be, in a word, his *best friend*. But here Ernesto knew that his wounded heart – wounded by beauty, and for the first time – gave the word *friend* an intensity outside its usual scope, and this knowledge only made him more despondent. (114-115).

The more Ernesto tries to imagine how to develop a relationship with Ilio, the more he feels melancholic and feels a lack whose definition he cannot theorize. I would like to draw attention to the use of the word "amico" (friend) and the special emphasis the narrator puts on it in suggesting a different

meaning of this word in this context. I have discussed in chapter 4.2 how the same use is present in *Maurice* when the eponymous character sees in his dreams a figure he calls "a friend", and his desire to meet a friend.[42] There is in both cases a lack of language to describe a relationship that has no social and political position, but also, in the case of *Ernesto*, a difficulty in dealing with fixed identity categories.

In *Maurice*, Forster is trying to present a specific case for homosexuality, with a precise political purpose, and he uses the word friend at the very beginning of the novel when Maurice is not aware of his sexuality making a point about the lack of terminology that reflects social invisibility. Saba is less concerned in proposing a case for sexual identity, however deals with male characters whose desires for other men are not clearly definable but that exist. In *Ernesto*, the use of the word friend is complicated by the nature of the desire and relation between Ilio and Ernesto.

At the end of the concert Ernesto looks for Ilio in the hope of seeing this beautiful boy "che non potendo *essere*, si sarebbe accontenato di *avere* (112) (for if he could not *be* he would make do with *having* (115)) but he will have to wait until the following day when he meets him at the violin teacher's house. This time, the two characters meet and start talking to each other:

> Si guardarono un poco in silenzio; poi – come spinti da una forza estranea alla loro volontà – si avvicinarono. Parevano due giovani cani; solo che, invece di menare la coda, si sorridevano. (114)
>
> They looked at each other for a moment, saying nothing; then they came closer, as if propelled by a force beyond their control. They looked like two young dogs, except that they smiled instead of wagging their tales. (117)

The clumsy association between the animal instinct and the flirtation between Ernesto and Ilio is a sign of how Saba, in the development of this affair, is torn between putting emphasis on the sexual aspect or on affection. It is Ernesto, once again, that takes the initiative and actively asks Ilio to become friends.

The connection is established and we are left with only hints at how the story develops: "La vicinanza dell'altro giovanetto emanava, per lui, un dolce

[42] E.M. Forster, *Maurice,* 26. See chapter 3.4 for the relation between friend and homoeroticism.

calore; non se ne sarebbe diviso più". (118) (There was a sweet warmth in the other boy's company; he would never be deprived of it again. (121)). The final account by the narrator suggests how special and unique this relationship is:

> Due ragazzi che, sulle scale del loro maestro di violino, s'intrattengono a parlare dei loro studi, e si stringono, congedandosi, la mano, sarebbe parso, a chiunque l'avesse osservato, un fatto banale della vita d'ogni ora. Invece – per la particolare costellazione sotto cui nacque, e per le sue conseguenze remote – era (ogni altra considerazione a parte) un avvenimento raro, quale può prodursi, sí e no, una volta sola in un secolo e in un solo paese. (118)
>
> Two boys passing the time on the steps outside their violin teacher's room, talking about their lessons and shaking hands as they part: it would have seemed a banal enough fact of daily life to any passer-by. But thanks to the particular constellation watching over them, and because of its far flung results, this was (everything else apart) a rare encounter: an event such as happens in one country only once every hundred years, if even once. (121)

The "Quinto Episodio" in the book, then, is very different from the previous ones. In the first four episodes Saba narrates how Ernesto experiences sexual intercourse with a man, and how the pressure from society leads him to experiment with a prostitute, in a process of continuous negotiation between individuality, others and society – and an especially fraught attempt for a queer character that does not recognise any already-existing categories as his own. Ernesto, as a subject, first lives through experiences of sexual desire with the man, then embarks in a negotiation with society going to visit the prostitute, and finally, in the narration of the relationship between Ernesto and Ilio, Saba seems to want to sketch love, or at least is entering the realm of affection after having presented a sexual affair.

This is where the narration stops, at the uneasy area where the development of the story worries Saba also for the presence of biographical elements, as I will explain in my next chapter.

CHAPTER 8
Queer posthumous writing

8.1 Introduction

Both *Maurice* and *Ernesto* were published posthumously and represent a unique personal case in Forster's and Saba's *oeuvre.* They occupy a specific and ambiguous space between autobiography and fiction and they both have a function in their authors' lives.

Forster worked closely with Nicholas Furbank, his biographer and editor of the novel, in order to leave *Maurice* ready for publication after his death (1970). In 1969, he added the "Terminal Note" that accompanies the published novel, where he explains and comments on the plot and the origins of the writing. Saba, on the other hand, left his novel unfinished. He had abandoned the writing a few years before his death and provided different explanations for this choice. Both Forster and Saba were acclaimed authors when they started writing their two novels. Forster had already published successful works such as *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908) and *Howards End* (1910) which had established him as a respected public author. Saba had published numerous poetry collections and two different editions of *Il Canzoniere* (The Songbook) and he was considered one of the three major Italian poets of the twentieth century.[1]

This chapter considers Forster and Saba together and their relationship between the public *oeuvre* and the urge to write these novels about same-sex desire. In both cases, author and queer text entered into a conflict that I want to investigate. With Forster, it ended a long time of literary silence, and came as a pressing presence to which he gave voice: "I wrote the book because it, or baser things, have for several years weighted on my mind", he explained to his friend Forrest Reid".[2] Saba described the writing as a crisis of maternity and, like Forster, he seemed to be pushed to write: "È stato come se si fosse rotta una diga e tutto affluisce spontaneamente" (It was as if a dam had burst and

[1] The other two were Eugenio Montale and Giuseppe Ungaretti. See Joseph Cary, *Three Modern Italian Poets: Saba, Ungaretti, Montale*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
[2] Forster, "Letter to Forrest Reid 13 March 1915", in "Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid (1912-1946)", manuscripts, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

everything flows spontaneously)[3] and the writing played a significant role in containing his neurosis.

In both texts, the eponymous characters appear to exit the novel and invade their authors' biography. Forster uses Maurice to talk about homosexuality and homosexual acts in his letters,[4] and Ernesto enters Saba's life several times creating a blurry boundary between life and the literary fictional world.[5] The problematic relationship between the authors and their two unpublished novels is illuminated by their private writing, by which I mean a specific body of work that is not meant for publication. Within this however, and separate from the private *oeuvre* of letters, diaries etc., I propose to create a new literary category for the "posthumous queer writing" whose existence the authors see as an addition to their *oeuvre*, but only after their deaths. This queer writing exists in a queer space, a space that collides with the "public *oeuvre*" – by which I mean the published corpus during the author's life, associated to their name.

Roland Barthes's 1968 essay, "The Death of the Author"[6], became the starting point in most discussions of the "author" from a poststructuralist perspective. The following year, 1969, Michel Foucault argued for a de-personalization of the author. [7] Feminism, post-colonialism, and other identitarian forms of literary criticism have contested the poststructuralist approach. For example, Michael Hardin maintains that removing the author from the text created a closet space for the author to hide in. He disagrees with Barthes' statement of the neutrality of the text and claims that: "writing expands

[3] Umberto Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada d'Amore, Lettere scelte, (1902-1957)*, Milano: Mondadori, 1983, 250.

[4] In a letter to Florence Barger, from da Alexandria in Egypt, on the 16 October 1916, while talking about his first sexual experience as a parting from respectability, Forster refers to Alec and draws a parallel between his life and Maurice: "It's as if (in the novel) A had been ordered to come and then dismissed at once. […] there is this enormous torrent in me that never stops and of which the novel is only one splash." Again on the 8 November 1916 to Florence Barger, he alludes to a meeting with Mohammed el Adl as " the Maurice sort." in "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Florence Barger", Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

[5] On 1 September 1953, he wrote to Nora Baldi: "Oggi ho trovato dal barbiere un Ernesto (quale Ernesto, Dio mio!): voglio dire un ragazzo circa della sua età, che veniva la prima volta a farsi la barba", (Today I met an Ernesto at the barber's (what an Ernesto, my God!): I mean a boy around his age who came there for his first shave.) Umberto Saba, *Lettere a un'amica. Sessantacinque lettere a Nora Baldi,* Torino: Einaudi, 1966, 60.

[6] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, 142-48.

[7] Michel Foucault, "What is an author?" in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin, 1984, 101-120.

and elucidates identity".[8] While such a general statement may not be applicable to all kind of relationships between the author and text, I find it particularly relevant for Forster and Saba who feared to link their public authorship to *Maurice* and *Ernesto*, to the queer posthumous writing. Hardin claims that removing the authors' biography from their texts, in the case of queer writing, corresponds to relegating again the author to his closet, thus reinforcing homophobia, erasing queerness, and repressing texts from the public.

Forster and Saba removed the text from the public living author, keeping the "dangerous" text separated from the *oeuvre* by postponing its publication, and, at the same time, they create a safe space for the text, allowing it to be written. Therefore we are in the presence not of suppressed novels, as Hardin defines *Maurice*, but of postponed novels, whose importance lies precisely in this postponement. The space this writing occupies has the potential to reveal something about the authors and their particular relationship with writing, their *oeuvre* and their relationship with queerness, at a time when same-sex desire was stigmatized and marginalized. Queer, therefore, becomes a position from where to look at both the living and the posthumous *oeuvre.*

José Esteban Muñoz presents a convincing argument for the understanding of queerness as existing only in the future, on the horizon.[9] Queerness is not here-and-now, but there and then, and it exists insofar as it is a rejection of the here-and-now for futurity. Relying on the notion of potentiality and anticipatory illumination of art developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Muñoz describes potentiality as a "certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense".[10] In Muñoz's words, "to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer".[11] And this is exactly what in my view both Forster and Saba did with their queer writing.

This chapter addresses the question of how Forster and Saba combined a public existence with queerness, by which I mean any sexuality or sexual

[8] Michael Hardin, "Was Killing the Queer Author Necessary to Liberate the Queer Text?: The Case of Andy Warhol's *A: A Novel*" in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 56, 2009, 219.
[9] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia.* See 1.6.
[10] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 9.
[11] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 27.

activity that is disqualified by heteronormativity, whether in the biographical space or in the literary one. I will show that Forster and Saba expressed ambivalent feelings towards these texts because of the special position they inhabited in their lives and for their relationship with the rest of their works.

I should note that I am not interested in speculating about Saba's sexuality and less in labelling it with this or that identity category.[12] In attempting to resist a sometimes infertile debate on terminology, Derek Duncan suggests that we refer to "'something like' a homosexual/gay/queer subject",[13] thus implying that the allusion and the space for speculation about certain forms of subjectivities can offer "a degree of cultural intelligibility".[14] The case of Saba's sexuality remains opaque, and does not easily allow for any clear sexual definition or category. In the complex relationship between the authors and their texts, the destiny both authors chose for their books will be relevant for exploring the category of queer posthumous writing.

8.2 E.M. Forster and closet/desire/literary failure

During his life Forster's homosexuality was known only by some of his close friends and, despite some speculation, he was perceived to be heterosexual[15] by the public, through the mechanism of compulsory heterosexuality[16]. Using the metaphor of the closet to indicate the space for silence on sexuality as analysed by Sedgwick, I want to investigate how Forster inhabits this space and argue for a close relationship between his closet and his writing.

The complex dynamics articulated by the closet, the problematic "relations of the known and unknown, the explicit and inexplicit around

[12] Antonio Debenedetti writes that "Saba […] fu omosessuale per dovere di lealtà verso la propria natura" (Saba was homosexual out of a sense of loyalty to his true nature), "Lo scandalo di essere Umberto Saba", in Umberto Saba, *Quante rose a nascondere un abisso*: *carteggio con la moglie, 1905-1956*, ed. Raffaella Acetoso, Cesario di Lecce (Lecce): Manni, 2004, 5. Parussa identifies Saba's neurosis in the Freudian explanation of the surplus of repression of homosexuality, Parussa, "Reluctantly Queer", 154. Luca Baldoni also asserts Saba's homosexuality. See Luca Baldoni, "Un Vecchio amava un ragazzo': Homoeroticism in Umberto Saba's late poetry (1935-48)", *Italian Studies*, Vol.. 60, 2, 2005: 221-239.
[13] Duncan, *Reading*, 12.
[14] Duncan, *Reading*, 12.
[15] For information on Forster's biography I mainly rely on Nicholas Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life*, San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1981.
[16] See introduction and chapter 1.

homo/heterosexual definition",[17] as noted by Sedgwick, can be revelatory about other acts of speech, including the very act of silence of which "closetedness" is the performance. I will therefore show, by looking at Forster's private *oeuvre*, how his closetedness forges phases of his literary career.

For most of his life Forster had the habit of recording significant events of his daily life in a diary named "The Locked Journal" (held in the Archive Centre at King's College in Cambridge).[18] In an entry of 21 July 1910, Forster expressed the conflict between his desires and the potential threat to other people's life thus choosing to censor his feelings for the sake of others' approval:

> However gross my desires I find that I shall never satisfy them for the fear of annoying others. I am glad to come across this much good in me. It serves instead of purity. I am two day back from Harrogate, wh.[ich] has done mother no (?) harm so far. Masood here for the night. Happy and interesting. We have the plan of going to Constantinople. [21 July, 1910] [19]

Judith Butler analyses the processes by which "the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications".[20] In her reading, the subject is formed through a mechanism of exclusion that creates a "domain of abject beings".[21] She argues that the subject constitutes itself through a logic of identification with normative sex "through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge".[22] Forster felt disqualified by a domain of heteronormativity where desire is required to be strictly directed towards the other sex and he always opposed his sexual desires to his wish to please and not disappoint the others. The moral judgment is evident in the language used in the previous quotation, where Forster, echoing societal judgment, opposed good and purity to his "gross" desires.

