



INCOGNITO MEN UNMASKED

An exploration of masculinity in seventeenth
century Venetian literature and culture of the
Accademia degli Incogniti

Supervision

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*This thesis is dedicated to a very special person,
Het Wonder van Enschede*

Abstract

This thesis considers the authors of the seventeenth century *Accademia degli Incogniti*, and their writings inspired by libertinism, from a masculinities studies perspectives. The Venetian Academy offered a refuge to men who were affected on the level of their experience of gender by tensions on socio-political, economic, cultural and intellectual levels. These tensions are taken as the elements of a crisis of masculinity, to which freedom in writing offered a means of escape. A close reading of Antonio Rocco's *l'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* confirms not only the *Incogniti*'s fascination with non-(hetero)normative masculinity, it also reveals both how corrupt masculinity can become within a patriarchal system, as well as the disturbing extremes a literary articulation of libertinism's predilection of a naturalist sexual ethics could reach. A focus on paratextual material in the *Incogniti* environment shows the importance of co-constructive bonds between men, and the practice of gifting texts to each other, usually through the printing of dedicatory epistles in collectively published works, establishes the Academy as a "literary fraternity". Libertinism's critical attitude against power constituted a shared discursive code, and remained so even after Ferrante Pallavicino's execution for *lèse majesté* forced the *Incogniti* into a position of heightened circumspection. However, the crisis of masculinity became ever more anxious as the *Incogniti*'s preferred way of navigating it – writing and publishing – proved limited. Despite the cultural dominance of the Academy in Venice, the *Incogniti* still had to heed to patriarchal exigencies exerted by the early modern system of hegemonial masculinity.

Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction..... | 6 |
| 1.1 Incognito libertinism..... | 7 |
| 1.2. Status questionis | 9 |
| 1.3. Contents of this thesis..... | 11 |
| 2. Theoretical framework..... | 13 |
| 2.1. Hegemonial masculinity | 13 |
| 2.2. Masculine domination..... | 15 |
| 2.3. Crisis of masculinity | 18 |
| 3. Historical context..... | 20 |
| 3.1. Symbolic and material ties between gender and Venetian socio-political life | 20 |
| 3.2. Women authors and literary fraternity..... | 22 |
| 3.3. Revolutionary or conservative?..... | 25 |
| 3.4. Masculine writing as emotional practice | 27 |
| 4. Analysis (I). “Amor maschio è fanciullo”: queer masculinities in <i>L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola</i> | 29 |
| 4.1. Loredan’s letter: the problem of <i>l’Alcibiades’</i> subversiveness..... | 30 |
| 4.2. Close reading of <i>l’Alcibiade</i> | 34 |
| 4.2.1. Filotimo..... | 35 |
| 4.2.2. Alcibiades..... | 39 |
| 4.2.3. Male-male sexual activity as (homo)sexual identity? | 45 |
| 4.3. Conclusions..... | 52 |
| 5. Analysis (II). “Io ti presento ... una parte delle sue Glorie”: coming out as men..... | 55 |
| 5.1. Method and focus of this chapter | 56 |
| 5.2. Collectively published work..... | 57 |
| 5.2.1. <i>Discorsi dei signori Incogniti</i> (1635)..... | 57 |
| 5.2.2. <i>Cento Novelle Amoroze</i> (1651) and <i>Le Glorie dei signori Incogniti</i> (1647)..... | 62 |
| 5.2.3. Collective work, collective identity..... | 64 |
| 5.3. Il mito di Ferrante Pallavicino..... | 65 |
| 5.3.1. <i>L’Anima</i> | 65 |
| 5.3.2. <i