---

[17] Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 3.
[18] "Locked Journal" is a stout notebook with a brass lock, once the property of Inglis Synnot used by EMF as a confidential journal for most of his life with entries from 1909 to 1967.
[19] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", Forster met Syed Ross Masood in 1906, in Weybridge. See Furbank, Vol. I, 143. They developed a long life relation between a friendship and Forster in an entry of his diary in 1910 declared "I love you, Syed Masood". See Furbank, 181.
[20] Butler, *Bodies,* 3.
[21] Butler, *Bodies,* 3.
[22] Butler, *Bodies,* 3.

Forster's feelings influenced his relation to his writing, as he felt as if he was somehow constrained in his writing in terms of what was speakable. The love between men and women that he wrote about in his public acclaimed novels bored him, and in the same year in his diary, Forster expressed a wish for a different book:

> *Desire for a book.* To deal with country life and possibly Paris. Plenty of young men and children in it, and adventure. If possible pity and thought. But not love making – at least of the orthodox kind, and perhaps nor even of the unorthodox. *It would be tempting to make an intelligent man feel towards an intelligent man of lower class what I feel,* but I see the situation too clearly to use it as in Mon Frere Yves where the author is either deceiving himself or the public. [19 Dec, 1910].[23]

Forster is tempted by the idea of a creative space where queerness, coming from his own personal desire, could exist. Once again the language deployed here shows a binary opposition between orthodox and unorthodox sex, thus replicating a heteronormative discourse of exclusion and the stigmatization of certain activities and or/pleasures. He gradually developed a sense of imminent literary failure that seemed to be intertwined with the sexual feelings he is unable to live. The insecurities about the future started to appear in his diary. In May 1910 he wrote:

> It struck me a few days ago how lucky I am - health, money, friends. Most of my troubles come from within or because the ill luck of others worries me. Good luck has done me good hitherto but the future is doubtful. My faults are idleness, and inability to admit that I am wrong, unless I love the accuser very much. I might be envious, *the inevitable decline of my literary reputation will test that*. [14 May, 1910] [24]

His private writing is the space for self-evaluation, where worries appeared with no filter. The negativity of this entry summarizes Forster's guilt and inadequacy towards his literary status. Intertwined with dreams about being able to express his feelings: "Imagine myself if I was loved as I can love", we read in an entry of 1 October 1910.

---

[23] "Locked Diary" (my emphasis). He is referring to Pierre Loti's novel *Mon Frere Yves*.
[24] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", 14 May 1910, (my emphasis).

The dissatisfaction caused by what Forster felt as a constraint to his creativity is reiterated in the following year. In June 1911 he wrote a long entry to summarise his activity as a writer:

> Having sat for an hour in vain trying to write a play. Will analyse causes of my sterility.
> 1. Inattention to health – curable.
> 2. *Weariness of the only subject that I both can and may treat – the love of men for women and vice versa*. Passion and money are the two main springs of action (not of existence) and I can only write of the first, and of that imperfectly. Growing interest in religion does not help me.
> 3. Depressing and enervating surroundings. My life's work, if I have any, is to live with a person who thinks nothing worthwhile. [16 June 1911] [25]

The last book Forster had published before this entry was *Howards End* (1911), and he worried about his future and the impossibility of producing another piece of literary work. The only possible scenario was, in his mind, to write about heterosexual relationships, but this option depressed him and increased his feeling of sterility. Let us focus on the play Forster mentions in his diary. It is an unfinished play, *The Heart of Bosnia*, that Forster wrote in 1911, in a period when, as argued by Vybarr Cregan-Reid, he tried to confine sexuality to the realm of connotations and allusions. Forster's impasse, according to Cregan-Reid, was that he aimed to provide a new possibility for the homosexual body, "for which there were few existing taxonomies to draw upon and with no socially permitted way of doing so".[26]

Forster is trying to negotiate his own desires and his literary persona, navigating through impervious zones. In the previous quotation, the dichotomy between work and private life is problematized and Forster seemed to reiterate the danger and almost the impossibilities of the two aspects to coexist. In his experimenting with a new and dangerous subject for him, he turned to a different genre in the hope that the structure could help him to end this "sterility". The play was never published but it is relevant in its representing "a twofold

[25] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", (my emphasis).
[26] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 453.

dramatization of failed connection for Forster, both thematically and in terms of the unpublishability, and consequently the unperformability of the text itself".[27]

In the same period Forster was working on a novel, *Arctic Summer,* left unfinished because of his uncertainty about the development of the relationship between two male characters. Albeit tamely and allusively, Forster was starting to represent homoeroticism and this caused him problems with the structure of his writing.[28] The entry on the last day of 1911, in a typical Forsterian convention, is dedicated to a summary of the most significant events of the year both in his private and public life:

> Literature. Very bad. One good story – The Point of it – one bad unpublished play – The Heart of Bosnia. That is all. *I seem through at last and others begin to suspect it. Idleness, depressing conditions, need for a fresh view of all life before I begin writing each time, paralyse me.* Just possible I may finish Arctic Summer, but see nothing beyond. Like writing erotic short stories, some of which may be good. […] Terrible year on the whole. […] I am only happy away from home. [31 January 1911] [29]

Forster seemed to confine to the closet not only his sexuality but also what he perceived to be his failure as a writer, creating a domain of secrecy to be jealously preserved. Neither *The Heart of Bosnia* nor *Arctic Summer* could allay the sense of literary frustration that Forster had already lamented in his diaries; in fact they confirmed and intensified his feelings. This frustration did not change through 1912, and at the very beginning of 1913 Forster referred to himself as "dried up":

> I am dried up. Not in my emotions, but in their expression. I cannot write at all. […] Please do not mention this, as few people know. It often makes me very unhappy. I see beauty going by and have nothing to catch it. The only book I have in my head is too like Howards End to interest me. […] I want something beyond the field of action and behaviour [February 2 1913].[30]

---

[27] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 452.
[28] For a brief and exhaustive analysis of this novel see Cregan-Reid and also Bristow in *Queer Forster*, 120-125.
[29] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", (my emphasis).
[30] E. M. Forster, "Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid", Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge, February 2, 1913.

In a sort of confession, that according to Foucault displays and requires an interlocutor ready to absolve,[31] Forster shared with Reid his worries and carefully created an important dichotomy between expression and emotions, positing his aridity in the realm of the former. His inability to express his feelings, however, is also linked to what was representable, something that held him back from his creativity. In March of the same year he lamented, once again to Reid, that: "[a]s for school stories, I might write them if I could write freely, but this is impossible in the Public's present state, and it bores me to write insincerely".[32]

Despite Forster feeling "dried up" and "sterile", Cregan-Reid noted that "between 1911 and 1914 Forster managed to produce a number of short stories and articles, began three novels (*A Passage to India* and *Maurice*), and he even drafted two plays".[33] The sterility and the silence, therefore, were confined to the specific space of his public *oeuvre*. Forster struggled to write something for publication and his attempts to find different modalities for expressing his creativity concurred in exacerbating a sense of literary failure, paralleled by the need to keep his sexual desire quiet and secret.

The end of this silence and sterility seemed to arrive in Forster's life when he started the writing of *Maurice*. It is here that, I argue, he finally found a way to express the "unorthodox" love making[34], as he called it, into a novel and to break the mode of writing between the lines that had characterized his previous writing into an explicit and consolidated representation of the homosexual body. On the 3 December 1913 Forster wrote:

> *Maurice born on Sept. 13th.* He tells the mood that created him. But will he ever be happy. He has become an independent existence – Greenwood feels the same.[35] [31 December 1913]

Since the very beginning, *Maurice* seemed to acquire its own status. The use of the masculine subject pronoun opens up two different interpretations: Forster is either referring to the book, addressing it with a "he", or he is referring to the

[31] See 1.3 on Foucault
[32] Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid", Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge, 23 March 1913.
[33] Cregan-Reid, "Modes of Silence", 446.
[34] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", 19 December 1910.
[35] E. M. Forster "Locked Journal", (my emphasis).

eponymous character through a metonymical process. Either way, I think Forster endowed it with a particular status and the personification of the character that "is born" corroborates this "independent existence". The very space that *Maurice* inhabits is therefore peculiar.

In the same entry, Forster debated on his cruising visits to Hyde Park, a notorious place of encounters for men in search of sexual activities:[36] "lustful thoughts and glances leave a terrible depression behind them" whereas "[a]cts would not – they involve the personal, however grossly. I woke with desolation and impotence weighing on me, and felt it grotesque to continue Maurice".[37] Additionally Forster mentioned once again his sterility, this time in relation to criticism and his public profile. The journey to India he took in the same year contributed, in his view, to ease the pressure on publication and made him "more of a 'personage' – more able to defend my sterility against criticism".[38] Relieved from public pressure, Forster is also released from his sense of sterility and is anxious to communicate to his friends. In a letter to Reid, while he explained why he wrote *Maurice*, he claimed:

> I wrote the book because it, or baser things, have for several years weighed on my mind: it was one of the causes of my sterility, and now that I have relieved myself I hope to go on to publishable work.[39]

Instead of recognizing in *Maurice* the end of his literary impasse, Forster attributed to it the cause of his sterility, the obstacle to continue with his public writing.

In the final note, written in 1960 and published with the novel in 1971, Forster talks about *Maurice* and how he wrote it:

> *Maurice* dates from 1913. It was the direct result of a visit to Edward Carpenter at Millthorpe. Carpenter had a prestige which cannot be understood today. He was a rebel appropriate to his age. […] He was a socialist who ignored industrialism and a simple-lifer with an independent income and a Whitmannic poet whose nobility exceeded his strength and, finally, he was a believer in the Love of Comrades,

[36] See Furbank, *E.M. Forster,* 255*;* Houlbrook, *Queer* London, 55 and also Wendy Moffat, *E.M. Forster: A New Life,* London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
[37] E. M. Forster "Locked Journal", (my emphasis).
[38] E. M. Forster "Locked Journal", (my emphasis).
[39] E. M. Forster, "Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid", 15 March 1915.

> whom he sometimes called Uranians. It was this last aspect of him that attracted me in my loneliness. For a short time he seemed to hold the key to every trouble. I approached him through Lowes Dickinson, and as one approaches a saviour […] the whole thing went through without a hitch. It was finished in 1914. [40]

Carpenter, whom Forster mentioned in a diary entry dated 1913, helped him to escape what he called his loneliness. *Maurice* reassured Forster about his ability to write, albeit not for publication. Forster worked on the first version of *Maurice* throughout 1914. Because of his intention to publish it after his death (therefore as a work that would eventually join his public writing), he is concerned both about (future) literary approval and, at the same time, about keeping it secret. Forster's desire to be approved is a leitmotiv in his private writing, and in the case of *Maurice,* he selected his own readers in the hope of receiving approval: "the friends, men and women, to whom I showed it liked it. But they were carefully picked".[41] The fact that he needs approval for *Maurice,* confirms his desire to posthumously publish it so that it could join his public *oeuvre*.

Forster worked for over thirty years on the novel by adding and rewriting parts, and in 1969 – two years before he died – he collaborated with the editor of the first published edition to guarantee *Maurice*'s posthumous existence. While he burned his short erotic stories after his friend Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson's disgust at them,[42] he chose a different destiny for *Maurice*. The novel acquired a special position in Forster's autobiography and he used it to communicate his homosexuality to some of his friends-readers.

In the next sections I will show the evidence of his need for approval in his private writing, and what Forster changed over the years in *Maurice* in order for it to achieve his goal of making a statement about the rights of homosexuals.

8.3 Literary/biographical legitimation

> Now happiness weakens, partly my work goes slower, partly Dickinson is grieved and shocked by my short story, Meredith wasn't. *How dependent on approval!* But I have learnt that happiness is only for the strong and why I have had so little of it the last few years. [43]

[40] E. M. Forster "Terminal Note" in E. M. Forster, *Maurice,* 217.
[41] E. M. Forster "Terminal Note", in E. M. Forster, *Maurice,* 217.
[42] E. M. Forster "Locked Journal", 17 December 1913.
[43] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", 6 December 1913.

In December 1913, Foster complains in his diary that the happiness caused by the "birth" of *Maurice* in September, ended because of his need for literary approval. In another entry he reiterated his decline as an author and linked it to Dickinson's negative reaction at his erotic short story:

> Certainly only happiness is in work. How absurd and for me how serious. My smooth spurt is over, ended by Dickinson's disgust at my short story. So here I am with 3 unfinished novels on my hands. Even mother must notice I'm played out soon.[44] [17 December 1913]

The feeling of being sterile did not abandon Forster, and in order to feel reassured, he expands his private circle of readers of *Maurice* that could at least alleviate his sense of literary failure.

One of the first to read and give feedback on *Maurice* was Carpenter who, on 23 August 1914, sent a letter with his comments on the novel:

> I have read your 'Maurice' after all, and am very much pleased with it. I don't always like your rather hesitating tantalising impressionist style – tho'[ugh] it has subtleties but I think the story has many fine points. You succeed in giving the atmosphere round the various characters, and there are plenty of happenings wh.[ich] is a good thing. Maurice's love affairs are all interesting, and I have a mind to read them again, if I can find time – so I won't send the MS [manuscript] back for a day or two. *I am so glad you end up on a major chord.* I was so afraid you were going to let Scudder go at the last – but you saved him and saved the story, because the end tho' improbable is not impossible and is the one bit of real romance – wh. those who understand will love.[45]

Carpenter approved of the epilogue of the first version of the novel, where Maurice and Alec retreat to the greenwood and live as a couple outside of society. In his view, the happy ending was a way to allow for the possibility of a queer future, a space where two men coming from two different social classes can live together, something that was denied by society in real life.

In December 1914, Forster received a long letter in which Dickinson gave him detailed feedback on *Maurice*. He expressed appreciation for the love affair

[44] E. M. Forster, "Locked Journal", 17 December 1913.
[45] E. M. Forster, "LETTERS book I", manuscript, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. (my emphasis).

between Maurice and Clive but he was less keen on the delineation of Alec and his relationship with Maurice. He thought the novel to be:

> almost perfect. It breaks my heart almost. Almost all, up to the entry of Scudder, I know from long suffers (?) much joy too, but always frustration and defeat, in the end. With Scudder my personal contact ceases. It may be all right, but I can't feel or see it.[46]

In his reading he is quite critical of the class gap for stylistic reasons: "the new motive of class war seems to me to break the unity. In fact you seem to me then to begin to have a theory, instead of recording. There's no reason why you shouldn't, and it may be a right theory. But it leaves me cold".[47] Dickinson was not convinced by the "theory", however he felt that "the reality of Maurice [was] complete" and that Clive was "admirable".[48] In the same letter we learn that Dickinson had previously given suggestions that Forster had chosen to ignore: "I had marked them before and you must have considered them and passed them".[49]

Lytton Strachey, a member of the Bloomsbury Group of which Forster was a peripheral member, read the novel sometime in 1915 and in a letter dated 12 March 1915 he offered his detailed comments.[50] He shared with Dickinson the same concerns about the class issue that he perceived to be "rather a red herring" and was perplexed about the end. Like Dickinson, he liked the affair between Clive and Maurice better because he felt that the falling in love between Maurice and Alec was "possible, but it's certainly queer as it happens"[51] and he did not see the grounds for a long relationship. For this reason he found the epilogue – what he called "your Sherwood Forest ending" – not strong enough and "slightly mythical".[52] Strachey also disapproved of Forster's distrust of lust in the novel. Despite his criticism, on the whole, Strachey liked *Maurice*: "I enjoyed it very much indeed – I think really more than

---

[46] E. M. Forster, "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson", December 1914, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge
[47] Forster, "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson".
[48] Forster, "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson".
[49] Forster, "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson".
[50] Lytton Strachey, "Letter to E.M. Forster, 12 March 1915", in Philip Gardner, ed., E. *M. Forster: The Critical Heritage*, London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1984, 429-432.
[51] Lytton Strachey, "Letter to E.M. Forster, 430.
[52] Strachey, "Letter to E.M. Forster, 12 March 1915", 430.

the others".[53] For someone like Forster, who seemed to be in constant search of approval, the fact that two of the readers found *Maurice* his best literary achievement was extremely significant. In a letter to E.J. Dent on the 6 March 1915, Forster wrote about the feedback he received from Carpenter, Roger Fry and Sydney Waterlow:

> Dear Dent,
> Thanks awfully for both your letters. You can scarcely imagine the loneliness of such effort as this – a year's work! *How one longs for praise shamelessly*! You have given me the greatest comfort and pleasure. […]
> Carpenter has read and liked it, but he is too unliterary to be helpful: he took to Alec and thought him improbable but possible, and as that part was then bad and unfinished he might think him better now. You did not mention A. in your second letter – someday I would like to hear your criticism. *About the epilogue, I quite agree, and it shall be altered,* as shall the B.M. allusion. […]
> Roger Fry and Sydney [Waterlow] have also read the book, and their opinions, being totally unbiased, are interesting. R. agrees with you that it's beautiful and the best work I have done. S. finds it moving, and persuasive to all but bigots, admirable as a sociological tract, full of good things but he finds the characters weighed down by these, Clive and his decay difficult, Alec vague, Mrs. Hill's[54] lack of a bed-pan incredible; and, speaking generally, nothing in it better than I have done already. *I am much dependent on criticism*, and now, backed by you and some others, do feel that I have created something absolutely new, even to the Greeks. Whitman nearly anticipated me but he didn't really know what he was after, or only half knew – shirked, even to himself, the statement.[…] [55]

This long quotation shows how much Forster valued his friends' good opinion, and what special space *Maurice* occupied in his writing. *Maurice* became so important that Forster was offended when his friend Hugh Meredith showed no emotion or interest in it. This even led Forster to question their friendship: "I was very badly hit by his utter indifference to Maurice and the pain has opened my

[53] Strachey, "Letter to E.M. Forster, 12 March 1915", 429.
[54] In the 1914 version, Maurice's surname was Hill; it was changed into Hall when Forster met a geophysicist named Maurice Hill, a member of King's College. Cfr. P. N. Furbank *E.M. Forster: A Life*, Vol.. 2, 304.
[55] Forster, "Letter to Dent, 6 March 1915" in "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and E.J. Dent", Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge, (my emphasis).

eyes little by little to his general indifference. To turn a hero into a jolly old boy is a ghastly task, but it must be done".[56]

The urge to be praised intertwined at times with a desire for coming out. On several occasions Forster sent the manuscript as a vehicle for a confession of his sexuality. That was the case with his friend Forrest Reid, to whom Forster wrote a letter dated 23 January 1915 to introduce *Maurice*. Forster was worried that this confession could put "a severe strain on our friendship" but he was confident it would not and he also explained the reasons why he felt the urge to send *Maurice*:

> I am taking quite a grave risk for two reasons – first one's ordinary desire to be read and secondly my knowledge that you will be glad to know I have written *something,* and am not sterile as I am obliged to pretend to the world. [23 January 1915] [57]

The end of sterility and the desire to be read and praised are, once again, at the centre of Forster's preoccupations. There is also another important element that is the desire for Forster to confess his sexuality, the desire to be absolved by his friends in the mechanism analysed by Foucault.[58] Forster used *Maurice* again in the same way with his friend Florence Barger:

> To you it will reveal a new and painful world, into which you will hardly have occasion to glance again: a tiny world that is generally unknown to all who are not born in it. My only fear is that it may make me seem remote to you – not for one instant repellent, but remote. […] Let me hear […] when you'll read it. [28 March 1915] [59]

In his posthumous writing Forster wanted to make a statement about the injustice queer subjects had to face in society. In a letter of 13 March 1915 to Reid, he complains about the terminology used by society to describe homosexuals: "'perverts' (an absurd word, because it assumes they were given a choice, but let's use it)". Forster argued that the association between badness and "perverts" is a direct result of societal attitudes towards them. Using

[56] Forster, "Letter to Florence Barger, 10 August 1915".
[57] Forster, "Letter to Forrest Reid, 23 January 1915" in Forster, "Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid", Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.
[58] See 1.3.
[59] "Letter to Florence Barger, 28 March 1915".

Maurice as an example, he wrote that he "is, roughly speaking, good, but Society nearly destroys him, he nearly sinks through his life furtive and afraid, and burdened with a sense of sin". In *Maurice*, the eponymous character is saved by the encounter with Alec and Forster insisted that we should "blame Society not Maurice, and be thankful even in a novel when a man is left to lead the best life he is capable of leading!"[60]

The second part of the letter is worth quoting in its length because it touches upon diverse elements and gives an extensive idea of the psychological, social and political investment Forster put into writing *Maurice*:

> Though I waver, I want not renunciation and mist at the bottom of my heart, but wind and blue sky, and I think that the poor perverts, to whom I belong, should be given a fairer chance. Perhaps I should collapse at the first touch of persecution, but this sometimes seems a cause that's worth dying for – it's any how the only one that the little bundle of fragments that's I can serve. To give these people a chance – to see whether their Paradises are really nearer any Hell than Penal Servitude, whether their convictions of Sin are really more than burrs in the social fabric that the heart and brain, working together, can pluck out – that's why I wrote about Maurice and let him meet Alec – not saints or aesthetes either of them … but *just ordinary affectionate men*.[61]

The condition into which society compelled homosexuals is what concerned Forster, who complained about the injustice of exclusions from respectable society. For Forster, *Maurice* was a fundamental step out of his sterility as a writer, and the approval from his readers pleased him and contributed to his constant working on the novel until his death. The novel became an important part of his private life, one that he used to explain his sexuality to some of his friends and that he considered a sort of testament to leave after his death. Feelings of happiness for having written it alternated with the frustration for having written a novel that was "unpublishable until my death or England's".[62]

[60] Forster, "Letter to Forrest Reid 13 March 1915"
[61] Forster, "Letter to Forrest Reid 13 March 1915" (my emphasis).
[62] "Letter to Florence Barger, 24 June 1914".

The fact that Forster repeatedly reworked the novel bears witness to a detailed project Forster had; the changes he introduced over the years witnessed the polishing of the novel to fit his agenda.

8.4 Polishing/changing/fitting

The novel as it was published in 1971 is the version dated 1960, when Forster wrote the "Terminal Note". In the Archive Centre, at King's College, Cambridge, there are two typed-written versions, respectively dated 1914 and 1932. The former is a copy found in 1967 amongst Hugh Greenwood's papers, after his death. It is the only extant copy of 1914. In the 1932 version the epilogue is no longer present and there is a different finale. In this section, I would like to focus on the different ends of the novel because this is what Forster worked incessantly on, most notably by deleting the epilogue that ended the 1914 version.

In the published version, in the final chapter, XLVI Maurice informs Clive that he will spend the rest of his life with Alec and Clive tries to persuade him to agree on a last meeting:

> "Next Wednesday, say at 7.45. Dinner-jacket's enough, as you know."
> They were his last words, because Maurice had disappeared thereabouts, leaving no trace of his presence except a little pile of the petals of the evening primrose, which mourned from the ground like an expiring fire. To the end of his life Clive was not sure of the exact moment of departure, and with the approach of old age he grew uncertain whether the moment had yet occurred. The Blue Room would glimmer, ferns undulate. Out of some eternal Cambridge his friend began beckoning to him, clothed in the sun, and shaking out the scents and sounds of the May Term.
> But at the time he was merely offended at a discourtesy, and compared it with similar lapses in the past. He did not realise that this was the end, without twilight or compromise, that he should never cross Maurice's track again, nor speak to those who had seen him. He waited for a little in the alley, then returned to the house, to correct his proofs and to devise some method of concealing the truth from Anne.[63]

[63] E. M. Forster, *Maurice*, 214.

Maurice disappears from Clive's life, and from the scene for good, and we are uncertain about his future with Alec. Clive remains confined in his heteronormative conventions and can only relive this moment in his memory, from now on.

In the 1914 version, chapter XLVI does not exist and the novel ends with chapter XLV, which describes Maurice's journey to Southampton to say goodbye to Alec who is about to leave for Argentina. Once at the harbour, Maurice meets Mr Borenius, the reverend of Penge, and they talk about Alec's future. The boat leaves but Maurice finds out that Alec has decided to stay in England to spend his life with him. This is where the version of 1914 finishes:

> He faced Mr. Borenius, who had lost all grasp of events. Alec had completely routed him. Mr. Borenius assumed that love between two men must be ignoble, and so could not interpret what had happened. He became an ordinary person at once, his irony vanished. In a straightforward and rather silly way he discussed what could have befallen young Scudder and then repaired to visit friends in Southampton. Maurice called after him, "Mr. Borenius do look at the sky – it's gone all on fire", but the rector had no use for the sky when on fire, and disappeared.[64]

In the version of 1914, this meeting was followed by the "Epilogue" – published as appendix in the Abinger edition[65] – that presented the destiny of Maurice and Alec in the greenwood where, after five years of life together, they are seen by Kitty, Maurice's sister.[66] Maurice and Alec live working in the wood and the narration is through Kitty's perspective who reflects on the nature of their relationship. The interaction between Kitty and Maurice is very brief, and she gradually makes sense of the fact that Alec and Maurice are "in love". The final lines of the epilogue focus on Alec's and Maurice's decision to move in order to escape the possible consequences of Kitty's reporting them:

> Couched in a shed near their work – to sleep rough had proved safer – they shared in whispered review the events of the day before falling asleep. Kitty was included, and they decided to leave their present job, and find work in a new district, in case she told the Police and returned. In the glow of manhood "There we shall

[64] Forster, *Maurice,* 207.
[65] The critical edition of the book edited by Oliver Stallybrass. See chapter 4.1.
[66] Gardner, "The Evaluation", 217.

> be safe" they thought. They were never to be that. But they were together for the moment, they had stayed disintegration and combined daily work with love; and who can hope for more?[67]

The narrator's voice makes the life of Maurice and Alec explicit, and Kitty in the rest of the "Epilogue" remains the focus of the narration. Forster thus breaks the silence and the suspension of the end of the novel, and Kitty reads the two characters' lives through the conventional and heterocentric language where love and work seem to be the greatest possible achievement. Why did Forster decide to eliminate it from the later version? We do not have precise information about this decision, nor do we know when exactly he eliminated it. We know that Strachey considered it "slightly mythical" but we also know that Forster did not follow his readers' advice unless it fitted with his project. Cregan-Reid convincingly reads the deletion of the epilogue as Forster's choice to employ silence as a mode of political meaning where "the lives of the two men who exist outside of society function as part of a wider commentary on the generic possibilities of fiction and of discourse itself".[68] The published end puts at the centre Clive who, instead of speculating about Maurice's and Alec's future, focuses on the past, implying that only heterocentric discourse can be articulated with words, whereas the rest is given to silence. But this silence, I argue, suspends possibility and instead of constraining the future with words and actions, opens up a space for queerness on the horizon, as a possibility positioned in the future, in the notion I borrowed from Muñoz. At the end of the published *Maurice*, as noted by Cregain-Reid, "[b]y shifting focus to Clive, the novel moves to narrate that which can be said, and it is only made sense of the past".[69] In his view, Alec and Maurice refused the terms of acceptability and performativity imposed by heteronormative society "outside their class and their geography in a way that marrying heterosexuals, like Clive, are not permitted to".[70] In the epilogue the characters are seen through a heterocentric logic according to which all possible relationships could be only understood in terms of binary structures.

---

[67] Forster, *Maurice,* 224.
[68] Cregan-Reid, "Modes", 457.
[69] Cregan-Reid, "Modes", 457.
[70] Cregan-Reid, "Modes", 457.

Despite eliminating the epilogue, Forster insisted on keeping a happy ending. We know that he had always been preoccupied with the ending of the novel since the very beginning of his career as a writer. Already in 1904, in a paper entitled "Happy vs. Sad endings", Forster articulated some ideas about how authors should not deny happiness in fiction because: "Is there not happiness in daily life, happiness sure and certain? Then why should the author neglect it?"[71] He was quite critical about sad endings in fiction as "a sign both of conscientiousness & incompetence"[72] because writers "are too clumsy to be optimistic in art".[73] In 1906, he elaborated a theory to which he remained faithful to for the rest of his writing career:

> All I write is, to me, sentimental. A book which doesn't leave people either happier or better than it found them, which doesn't add some permanent treasure to the world, isn't worth doing. […] This is my 'theory'.[74]

He conceived the idea that fiction should be a better and happier place, a space where happiness could and should exist. The ending of *Maurice*, as we have seen, was a concern of Forster's and discussing the epilogue in a letter to Dickinson he agreed that he could have "resolve[d] into dust or mist, but the temptation's overwhelming to grant to one's creations a *happiness actual life does not supply*."[75] In the final note he confirmed his intention to have a happy ending:

> A happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write otherwise. I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows, and in this sense Maurice and Alec still roam the greenwood.[76]

Queer hope is what Forster is working on while working on *Maurice* over the years and insisting on the importance of a happy ending and hope,

---

[71] "'Happy v. Sad Endings' 1904 – Autograph manuscript of 'Happy v. Sad Endings', probably given to an undergraduate society", manuscript Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.
[72] Forster, Diary, 27 February, 1905, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge, quoted also in Furbank, *E.M. Forster: A Life,* Vol.. I, 132.
[73] Forster, Diary, 27 February, 1905.
[74] Forster, Diary, 27 February, 1905.
[75] Forster, "Letter to Dickinson, 13 December 1914", (my emphasis).
[76] Forster, "Note to Maurice", 218.

somewhere in a different time and space. The very dedication of the book "to a happier year" confirms this reading and positions the novel in a special space.

8.5 Umberto Saba: *Ernesto* as a rascal

Saba started writing *Ernesto* in May 1953 while staying at the clinic Villa Electra in Rome to try and cure his neurosis. He himself called the process of writing a "crisis of motherhood" and used the metaphor of birth to describe something that, as in the case of *Maurice* for Forster, was a pressing presence.[77] Some of his friends – mainly other writers and family members – whom he allowed to read the book in its very early stages expressed a positive opinion. Nevertheless, Saba left the novel unfinished, offering numerous alibis to justify his inability to complete it. The novel was published only in 1975, some twenty years later, thanks to his daughter Linuccia, who took over the literary works of her father.

As in the case of *Maurice*, *Ernesto* was published posthumously because Saba perceived it as unpublishable and because he feared this "mascalzone" ("rascal")[78] would put at risk the poetic production to which he had dedicated all his life, *Il Canzoniere*, (*Songbook*) and therefore his public figure as an author. *Ernesto* occupied a problematic space in Saba's production and urged him to rethink his works and the relationship between biography and literary production. The presence of this queer writing required Saba to reflect on preserving his *oeuvre* from indiscreet and dangerous allegations. At the same time Saba felt a desire to talk about this novel. He expressed the desire to read it during the ceremony for his degree *honoris causa* from the University of Rome: "Oh Dio, se invece di quel discorsetto avessi potuto leggere *Ernesto*". (Oh God, if only instead of that short address I could have read out *Ernesto*).[79] Ernesto often departed his fictional world to inhabit Saba's biography in a problematic relation. Saba frequently engaged in his letters with the idea of post-mortem publications. In this context, *Ernesto* can be seen as the actual

[77] Saba, "Letter to Bruno Pincherle, 20 June 1953", in Sergio Miniussi*, "*Tredici lettere in cui si parla di *Ernesto*", in Umberto Saba, *Ernesto,* Torino: Einaudi, 1975, 143.
[78] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 13 August 1953", in "Fondo Umberto Saba" in Centro di ricerca sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei, University of Pavia.
[79] Saba, "Letter to Bruno Pincherle, 27 June 1953", "Centro di ricerca sulla tradizione manoscritta di autori moderni e contemporanei," University of Pavia.

practice of his thoughts. Only once did Saba express the desire to burn it,[80] however he decided to leave it for posthumous publication, in a precise literary choice for a post-mortem addendum to his public writing. I will find evidence in his private writing, mainly in his correspondence since we do not have a diary, for where he discussed the impossibility of publication and the reasons for not finishing the novel. I will argue that the alibis Saba created are masking devices for protecting himself and *Il Canzoniere* from the emergence of his biography, and for preserving the acclaimed author persona that he had constructed through his poetic efforts.

8.6 Pregnancy and motherhood of *Ernesto*

Saba compared the writing of *Ernesto* to pregnancy: "ho avuto, mentre scrivevo, la netta impressione di essere incinta" (I had, while writing, the distinct feeling of being pregnant.)[81] On 20 August 1953 to his friend Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, Saba used the same expression referring a "crisi di maternità" (crisis of motherhood), linking the writing of a novel to giving birth and writing a poem to an "erezione" (erection).[82] The sexual and maternity language is replaced in a letter to his wife Lina by the metaphor of the dam: "È stato come se si fosse rotta una diga, e tutto affluisce spontaneamente". (It was as if a dam had burst and everything flowed spontaneously.)[83] In both cases Saba recognized *Ernesto* as a presence that he could not control, a sort of independent existence that forced itself into his writing. The idea of a posthumous book was already present in 1946: "Che bel libro potrei scrivere! Da pubblicare una parte da me vivo, e l'altra dopo la mia morte, perché non ho nessuna voglia di finire linciato". (What a wonderful book I could write! To be published part during my lifetime and part after my death, because I have no wish to finish up lynched.)[84] He reiterated the same prospect in a letter to Vittorio Sereni dated 22 February

[80] See 8.7.
[81] Saba, "Letter to Bruno Pincherle, 20 June 1953", 143.
[82] Saba, "Letter to Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, 20 August 1953", in Umberto Saba-Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, *Il vecchio e il giovane - Carteggio 1930-1957*, Milano: Mondadori, 1965, 135.
[83] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953" in Saba, *La* Spada, 250.
[84] Saba spent the year in Milan and showed the idea to write a book consisting of a collection of autobiographical short stories, whose title should have been *Ricordi del mondo meraviglioso*. The project was never finished but some of the stories were commissioned by Mondadori and published separately. See Arrigo Stara, "Cronologia" in Saba, *Tutte le Prose*, LXXI.

1948, while expressing again the idea and desire to write a final book: "un libro che non avrei scritto per nessuna forma di "vanità" (non avrebbe potuto uscire che dopo la mia morte); ma semplicemente perché ero incinta di lui. …È spaventevole, questo libro io non lo scriverò mai; è già, dentro di me, abortito" (a book I would not have written for any form of "vanity" (it could only have been published after my death); but simply because I was pregnant with it … It is frightening, this book I will never write; it's there already, inside me, aborted).[85] The metaphor of the pregnancy is complicated, in this quotation, by the possibility of abortion, of failure to structure this final book. Saba's expression is vague but it shows how he had been thinking about the possibility of writing a will and also suggests an ambivalent anxiety about this prospect.

Saba often reflected upon the idea that his public figure would be compromised if these literary texts were to be published. In 1951 he returned to the desire for a final book in a letter to Carlo Levi:

> Mi sarebbe piaciuto chiudere la mia vita – e il mio dolore – con un immenso fuoco di artificio nel quale tutti – me per il primo – saremmo allegramente saltati. Ma sono proprio quelle cose "che non si possono fare"; e che non farei nemmeno se avessi, a portata di mano, la famosa fialetta d'acido prussico, che tanto e da tanti anni e tanto vanamente invoco, per prenderlo subito dopo finito il libro, e sottrarmi così al linciante furore popolare.[86]
>
> (I would have liked to end my life – and my sorrow – with an immense bonfire in which everyone – starting with me – would gladly explode. But these are precisely the things "one cannot do"; and indeed I wouldn't do, even if I had, to hand, the famous little vial of Prussic acid that so much and for so many years and in vain I have been calling out for, ready to be taken immediately after finishing the book, in order to escape the lynch mob).

What strikes one in Saba's words is the return to the idea of writing something that could be dangerous because of its supposed reception. The desire for "prohibited" writing comes back time and again in Saba's letters. In 1952, the project of writing a fictional book in prose became more concrete thanks to his rediscovery of some short stories on Jews that he had written in

[85] Umberto Saba-Vittorio Sereni, *Il cerchio imperfetto. Lettere 1946-1954*, Milano: Archinto, 2010, 75-86.
[86] Saba, "Letter to Carlo Levi, December 1951", Fondo Umberto Saba, quoted also in Saba, *Prose*, xxxviii.

1912.[87] Lavagetto convincingly suggests a possible link between *Ernesto* and this project,[88] based on the idea of posthumous publication and, I add, of performativity of the text. Saba perceived these books as impossible to write and present to the public, in other words "unperformable" during his life. When *Ernesto* "came to life" in 1953, it interrupted Saba's reticence. As in the case of *Maurice* for Forster, Saba started writing very quickly in a state of euphoria, in the clinic. Saba felt the urge to finally give voice and literary life to this idea and he completed the first three chapters in Rome. Once back in Trieste, his writing slowed down, nevertheless Saba finished what would become chapters four and five. *Ernesto* ends after the "Quinto Episodio" but the addition of "Quasi una conclusione" proves that Saba knew that the novel would survive.[89]

Since the very first writing stages however, Saba started claiming that the novel was not publishable and, despite maintaining he had the whole story in his mind, he struggled to finish it and made numerous excuses for not doing so. He is ambiguous and contradictory about his reasons mentioning his age, his lack of tranquility, and other contingent justifications. The peculiar relation with *Ernesto* made Saba feel torn between the desire to keep it secret and to use its potential disruptive force to shock people (as in the previously mentioned idea that he might read it at the ceremony for his honorary degree).

In the following pages, I will look at the letters where Saba explained his motivations for not completing *Ernesto* and not publishing it. I will show that, despite one instance when he asked his daughter Linuccia to burn the manuscript, he made it clear in his letters that he intended to leave the novel to posterity, albeit unfinished. Saba can thus be seen to have positioned queerness on the horizon in the same way as Forster had done.

8.7 "Questioni di linguaggio" (language matters)

One of the first alibis Saba used to validate the impossibility of publication is based on language as he explained to his wife Lina on the 30 May 1953: "La non pubblicabilità del racconto non sta tanto nei fatti narrati quanto nel linguaggio che parlano i personaggi". (The unpublishability of the story does not

[87] See Stara, "Cronologia", LXXV.
[88] Lavagetto, "L'altro Saba", in Saba, *Tutte le Prose,* xxxviii.
[89] For the punctual reconstruction of the process of writing the novel see Grignani, "Introduzione", in Saba, *Ernesto*.

lie in the narrative so much as in the language the characters speak.)[90] The content of the novel, and in particular the sexual acts described there, is not what made it unpublishable; it is the language, rather, that is perceived as scandalous. Saba confirmed his position a few months later, in a letter to Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, where he wrote that "il romanzo non potrà mai, anche ammesso che lo finisca, essere pubblicato, per una ragione, non di fatti – tutto ormai si è detto – ma di linguaggio". (The novel will never, even in the event that I finish it, be published for one reason, not the facts – everything has already been said – but the language.)[91] By repeating this statement, Saba was trying to prove to others and also to himself that the language was the real issue.

The use of the dialect from Trieste that Saba altered to make it closer to Italian, in the dialogues between Ernesto and the man could hardly be seen as a shocking presence in the Fifties, when Italian readers were already used to the manipulation of Italian to make it closer to dialect. As noted by Maria Antonietta Grignani, "il triestino ammorbidito e alquanto italianizzato dei dialoghi non poteva incontrare di per sé una ricezione ostile negli anni Cinquanta" (the softened, rather Italianized Trieste dialect used in the dialogues could not have met other than a hostile reception in the Fifties),[92] therefore Saba probably meant something different by "linguaggio" (language) maybe "un colore, una tonalità" (hue, tone).[93] Grignani's interpretation focuses on the presence of the two languages, the Italianized dialect from Trieste used by the characters and the Italian of the narrator, and she considers the intimacy between the two as being perceived by Saba as scandalous.[94] Along the same line, Favretti argues that the issue could be the dialect that is spoken in the same way by members of different social classes.[95]

---

[90] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, La *Spada*, 250.
[91] Saba, Letter to Quarantotti Gambini, Letter of 20 August 1953, in Saba-Quarantotti, *Il vecchio,* 134.
[92] Grignani, "Introduzione", 6.
[93] Grignani, "Introduzione", 6.
[94] To corroborate this thesis, Grignani analyses all the changes Saba made in the text so as to increase the gap between the two languages, see Grignani, "Introduzione", 10 and ff.
[95] See chapter 6.

These readings, in my view, too quickly accept Saba's statement that it is the language and not the sexual content that is scandalous. Despite Saba's claim that the novel is "castissimo (ma di una castità che la gente non capisce)" (very chaste (but a kind of chastity people do not understand)),[96] the sexual content cannot be dismissed, and must be considered alongside its linguistic expression.

What emerges is a very ambivalent position and some perplexity between a desire to continue, and a creation of credible alibis to justify the impossibility of completing it. Since the very beginning, while in the clinic, Saba had very positive feedback from readers: "Tutte le persone alle quali l'ho letto: Linuccia, Carlolevi, Bollea e un giovane qui ricoverato, dicono che è la più bella cosa che io abbia scritto" (Everyone to whom I read it: Linuccia, Carlolevi, Bollea and a young convalescent, they say it's the best thing I have ever written)[97], he wrote to Lina on the 30 May 1953, after having completed the first episode. At this very early stage he is unsure about whether to continue or to leave the story as it is, "potrebbe anche stare a sé" (it could stand as it is) and "potrebbe fermarsi anche a questo primo episodio" (it could stop after the first episode).[98] Saba hesitated about continuing writing because he was anxious about the possible developments of the story, and he foresaw the dangers that *Ernesto* could mean for his career and his personal life. He added therefore a second justification and identified the ultimate requirement, a peaceful and tranquil environment: "per continuare e finire, mi occorrerebbero due anni di pace assoluta, preferibilmente qui in clinica", (to continue and finish it, I would need two years of absolute peace, preferably here in the clinic)[99] being perfectly aware of the impossibility of staying in the clinic for "un anno, un anno e mezzo, tanto da poter finire in pace il libro" (a year, a year and a half, so that I could finish the book in peace).[100] By insisting on the need for quietness Saba, I suggest, was considering the possibility of abandoning the novel, while leaving open a path for *Ernesto*'s survival.

---

[96] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 22 June 1953, Saba, *La Spada,* 257.
[97] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada*, 250.
[98] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada*, 250.
[99] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada*, 250.
[100] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada*, 254.

When Saba returned to Trieste, the calmness and ease of the clinic were just a memory and the progress of *Ernesto*, as he had predicted, slowed down and increased his sense of failure for not being able to let Ernesto out: "Ho Ernesto, Ernesto mio che vuol venire per intero alla luce" (I have Ernesto, my Ernesto that wants to come out entirely into the light),[101] he wrote to his daughter Linuccia in July. At this point, however, Saba was more firm about his desire to complete the novel: "il terribile desiderio che il libro sia compiuto, e compiuto in tue mani" (the terrible desire that the book is complete, and complete in your hands),[102] he wrote in the same letter. By that time, Saba had finished the second chapter of the "Quarto Episodio"[103] and started to realize (and admitted it in the letter) that tiredness and lack of ease were not the only impediments: there was "certamente qualcosa che, (stanchezza a parte) farà di *Ernesto* un libro incompiuto (certainly something that, (apart from tiredness) will make *Ernesto* an unfinished book)."[104]

Following Lavagetto and Grignani, I read this "something" as referring to structural and biographical elements. Sergio Parussa has analysed how the conspicuous presence of unfinished novels in Italian twentieth-century fiction is linked to an "inability to formally reconcile the novel as a genre with a certain kind of homoerotic inspiration".[105] Undoubtedly, Saba was not familiar with the novel as a genre and he also lacked a language to include homoeroticism and queer acts in his writing, as I have already mentioned. However, what I find particularly stimulating is how in Saba's case, this is problematized further by the intromission of his own biography. Saba was particularly anxious about the development of the relationship between Ernesto and Ilio as no evolution seemed to convince him. If we consider that Saba referred to Ilio's house in Trieste and identified himself as Ernesto in a letter to Linuccia, the problematic nature of the question for him becomes clear. He wrote:

> Quando sarai a Trieste ricordami che ti faccia vedere la casa dove abitava Ilio… Forse anche ci andremo; chi sa che non ci sia ancora e che mi aspetti.

---

[101] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 25 July 1953" in Fondo, also quoted inSaba, *Prose,* 1294.
[102] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 25 July 1953" in Fondo, also quoted inSaba, *Prose,* 1294.
[103] See "Letter to Linuccia, 29 July 1953", in Umberto Saba, *Atroce paese che amo: lettere famigliari (1945-1953),* ed. Gianfranca Lavezzi and Rossana Saccani, Miano: Bompiani, 1987.
[104] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 25 July 1953" in Fondo, also quoted inSaba, *Prose,* 1294.
[105] Parussa, "Reluctantly Queer", 174.

> (When you come to Trieste remind me to show you where Ilio lived…Maybe we'll go there together, and who knows, perhaps he might still be there waiting for me.)[106]

Saba's reluctance to finish *Ernesto* could be explained by the substantial presence of autobiography. Arrigo Stara has argued that it would be possible to reconstruct the entire plot of the novel by looking at the events of Saba's life, tracing the names and models he used to create the fictional world of the novel; a dangerous practice, Stara argues, because it is based on inferences and suppositions difficult to prove.[107] In the same vein, Lavagetto convincingly established a connection between Saba and Ernesto, thus making it difficult not to identify, behind the protagonist of the novel, the young Saba who, in 1898, was 16 years old, exactly like Ernesto in the book.

What I find significant is how Saba felt about the blurry boundaries between this particular queer novel and his biography, and how he struggled to keep the two areas separated. In the writing process he actively worked to limit the biographical presence, as he wrote to his friend, Nora Baldi, on the 28 August 1953:

> Mi sono accorto di aver commesso, nel quarto episodio, dei gravi errori, per cui dovrò, in parte rifarlo: ho lasciato entrare nella trama del romanzetto elementi estranei (tolti alla mia biografia), che hanno e non hanno a che fare con Ernesto.
>
> (I have just realized that I have made, in the fourth episode, some serious mistakes, so I will have to rewrite it in part: I let enter into the plot of my little novel some foreign elements (taken from my biography) relevant and not to Ernesto). [28 August 1953] [108]

The very decision to interrupt the writing is justified in another letter to Nora Baldi as an embarrassment caused by the construction of the characters: "non mi sento di continuare: i motivi li sai. Ero già imbarazzato all'avvicinarsi di Ilio, figurati poi da quello di Eugenia (I don't feel like carrying on: you know the

[106] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 12 August 1953", in Umberto Saba, *Ernesto,* Torino: Einaudi, 1975, 151.
[107] Stara, "Ernesto" in Saba, *Tutte le Prose*, 1298.
[108] Umberto Saba, *Lettere a un'amica, Settantacinque lettere a Nora Baldi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1966, 57.

reasons. I was already embarrassed at the arrival of Ilio, imagine then the arrival of Eugenia).[109] The presence of Ilio and his relationship with Ernesto troubled Saba because, as noted by Grignani, he was unable to hide his biography. *Ernesto* stopped, in her words, "alla stazione successiva dell'autobiografia malcelata" (the stop after the thinly-veiled autobiography).[110] Despite the numerous occasions on which Saba claimed that the novel was all in his head, the issue seemed to be the dangerous intrusion of his biography.

As I explained earlier in this chapter, Forster used characters from *Maurice* to talk about episodes of his life or people he met; similarly, Saba referred to episodes of his life using the characters in *Ernesto*.

At the ceremony for his honorary degree on the 27 June 1953 he read a speech about his teacher of Greek in high school, who strongly criticized his poetry, leading him to abandon the study of the classics.[111] Lavagetto noticed the intertextuality between Saba's speech and the novel. After Ernesto confesses to his mother his relationship with the man, she calls the acts "cose brutte e indecenti" (ugly and indecent things) and Ernesto immediately thinks about his poem from his school years that caused an antipathy between him and his teacher. In Lavagetto's analysis, the link is established about indecency: both homosexuality and the poems are connoted as indecent and endowed with a power to challenge the status quo.[112]

Saba went further, and the day after the ceremony, he wrote to Nora Baldi using Ernesto, the character, as an agent in his life and his choices, a sort of mask behind which Saba hid:

> Ernesto, che era un buon ragazzo, ma al quale piaceva far dispetti, premeva perché inserissi nel discorsetto una frase un po' irriverente, che avrebbe – non ne dubito – beati gli studenti che si trovavano nell'Aula. Premeva tanto che io (che gli voglio troppo bene) gli avevo ceduto; ma Linuccia, me la censurò con la massima energia, minacciando perfino, se la lasciavo, di non assistere alla cerimonia. Cosí non gli ho permesso questa volta di dire tutto.
>
> (Ernesto, who was a good boy, but who liked to play tricks, insisted that I put in the speech a slightly irreverent sentence that would,

[109] Saba, *Lettere a un'amica*, 60.
[110] Grignani, "Introduzione", VII.
[111] Saba, "Discorso della laurea", in Saba, *Tutte le prose*, 1046-1051.
[112] Lavagetto, *La Gallina,* 206.

> without doubt, amuse the students in the Hall. He insisted so much that I (as I love him too much) gave into him; but Linuccia, censored it vigorously, threatening that if I left it in, she would not attend the ceremony. So I didn't let him tell everything this time) [28 June 1953] [113]

In this letter, Ernesto became the embodiment of irreverence but at the same time he represented a sort of knowledge and truth about his life. He is described as a good boy with a naughty side and, as noted by Lavagetto, it is hard not to see the connection between the character and the poet described in the speech at University as an "enfant terrible".[114] On other occasions, Ernesto became a type and Saba used it as a model to describe people in real life, as I have already shown.[115]

Saba intended his living *oeuvre* to be separated from this queer posthumous writing. *Il Canzoniere* is the *oeuvre* Saba worked on during all his life with different editions and in which he put all his literary efforts as a poet. He also endowed it with a critical apparatus that he himself wrote under the pseudonym of Giuseppe Carimandrei, between 1944 and 1947.[116] Saba wanted to preserve the investment in this project, the energy that it took him to be recognized as a poet and as a public figure. A novel like *Ernesto*, with its queer content and irreverent language, needed to be kept away from the public domain, especially in the light of the dangerous blurry borders with his biography. The publication of *Ernesto* would have exposed his life to new readings and possibly questioned the legitimate position of his other works. The queer writing had to remain silent in order to avoid leaking dangerously into the rest of Saba's production.

At the same time, there is in Saba, as in Forster, a desire for this queer writing to survive, to be linked to their name. Since the very beginning, Ernesto was born as the final book, the "indicibile" (unspeakable) that required the

---

[113] Saba, *Lettere a un'amica*, 48.
[114] Saba, "Discorso della laurea", 1047.
[115] See 8.1. In a letter to Nora Baldi, Saba wrote that he had read to Ernesto an essay written by the critic Tullio Mogno and Ernesto decided to write a letter to him which is published in the appendix of *Ernesto*. In another letter to Baldi on the 24 August 1953, Saba talked about Ilio pulling Saba's jacket begging him not to tell the story of his sexual interaction with a goat, in Saba, *Lettere a un'amica*, 52.
[116] See Lavagetto, "Introduction", in Saba, *Tutte le Poesie*, XI-LXIX.

maximum distance that only the author's death could guarantee.[117] Saba called it "una gara tra me e la sventura (a race between me and misfortune)"[118] and yet, despite the fact that the possibility of publication is rejected from the very beginning, Saba mentioned it over and over again, choosing an afterlife for *Ernesto*. Saba was well aware of the impact it could have had on his life however, from the very first episodes he engaged, albeit subtly and shyly, with the possibility of publication. In the letter to Lina dated 30 May 1953, the possibility of publication in various forms is examined and the posthumous existence of *Ernesto* taken into consideration:

> Il più che si potrebbe fare sarebbe pubblicare o il breve racconto (se non farò altro) o il romanzo (se finirò il libro) in un'edizione privata di pochi esemplari, e fuori commercio; e, naturalmente, dopo la mia morte.
>
> (The most that could be done would be to publish either the short story (if I couldn't do anything else) or the novel (if I finish the book) in a private, short-run edition, not for sale; and, naturally, after my death). [119]

This was also encouraged by the positive responses he received from the first readers.[120] During his life *Ernesto* could only occupy the hybrid space of queer posthumous writing. Saba wrote to Quarantotti Gambini on the 25 August 1953:

> Sapevo fin da quando ne ho scritta la prima riga in clinica, che non era per la pubblicazione. […] Avrei dovuto interrompere il libro dopo il terzo episodio (sarebbe stato compiuto a sé) invece quei pochi che conoscevano quegli episodi e la trama hanno tanto insistito che ho cominciato e finito il quarto, e cominciato il quinto.
>
> I knew since I wrote the first lines in the clinic that it wasn't for publication. … I should have stopped the book after the third episode

[117] Umberto Saba, *La Spada d'amore,* 256-57.
[118] Saba, "Letter to Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, 20 August 1953", in Umberto Saba-Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini, *Il vecchio e il giovane - Carteggio 1930-1957*, Milano: Mondadori, 1965.
[119] Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada d'amore,* 250.
[120] "Carlolevi diceva che, se lo si potesse pubblicare, sarebbe una rivoluzione nella prosa narrativa, Bollea è ritornato indietro due volte per ringraziarmi di averglielo letto: quasi mi baciava" (Carlolevi said that, if it could be published, it would be a revolution in narrative prose, Bollea came back twice to thank me for reading it to him: he nearly kissed me). Saba, "Letter to Lina, 30 May 1953", in Saba, *La Spada d'amore,* 250.

> (it would have been complete in itself) instead those few who were familiar with those episodes and the plot were so insistent that I began and finished the fourth, and began the fifth. [25 August 1953] [121]

The perspective of a posthumous publication arose since the writing of the first two episodes but he completed five and left in his private writing a plan of the plot.

In a letter to Linuccia on the 25 July Saba included the "Quinto Episodio" and described the development of the plot in detail, with an explicit request to his daughter to keep the letter as evidence of the plot: ("[c]onserva la presente; se non arrivo a finire il libro, che ne rimanga almeno una vaga traccia" (keep this letter; if I cannot finish the book, at least there will be a vague trace) were he unable to complete the book. [122]

Saba chose, as did Forster, to deliver the novel to his afterlife. Only once, in 1955, did he express to Linuccia the unease he felt about leaving unfinished writing. On 17 August 1955 he gave Linuccia the order to destroy the copy in Carlo Levi's possession:

> Senti, Linuccia, io sto così male come forse nessuno può immaginare. In queste condizioni mi seccherebbe assai lasciare in giro cose incompiute, che dovrebbero essere riviste, terminate, ecc. e che così come stanno non hanno senso. Né io avrei mai più la forza, né l'animo di terminare quel romanzetto incompiuto che ho lasciato da lui con l'ordine preciso di bruciarlo appena ne avesse avuto da me l'ordine. Ti prego di passargli l'ordine senza fare ostruzione: e poi subito telegrafare "eseguito".
>
> (Listen, Linuccia, I am so ill, maybe such that no one can even imagine. In my state, it would upset me a great deal to leave lying around unfinished things that should be revised, finished, etc. and that, as they are, make no sense. I would have neither the strength nor the will to finish this incomplete little novel that I left with him with the precise order to burn it as soon as I would give him the word. I

[121] Saba, "Letter to Quarantotti Gambini, 25 August", in Saba- Quarantotti Gambini, *Il vecchio e il giovane*, 134.
[122] Saba, "Letter to Linuccia, 25 July 1953", Fondo also quoted in Saba, *Prose,* 1296. For the evolution of the plot, it is worth quoting the letter to Nora Baldi written on the 24 August 1953 when Saba talks about an encounter between Ilio and Ernesto when both were married. Saba, *Lettere a un'amica,* 52.

> beg you to give him the order without making any objections: and then immediately telegraph "done"). [17 August 1955] [123]

Linuccia and Levi did not follow this request, and in 1962 the typescript still had on the envelope a note written by Levi, "sigillato" (sealed). This is the only time that Saba took into consideration the possibility of burning *Ernesto*. On all the other occasions when he mentions the novel in his private writing, he sanctions its existence and its position in the queer space of posthumous writing.

In a letter to Carlo Levi of 31 August 1953, Linuccia expressed her worry that Saba wanted to interrupt the writing, recognizing in the writing of *Ernesto* a soothing force for Saba's neurosis. The state of fatigue and anxiety caused by Saba's neurosis[124] and the sense of uselessness that had characterized his life after the Second World War seemed to fade while writing *Ernesto.*[125]

In 1964 Linuccia edited the *Prose* for the publisher Mondadori and she did not include *Ernesto*, still debating whether to be faithful to her father' desire to burn it or instead to expand Saba's *oeuvre* by adding it. In 1975, after Pasolini's death and the wave of homophobia that followed it, Linuccia decided to proceed with the publication and gave the manuscript to the publisher Einaudi. In a way she made her father take a position – in favour of a more open society, almost as if with the publication of the novel she had wanted to achieve what her father had imagined doing (but had not done) by reading the novel at the ceremony for his honorary degree.

In the case of both Forster and Saba, it is as if the author is split into two different literary personae, two personae that cannot coexist during the present, and which need to be kept separate, but which will however reunite in the afterlife. The compromise both writers found consisted in leaving their queer writing in a posthumous queer space where *Ernesto* and *Maurice* could remain until, with their authors' deaths, they finally rejoined the rest of Forster's and

[123]Saba, "Letter to Linuccia,17 August 1955, Fondo.

[124] In a letter to Sergio Ferrero, 27 March 1950, Saba writes: " Sto molto male. Non sono più altro che un povero vecchio che passa le sue tristi giornate a letto. (I am very unwell. I am nothing more than a poor old man who spends his sad days in bed.) in Saba, *La Spada d'amore*, 215.

[125] In a letter to Nora Baldi, on the 13 November 1953, Saba complained about his present suffering juxtaposing it with the happy days in the clinic when he started writing *Ernesto*, "Dove sono ormai quei giorni – giorni di Ernesto cosi vicini e cosi lontani?" (Where are now those days- the days of Ernesto, so close and so far away". Saba, *Lettere a un'amica*, 64.

Saba's *oeuvres*, thus transforming our understanding of each novelist's written legacy.

CONCLUSION

Queer posthumous writing marks an intervention into the field of literary studies, comparative literature and queer theory. The thesis posits a new potential mode for the reading of posthumous writings and understanding them in particular contexts.

Maurice and *Ernesto* represent ideal models for this mode of critical reading that show queer posthumous writing as the articulated product of different components that reveals complex relationships between an acclaimed author, his *oeuvre* and a queer desire to write fiction about same-sex desire. A wish that, in both Forster and Saba, became an urge to give voice to a pre-existing idea. These two novels have since become canonical as representative of same-sex desire fiction. But they are more complex than this.

The thesis demonstrates that this kind of writing is characterized by an authorial choice not to publish this queer writing during their lifetimes and to intend them for post-mortem publication. It analyses the existence of a mutual exclusion between this writing and the rest of the authors' canon and that this is the site from which we may understand the relationship between queerness, authorship and 'canonical publishing'. A relationship much ignored in current scholarship.

Despite living in two different historical and cultural contexts, Forster and Saba showed practically identical anxieties about publication. They both shared a fairly unique in literary history in that they each inhabited a hybrid space between literary fame and queerness, and both tried to secure for themselves a certain degree of literary status that would have been threatened, questioned, or even scandalized by the presence of their queer texts. What is also unique about Forster and Saba is their shared desire and intention for a queered literary futurity. The operation was precise: *Maurice* and *Ernesto* needed to be preserved in order to join their authors and the remainder of their *corpus* posthumously.

While biographical readings are shot through with theoretical difficulties, they have proved to be a structural support for thinking about queer posthumous writing. Archives have proved valuable in researching the writers' own acknowledged justifications for demarcating their queer writings from their

mainstream corpus. From the very beginning of the writing process, impublishability was the ensign for both.

In order to interpret these anxieties and to make them explicit, this thesis analyses the two national cultural contexts offering readings grounded in historical and theoretical research. By creating a dialogue between on-going discourses on sexuality and same-sex desire and Forster's and Saba's personal ideas, this thesis puts *Maurice* and *Ernesto* in context and offers a new interpretation of the posthumous publication.

The extensive analysis of the national contexts was necessary to individuate areas of similarity but also to mark differences in the way discourses on sexuality are created and produced. The investigation laid out, despite being limited to two contexts, is more universal and possesses considerable potential for application in other perhaps less predictable contexts. In terms of British histories and cultural contexts the thesis performs a kind of archaeology of discourse going back to the beginning to Eighteenth century to analyse concepts of sex and sexuality. As far as Saba is concerned the thesis addressed the hybrid and complex milieu of Trieste demonstrating the origins of some of Saba's ideas on sexuality.

This had not been explored at length before, neither has it been analysed in connection to the representation of sexual content in *Ernesto*. Previous studies have tended to focus on identitarian sexual politics. This thesis argues that such a position is quite deliberately not represented by the textual content and thereby bears no relation whatsoever to the sexuality of Saba, that previous studies have seemed oddly obsessed with. Queer theory theoretical framework allowed me to re-define interpretations of the two novels that I chose to consider queer in their resistance to the gender/sex system as historically and culturally specific to the times Foster and Saba were writing. However, the potential of queer posthumous writing is much greater than this, as it may be taken up by those interested in epistolary history, poetry, auto/biographical writing, etc.

Maurice is a queer novel in the way in which the dominant models of social bonding are not only challenged but also refused by some of the characters and replaced by a rejection of the social order especially through the smashing of the class system. The specificity of this particular queer posthumous writing also allowed Foster to serially re-work *Maurice* and to

carefully adjust it to his understanding of same-sex relationships and their position within/out of society, and the ways they changed over his lifetime, and the lifetime of the novel. In this particular respect, the final version of *Maurice*'s finale demonstrates a desire to abandon a particular mode of writing proper to heteronormative fiction. By eliminating the epilogue that shows Maurice and Alec in the greenwood perceived by Maurice's sisters as a 'normal' couple, Forster is embarking on an operation that goes beyond a merely stylistic endeavour. In fact, he is claiming silence for a future that cannot be written through heteronormative words and modes.

In the analysis of *Ernesto* this thesis shifts the focus from the kinds of criticism that concentrated on Ernesto's sexuality to one that prioritised the sexual activities themselves, thereby avoiding the common practice (that lead to misreadings) of reducing the characters to nameable sexual categories. The thesis' contribution to the development of queer studies in the field of Italian studies is therefore significant in its attempt to re-define the boundaries and the terms in which same-sex desire has been thus far analysed.

Queer posthumous writing has the potential to prove essential in understanding and re-evaluating texts in other contexts and can shine new light on issues of self-censorship and modes of writing about queerness. It also affords the opportunity to investigate the relationship between degrees of homophobia and heteronormativity in different milieux and the possible impacts this has on queer writing. I believe this theorization of posthumous queer writing has also the potential for the analysis of a wider and broader spectrum of queerness that could include poetry, life-writing and other genres.

These two 'minor' fictions have succeeded in bringing into focus a mode of writing that is so significant that it crosses geographical and linguistic boundaries. Queer posthumous writing offers a new aspect to the existing architecture that is queer theory by employing a temporal perspective that focuses not on the past or the future, but a 'possible', queerer, future.

WORKS CITED

1. EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER'S WORKS

Forster, Edward Morgan. "Correspondence between E.M. Forster and Florence Barger". 1910-1958. MSS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

———. "Edward Carpenter". *Two Cheers For Democracy*. Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1972.

———. "'Happy v. Sad Endings' Autograph manuscript of 'Happy v. Sad Endings', probably given to an undergraduate society". 1904. MS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

———. *Howards End.* Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. 1910. London: Penguin, 1989. Print.

———. *The Journals and Diaries of E.M. Forster, Vol. 2 The 'Locked Diary' (1909-67)*. Ed. Philip Gardner. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.

———. "Letters from E.M. Forster to Forrest Reid".1912-1946. MSS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

———. "Locked Journal". 1909-1949. MS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

———. *The Longest Journey.* Ed. Elizabeth Heine. 1907. London: Penguin, 1989. Print.

———. *A Room with a View.* Ed. Oliver Stallybrass. 1908. London: Penguin, 1990. Print.

Maurice. 1889. Copy A. TS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. Fair copy of 'Maurice', with manuscript alterations by L.H.G. Greenwood (KC 1899), probably derived from E.M. Forster's working copy.

———. *Maurice*. 1932. Copy B. TS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. 1932 version of 'Maurice', with autograph manuscript and additions made c.1959, Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge.

———. *Maurice*. 1932. Copy C. TS. Archive Centre, King's College, Cambridge. 1932 version of 'Maurice' lacking alterations. (Copy C.),

———. *Maurice*. Philip Gardner. Ed. London: Andre Deutsch, 1999.

———. "Notes on Maurice" in *Maurice* 215-220.

———. *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* Ed. 1905. Oliver Stallybrass. London:

Penguin, 1976. Print.

2. PUBLICATIONS ON EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER

Bakshi, Parminder Kaur. *Distant Desire, Homoerotic Codes and the Subversion of the English Novel in E.M. Forster's Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Booth, Howard J. "Maurice". *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster*. Bradshaw 173-187.

Bradshaw, David. *The Cambridge Companion to E.M. Forster*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Bredbeck, Gregory W. "Queer Superstitions: Forster, Carpenter and the Illusion of (Sexual) Identity". Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster* 29-58.

Cavaliero, Glen. *A Reading of E.M. Forster*. London: Macmillan, 1979.

Cregan-Reid, Vybarr. "Modes of Silence in E. M. Forster's 'Inferior' Fiction". *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 56.4 (2013): 445-461. Print.

Curr, Matthew. "Recuperating E.M. Forster's *Maurice*". *Modern Language Quarterly* 62.1 (2001): 53-69. Print.

Dellamora, Richard. "Textual Politics/Sexual Politics". *Modern Language Quarterly* 54.1 (1993): 155-64. Print.

Fletcher, John. "Forster's Self-Erasure: *Maurice* and the Scene of Masculine Love". Bristow, *Sexual Sameness* 64-90.

Furbank, Nicholas Philip. *E.M. Forster: A Life*. 2 vols. San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace Company, 1981.

Gardner, Philip. Introduction. Maurice. By E.M. Forster. London: Andre Deutsch, 1999. vii-lvi. Print.

———. "The Evaluation of E.M. Forster's *Maurice*". Herz and Martin 204-223.

Grant, Kathleen. "*Maurice* as Fantasy". Herz and Martin, *Centenary Revaulations* 191-203.

Herz, Judith Scherer, and Martin, Robert K. *E.M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*. London: Macmillan, 1982.

Martin, Robert K. "Edward Carpenter and the Double Structure of *Maurice*". *Journal of Homosexuality* 8.3-4 (1983): 35-46.

Martin, Robert K. and Piggford, George eds. *Queer Forster*. Chicago and

London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Martin, Robert K. and Piggford, George. "Introduction: Queer Forster?". Martin, and Piggford, *Queer Forster* 1-28.

Meyers, Jeffrey. *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930*. Montreal: McGill, 1977.

Moffat, Wendy. *E.M. Forster: A New Life*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

Nadel, Ira Bruce. "Moments in the Greenwood: *Maurice* in Context". Herz and Martin, *Centenary Revaluations* 177-190.

Ozick, Cynthia. "Forster as Homosexual". *Commentary* 52.6 (1971): 81-85. Print.

Page, Norman. *E.M. Forster's Posthumous Fiction*. Victoria, B.C: University of Victoria, 1977.

———. *E.M. Forster*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987.

Papazoglou, Dimitra. *The Fever of Hellenism. The Influence of Ancient Greece on the Work of E.M. Forster*. Athens: Parousia, 1995.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. "Edward Morgan Forster, *Maurice*". Siti and de Laude, *Saggi*, vol. 2, 1688.

Raschke, Debrah. "Breaking the Engagement with Philosophy: Re-envisioning Hetero/Homo Relations in *Maurice*". Martin and Piggford, *Queer Forster* 151-165.

Rosecrance, Barbara. *Forster's Narrative Vision*. New York and London: Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1982.

Summers, Claude. *E.M. Forster*. New York: Ungar, 1983.

Woods, Gregory. "The Tragic Sense of Life". Woods, *A History of Gay Literature*, 217-218.

3. UMBERTO SABA'S WORKS

Umberto Saba, *Atroce paese che amo: lettere famigliari (1945-1953)*. Ed. Gianfranca Lavezzi and Rossana Saccani. Milano: Bompiani, 1987.

———. *Autobiografia*. *Tutte le* poesie. Ed. Arrigo Stara, 253-269.

———. "Discorso per il settantesimo compleanno". Stara 1059.

———. *Ernesto*. Einaudi: Torino, 1975.

———. *Ernesto*. Trans. Mark Thompson. London: Paladin, 1989.

———. *Ernesto.* Ed. Maria Antonietta Grignani.Torino: Einaudi, 1995.

———. “Inferno e Paradiso di Trieste”. Stara 981-986

———. *Prose*, Ed. Linuccia Saba, Milano: Mondadori, 1964.

———. *La spada d’amore: Lettere scelte 1902-1957.* Ed. Aldo Marcovecchio. Milano: Mondadori, 1983.

———. *Lettere a un'amica. Sessantacinque lettere a Nora Baldi*. Torino: Einaudi, 1966.

———. *Lettere sulla psicoanalisi*: *carteggio con Joachim Flescher 1946-1949 : con gli scritti di Saba sulla psicoanalisi, le lettere di Saba a Edoardo Weiss, due lettere di Weiss a Linuccia Saba*. Ed. Arrigo Stara. Milano: SE, 2013 (?)

———. *Quante rose a nascondere un abisso*: *carteggio con la moglie, 1905-1956.* Ed. Raffaella Acetoso. Cesario di Lecce (Lecce): Manni, 2004.

———. *Storia e Cronistoria del Canzoniere.* Stara 108-352.

———. *Tutte le poesie*. Ed. Arrigo Stara. Milano: Mondadori, 1998.

———. *Tutte le prose.* Ed. Arrigo Stara. Milano: Mondadori, 2001.

Umberto Saba and Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini. *Il vecchio e il giovane – Carteggio 1930-1957*. Milano: Mondadori, 1965.

Umberto Saba and Vittorio Sereni. *Il cerchio imperfetto. Lettere 1946-1954*. Milano: Archinto, 2010.

4. PUBLICATIONS ON UMBERTO SABA

Atti del Convegno Internazionale 1984. Il Punto su Saba, Trieste, 25-27 marzo 1984. Trieste: LINT 1985.

Baldoni, Luca. “‘Un Vecchio amava un ragazzo’: Homoeroticism in Umberto Saba’s late poetry (1935-48).” *Italian Studies* 60.2 (2005): 221-239. Print.

Baroni, Giorgio. *Umberto Saba e dintorni*. *Appunti per una storia della letteratura giuliana*. Milano: Istituto Propaganda Libreria, 1984.

———. “Un Saba minore’. Baroni 83-90.

Campailla, Sergio. “Il testamento di Saba nella terapia preventiva di *Ernesto*” Campailla. *Scrittori Giuliani*, 229-253.

———. *Scrittori Giuliani*. Bologna: Patron, 1976.

Cary, Joseph. *Three Modern Italian Poets: Saba, Ungaretti, Montale*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Cinquegrani, Alessandro. *Solitudine di Umberto Saba. Da Ernesto al Canzoniere*. Venezia: Marsilio , 2007.

Debenedetti, Antonio. "Lo scandalo di essere Umberto Saba". Saba, *Quante rose* 5- 18.

Favretti, Elvira. *La Prosa di Umberto Saba. Dai racconti giovanili a Ernesto*. Roma: Bonacci, 1982.

Gargano, Claudio. *Ernesto e gli altri. L'omosessualità nella narrativa italiana del Novecento*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2002.

———. "Umberto Saba, Aldo Palazzeschi o del Complesso di Edipo". Gargano 31-44.

Gnerre, Francesco. "Umberto Saba. Incauti amori e amicizie amorose". Gnerre, *L'eroe negato.* 43-60.

Grigrani, Maria Antonietta. Introduzione. *Ernesto*. By Umberto Saba.Torino: Einaudi, 1995. v-xxiv.

Lavagetto, Mario. *La Gallina di Saba*. Torino: Einaudi, 1989.

———. "Conferme da Ernesto", in *La Gallina* 201-210.

———. Introduzione. *Tutte le Poesie*. By Umberto Saba. Milano: Garzanti, 1988, xi-lxix.

———. "L'altro Saba". Saba, *Tutte le prose* xi-xlvi.

Miniussi, Sergio. "Tredici lettere in cui si parla di *Ernesto*". Saba, *Ernesto,* Einaudi: Torino, 1975 137-162.

Parussa, Sergio. "Reluctantly Queer. In Search of the Homoerotic Novel in the Twentieth-Century Italian Fiction". Cestaro *Queer Italia* 173-186.

Paino, Marina. *La Tentazione della Leggerezza. Studio su Umberto Saba*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2009.

Pedullà, Walter. *Lo schiaffo di Svevo: giochi, fantasie, figure del Novecento italiano.* Milano: Camunia, 1990.

Stara, Arrigo. "Cronologia". Saba, *Tutte le Prose* il-lxxvii.

———. "Ernesto". Saba *Tutte le Prose* 1292-1305.

Van Watson, William. "Adapting to Heterocentricity: The Film Versions of Umberto Saba's *Ernesto* and Giorgio Bassani's *The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles*".
in Cestaro *Queer Italia*, 153-171.

5. OTHER SOURCES

Adam, Barry. *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life*. New York: Elsevier, 1978.

Aldrich, Robert. *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

———. "Queer Feelings". Hall and Jagose, *Queer Studies* 422-441

Ara, Angelo, *Fra Nazione e Impero. Trieste, gli Asburgo, la Mitteleuropa.* Milano: Garzanti, 2009.

Ara, Angelo, and Claudio Magris. *Trieste. Un'identità di frontiera,* Torino: Einaudi, 2007.

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Barth Schwartz, David. *Pasolini Requiem*. New York: Pantheon, 1992.

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author", Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*. 142-48.

———. *Image-Music-Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Bauer, Heike. *English Literary Sexology. Translation of Inversion, 1860-1930*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Bellassai, Sandro and Maria Malatesta, eds. *Genere e mascolinità. Uno sguardo storico*. Roma Bulzoni: 2000.

———. "The Masculine Mystique: Anti-Modernism and Virility in Fascist Italy", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10.3: 314-35. Print.

Benadusi, Lorenzo. *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy*. Trans. Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney, Jennifer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012. Trans. of *Il nemico dell'uomo nuovo. nell'esperimento totalitario fascista*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2005.

Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Bernabei, Marco. *Educazione del sesso*. Milano: Albrighi, Segati and C., 1933.

Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Bettazzi, Rodolfo. *Il Casto Talamo. Al giovane sposo Cristiano*. Torino:

Marietti, 1937.

Bristow, Joseph. Ed. *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

———. *Effeminate England: Homoeroticism After 1885*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

———. *Sexuality*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Bunzl, Matti. *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2004.

———. "Queering Austria for the New Europe." *Sexuality in Austria.* Eds. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Dagmar Herzog. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007, 131-144.

Burgio, Alberto, and Luciano Casali, Eds. *Studi sul razzismo italiano.* Bologna: CLUEB, 1996.

Butler, Judith. "More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6.2-3 (1994): 1-26. Print.

———. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

———. "Melancholy Gender/Refused identification." *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Jonathan D. Culler. Vol 3. London: Routledge: 2003, 213-224.

Campanile, Anna. "The Torn Soul of a City. Trieste as a Center of Polyphonic Culture and Literature." *History of the Literary Cultures*. Eds. Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, 145–161.

Carpenter, Edward. *Towards Democracy*. Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1883.

———. *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women.* London: Allen and Co., 1912.

Caserio, Robert L., Lee Edelman, Judith Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and Tim Dean. "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory." *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 819-828.

Cattaruzza, Marina. Ed. *Trieste, Austria, Italia tra Settecento e Novecento studi in onore di Elio Apih*. Udine: Del Bianco, 2006.

Cavaglion, Alberto. *Otto Weininger in Italia*. Roma: Carucci, 1983.

Cestaro, Gary P. Ed. *Queer Italia. Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*. London: Macmillan, 2004.

Champagne, John. *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013

Collini, Stefan. Preface. *Culture and Anarchy*. By Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy, ix-xxvi*

Comisso, Giovanni. *Mio sodalizio con de Pisis*. Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1993

Convegno per la questione sessuale. Appello del Comitato ordinatore del Convegno, in "Battaglie d'oggi", VI, 11, 1910, 461-463.

Cornis-Pope, Marcel, and John Neubauer, eds. *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins: 2004.

Cotta, Maurizio, and Luca Verzichelli. *Il Sistema politico italiano*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008.

Crozier, Ivan. Introduction. *Sexual Inversion*. By Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds

Culler, Jonathan. Ed. *Deconstruction: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, *vol 3*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Dall'Orto, Giovanni. "La 'tolleranza repressiva' dell'omosessualità", *Quaderni di critica omosessuale* 2 (1987a): 37-57.

———. "Ci furono *femmenelle* che piangevano quando venimmo via dalle Trémiti!" Intervista a un omosessuale confinato nel periodofascista:

———. "La 'tolleranza reppressiva' dell'omossesualità. Quando un atteggiamento legale diviene tradizione", http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/tollera/tolle2e.html

———. Interview Gino Olivari., "Gino Olivari: erano anni difficili", first published in *Babilonia*, n. 64, February 1989, 51-53, now in http://www.giovannidallorto.com/saggistoria/olivari/olivari.html

Daniel, Marc and Baudry, André. *Gli omosessuali*. Firenze: Vallecchi, 1971.

Dau Novelli, Cecilia. *Famiglia e modernizzazione in Italia fra le due guerre*. Roma: Studium, 1994.

de Lauretis, Teresa. "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3.2 (1991): iii-xviii. Print.

Dellamora, Richard. *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian*

Aestheticism. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Denisoff, Dennis. *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody, 1840-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Doan, Laura. *The Lesbian Postmodern*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Dover, Kenneth James. *Greek Homosexuality*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Dowling, Linda. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Downing, Lisa and Robert Gillett, eds. *Queer in Europe*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011.

Duncan, Derek. *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate 2006.

Edelman, Lee. *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory.* New York: Routledge, 1994.

———. *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

Ellis, Havelock and John Addington Symonds. *Sexual Inversion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Eng, David, Judith Halberstam, and Jose Muñoz, Eds. *What's Queer about Queer Studies Now? Social Text* 23.3-4 84-85 (2005).

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: an Introduction*. London: Penguin, 1990. (1976).

———. "Interview with O'Higgins". Bersani, 82.

———. "What is an author?" *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. London: Penguin, 1984, 101-120 .

Freccero, Carla. "Queer Times". *After Sex*. Halley and Parker, 17-26.

———. *Queer/Early/Modern.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id and Other Works, The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol xix. Trans. Lytton Strachey, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961.

———. *On Sexuality: Three Essays on Sexuality; The Complete Psychological*

Works of Sigmund Freud. vol xix. Trans. Lytton Strachey, Anna Freud, vol. vii, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953.

———. "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex". in Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* 173-183.

Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace. Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.

Gentile, Emilio, *Politics as Religions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

———. *Fascismo: storia e intepretazione*. Roma: Laterza, 2007.

Giovannini, Fabio. *Comunisti e diversi. Il Pci e la questione omosessuale*. Bari Dedalo, 1980.

Gnerre, Francesco. *L'Eroe Negato. Il personaggio omosessuale nella narrativa italiana contemporanea*. Milano: Gammalibri, 1981

———. *L'Eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano*. Milano: Baldini e Castoldi, 2000 [1989].

Grosz, Elisabeth. "Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity." Hall, *Queer Studies Reader* 194-211.

Hall, Donald E. *Queer Theories.* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Hall, Donald E, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter, Eds. *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader.* Abingdon and Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

Halley, Janet and Andrew Parker, Eds. *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.

Halperin, David. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

———. "The Normalizing of Queer Theory." *Journal of Homosexuality* 45.2-4 (2003): 339–343.Print.

Hardin, Michael. "Was Killing the Queer Author Necessary to Liberate the Queer Text?: The Case of Andy Warhol's *A: A Novel*" in *Journal of Homosexuality* 56 (2009): 218-232. Print.

Houlbrook, Matt. *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005

Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press,

1996.

Jenkyns, Richard. *The Victorian and Ancient Greece*. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980.

Lombroso. Cesare. “L'amore nei pazzi”. *Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale, Volume Secondo*. Torino: Loescher, 1881.

———. *Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale, Volume Secondo*. Torino: Loescher, 1881.

———. *L’Uomo delinquente in rapporto all’antropologia, alla giurisprudenza ed alle discipline carcerarie.* Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1889.

———. *Du parallelisme entre l'homosexualité et la criminalité innée*. "Archivio di psichiatria", XXVII 1906 378-381.

Malici, Luca. “Queer in Italy: Italian Televisibility and the ‘Queerable’ Audience.” Downing and Gillett, *Queer in Europe* 113-28.

Mantegazza, Paolo. *Igiene dell’Amore. XVI edizione accuratamente riveduta dall’autore con molte aggiunte*. Firenze: Bemporad, 1903.

McCabe, Susan. “To Be and To Have, The Rise of Queer Historicism.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 11.1 (2005): 119-34. Print.

Mieli, Aldo. “Un viaggio in Germania. Impressioni e appunti di uno storico della scienza.” *Archivio di Storia della Scienza* 4 (1926): 342-81.

———. “Legislazione sessuale”, in *Rassegna di Studi Sessuali*, 4 (1926)

Mieli, Mario. *Elementi di critica omosessuale*. 1977. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002. Print.

Monfoldo, *Rodolfo*. “Ancora sulla morale sessuale.” *Critica Sociale,* xxii, 20 (1912): 309-310.

Mosse, George L*. Nationalism and Sexuality. Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe,* New York: Howard Fertig, 1985.

———. *The Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity.* Oxford: University Oxford Press, 1996.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia*. *The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.

Nigianni, Chrysanthi and Merl Storr, Eds. *Deleuze and Queer Theory.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Norton, Rictor. “Ganymede Raped: Gay Literature – The Critic as Censor.”

Young, *The Male Homosexual* .

Pasolini, Piero Paolo. *Scritti Corsari*. Milano: Garzanti, 1975.

Petrosino, Dario. “Omosessualità e diritto: un percorso tra storia, modelli culturali e codice in Italia.” *Rivista di Sessuologia* 2 (1992): 150-162.Print.

———. “Traditori della stirpe. Il razzismo contro gli omosessuali nella stampa del fascismo” in Burgio and Casali eds. *Studi sul razzismo*, Bologna: CLUEB, 1996, 89-107.

———. “Crisi della virilità e ‘questione omosessuale’ nell’Italia degli anni cinquanta e sessanta”. Bellassai and Malatesta, *Genere e mascolinità* 317-343.

Pini, Andrea. *Quando eravano froci. Gli omosessuali nell’Italia di una volta.* Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011.

Proteus, “Intorno ad un articolo del progetto del nuovo codice penale.” *Rassegna di Studi sessuali demografia ed eugenica (Genesis),* 3 (1927).

Pustianaz, Marco. “The White Hole of Italian Gay Studies”. http://www.gay-web.de/fluss/konferenz/pdf/pustianaz.pdf

———. Ed. *Queer in Italia. Differenze in movimento*. Pisa: ETS, 2011.

Rabinow, Paul. Ed. *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin, 1984.

Raffaelli, Giuseppe. “Nomotesia penale”. Napoli: Tip. Cataneo, 2 (1820-1826): 113 and ff.

Reade, Brian. Ed. *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1971.

Ille Ego (pseudonym of Filippo Turati), “L’immortalità della “morale sessuale.” Replica a Rodolfo Mondolfo, *Critica Sociale,* xxii, 24 (1912) 373-76.

Reiter R., Rayna. Ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975.

Rich, Adrienne. “ ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ Women: Sex and Sexuality.” *Sign* 5.4 (1980): 631-60. Print.

Rossi Barilli, Gianni. *Il Movimento gay in Italia*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999.

Rubin, Gayle. “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy of Sex.” Reiter, 157-210.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

———. *Epistemology of the Closet*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

———. *Tendencies.* Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993.

Sengoopta, Chandak. *Otto Weininger. Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Sinfield, Alan. *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment*. London and New York: Cassell, 1994.

———. "Sorting Out the Men from the Queer". Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*, 140-42.

Siti, Walter and Silvia de Laude, Eds. *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*. 2 vols. Milano: Mondadori, 1999.

Slataper,Scipio. *Scritti politici*. Milano: Mondadori, 1954.

Spackman, Barbara. *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1996.

Stall. Sylvanus.*The Successful Selling of the Self and Sex Series.* Philadelphia: The Vir, 1907.

Symonds, John Addington. *A Problem in Greek Ethics: Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion: Addressed Especially to Medical Psychologists and Jurists* [1883] 1901.

———. *A Problem in Modern Ethics Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion Addressed Especially to Medical Psychologists and Jurists*. London: privately printed, 1896.

———. *Memoirs. The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds,* London: Hutchinson, 1984.

Tasca, Luisa. "Il 'Senatore Erotico'. Sesso e matrimonio nell'antropologia di Paolo Mantegazza." Wanrooij, *La Mediazione Matrimoniale*, 295-322.

Turner, Frank. *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.

Voghera, Giorgio. *Gli anni della psicanalisi*. Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1980.

Wagner, Nike. *Spirito e Sesso: la donna e l'erotismo nella Vienna fin de siècle.* Torino: Einaudi, 1990.

Wanrooij, P.F. Bruno. Ed. *La Mediazione Matrimoniale: Il Terzo (in)comodo in Europa Fra Otto e Novecento*. Fiesole: Villa Le Balze, Georgetown University, 2004.

———. “The History of Sexuality in Italy (1860-1945).” Willson 173-91.

———. *Storia del Pudore. La questione sessuale in Italia 1860-1940.* Venezia, Marsilio, 1990.

Warner, Michael. “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet.” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 3-17.Print.

Weeks, Jeffrey. *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. London: Quarter Books, 1990.

Weininger, Otto. *Sex and Character, An Investigation of Fundamental Principles.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York and London: Paddington, 1976.

Wiegman, Robyn. “Introduction: Mapping the Lesbian Post-modern.” Doan 1-20.

Willson, Perry. Ed. *Gender, Family and Sexuality. The Private Sphere in Italy, 1860-1945,* Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and New York, 2004.

Wittig, Monique. “The Straight Mind.” *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. NY: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1980. 21-32.

Young, Ian. Ed. *The Male Homosexual in Literature: a Bibliography.* New Jersey and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1982.

Woods, Gregory. *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998.

Zappino, Federico. Trans. *Stanze private. Epistemologia e politica della sessualità*. Roma: Carocci, 2011. Trans of *Epistemology of the Closet*.

Zuccarello, Ugo. “Omosessualità maschile e modelli di virilità.” in Sandro Bellassai, Sandro, and Maria Malatesta. Eds. *Genere e Mascolinità. Uno sguardo storico*: Roma, Bulzoni, 2000.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If you are about to read these acknowledgments you are probably one of my friends therefore put on the soundtrack which is the opening of Golden Girls' theme song, "Thank you for being a friend".

I realized this thesis has been the second big achievement of my life, the first being having met all my incredibly amazing friends, whom I want to thank below. You all know that this PhD has occupied a considerable amount of time and energy and you also know that, as banal and cheesy as it might sound, its completion has also been possible thanks to your support.

This PhD is dedicated to Delfio, with whom I shared numerous conversations about literature, queer theories and life in general.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor at UCL, Florian Mussgnug and my co-supervisor at Goldsmiths, Lucia Boldrini, for accepting my project in the first place and for reading and commenting on many drafts of this thesis and to allow me to produce this final, better piece of work.

This thesis has queered most of my friends and has hopefully enriched some with awareness of heteronormativity and other patriarchal modes of understanding the world. Hearing some of my best friends using terms like heteronormative, queer, and questioning the very word *normal* in their everyday talking has made me very proud and touched me a lot.

First, my family: my parents, Renzo and Marisa, and my brother Marco who have supported me and believed in this project as much as I have, if not more. A special thanks to my extended family zio Aldo, and Silvia and Claudia Biancareddu who, despite being by birth my cousins, are more sisters to me. And my little zia Regina who has always been supportive and anxious about this PhD.

My thanks to my old friends from school, Erica Atzeni, Sonia Fois and Luisa Atzei and their husbands Mario, Franco and Giuseppe who have always been proud and supportive.

A special thanks to my long-life friend Silvia Loddo, who has been a great friend for the last 30 years or so since high school. Thanks also to another friend from high school, Arianna Cadeddu for her cheerful support.

A special thanks to Mario Cubeddu, who taught me Italian literature in the high school infusing me with a pleasure for fiction that changed my life for good. His friendship has been fundamental all my life.

Thanks to his wife, Carla Murru, a special friend who has taken care of my health as well as my mind by sharing important homeopathic advice and for being supportive.

Thanks to Giovanni Curreli and Matteo Canu for entertaining me in my Sardinian trips.

Bologna is my second home and ten years there gave me as much happiness as possible and gifted me with amazing friends.

Thanks to Arianna Simoncini, with whom I debated extensively about existentialism *mal de vivre* in our 20s and whose results still have an impact on my selves. Davide Mattei and Jacopo Masi, two of the first friends I made in Bologna.

Thanks to Roberta Granato and Lucia Gazzoni, with whom I shared worries, bazziness, joy, love and concerns about carbs while enjoying bomboloni in bed. Priceless. And Carlotta, of course.

Francesco Cattani, Franz, best friend, ex flat mate, who always showers me with love, good words and plenty of advice, both academic and not. Special, special thanks to you from the bottom of my heart.

Thanks to Sara Cattelani, whom I love dearly, who has been ex flat mate, sister, brother, mother, with whom connection and understanding goes beyond words. And to Brenda and Glenda.

Thanks to Davide Trevisani for allowing me to escape to Paris to recharge my batteries whenever I wanted.

Thanks to Bea Quartieri, whose years of flat sharing are still memorable and is still a special friend.

A thanks to Rosanna Sferrazza, whose friendship is still very important despite we have not met for a while.

Paolo Montanari and Francesco Gabbi have suffered from my PhD in many ways and their friendship has been of great value. They deserve a big thanks.

Thanks to Caterina Bonori and Alessandro Gangemi and their amazing family. They all have always been a milestone for me and have queered many of my understandings of family.

Thanks to Marco Scipioni, who, in the last phase of his PhD at the same time, shared anxieties, worries but also celebrations in the end.

My special thanks to Alex Gibson and Tess Callaway, who welcomed me from my very first day in London, in 2007 and have been a constant familiar presence without which I could not live. Thanks, Mitches, I would have not reached this stage of my life without your love and support.

A special thanks also to Arianna Mascherin for making me feel amazing no matter what and for her unconditional love that she is always ready to spread over me. To her and her wonderful husband, Henry Bowers-Broadbent, who is also a very good friend, all my thanks.

A thanks to Mark Madine and Will Gage for some truly relaxing and amazing weekends in Kent, delicious dinners and fun nights out. Above all, I want to thank them for being there every time I was in need: every single time. And for the discussions about queer theory that has enriched my views in many ways.

I want to thank Elian Weizman for listening to me, pitied me when necessary and also assure me that I would finish my PhD. Thanks also for sharing several Middle-Eastern and Italian dinners and for her help in the difficult years of PhD until the very last stages. Grazie, Emilio Distretti for whining with me about writing while indulging in one or two bottles of red wine to help us finally forget about everything.

Thank you, my amazing Italian friends in London, Elena Baglioni, Mimi Mollica, Alessandra Cecolin and Sandro Gulì for many a dinners and drinks necessary to de-stress and enjoy life. And to Anna Kari and Guilhem Alandry for sharing most of them too.

Thanks to Noor Al-Qasimi for her intellectual insights but also for the numerous and much needed sushi breaks and shopping trips that allowed me to emerge from the abyss of PhD blues.

Thanks to Marko Jobst for his support, sharing of anxieties and for the special doughnuts delivery and for introducing me to Ljutenica, another of my current obsessions.

Thanks to Luke Dare for sharing the love for Claudia Roden, for the conversations about food and for taking interest in videoing my cooking.

Thanks to Adam O' Farrell and V. for dinners, drinks, fun evenings and their support through the years.

Thanks to Chloe Patton with whom I shared a flat in London while debating about queering the world and eating my special diet food. She remains a very good friend even if she moved back to Melbourne. Thanks to her husband Raphael for the de-stressing nice time in France.

Thanks to Nico Sarti and Lucy Bannerman, Tom Lister and Tiffany Schellenberg, Elly Stewart, Clara de los Arcos and Adam, and Rhian Rosser and Tom McGrath for bearing with me and for being exciting about my work and my achievement.

I want to thank all my colleagues and friends in the Italian Department, UCL for their constant support. Especially Robert Lumley and Catherine Keen, who have always found time to give me a word of comfort. Thanks to Federica Mazzara, Beatrice Sica, Marco Biasioli, Anna Maria Giuffrida and all the other members of staff.

Thanks to Patrizia Oliver for suffering with me, for supporting me and helped me to sort things out until the last minute.

Thanks to Laura Mason for her incredible help, for organizing drinks after my viva and her cheerful presence during all my PhD years.

Thanks to Maria Novella Mercuri, who has always believed in me.

Thanks to Edoardo Menegazzo who listened to me and discussed with me about queer theory and who also enjoyed with me many a bottles of wine.

Thanks to my dear friend Cristina Massaccesi, who supported me throughout the thesis and who helped me in finding some of the typos in the very last phase of my PhD. She also held my hands while, in panic, I was printing the thesis. For that and her indispensable friendship I will always be thankful.

Many thanks also to my friend Federica Signoriello who had the misfortune of finishing just before me and was pestered with admin questions. She also helped me not to lose my mind while completing my bibliography and for that and her friendship I am very grateful.

I want to thank Marta Niccolai for her wrapping hugs and the doses of confidence and for her constant support and friendship.

A special thanks to Eleanor Chiari, who has helped me to boost my confidence and offered me an amazing mock viva that calmed me and made me believe in my work. Just what I needed.

Thanks to Lucia Rinaldi for her continuous encouragement over the years.

Thanks to all friends with whom I shared what was felt as a somehow imprisonment in the British library, especially Cüneyt Çakirlar whose views on queer theory has had an impact on my own. Thanks to Chiara Franceschini, who watched my last depressing and hard summer, and whose presence delighted my long days there.

Thank you to my friends who shared the PhD experience at UCL: Enza De Francisci, Andrew Campbell, Adam Greenwood, Patrick McGauley. You all have been very supportive.

Thanks to my Harrow School colleagues in the Modern Language School, especially my *capo* Will Turner, Alex Hills also my fellow PhD at UCL who has shared many "coraggio" with me, Ana Morena Alvarez, Victoria Reardon-Lepine, Dagmar Richter, Teresa de Luca and Loretta Moseley for their support. A special thanks to Fatima Radouk, whom I met in Harrow before she became a very important part of my life and who supported me in many ways.

Thanks to my colleagues in North London Collegiate School, my boss Peter Langdale for his understanding and my wonderful colleagues who supported me, especially Davina Suri, Hannah Wiedermann, Axelle Douillet and Ana Rosa Baena, Hanna Heffner.

Thanks to Queer Caucus: Ayana Smythe, Dom Holdaway, Charlotte Ross, Julia Heim, Caterina Sinibaldi for listening to my talks and deliria about queer theory several times.

A special thanks to all of my students who have given me new perspectives and insights about my PhD and myself more in general.

I want to thank also my friends' beautiful children, despite Edelman: Emma, Camilla, Viola, Ines, Miranda, Vinicio, Martino, Nour, Raphael, Elsa, Cecilia, Tommy, Arianna, Nora, Lily, Sonny, Lenny, Emil and Ezra who, in their

own ways, have contributed to this thesis and whom I will soon infuse with queer theory stuff.

Last, but not least, I am very grateful to my wonderful examiners Derek Duncan and Vybarr Cregan-Reid for making my viva a memorable experience and for their valuable suggestions and advice.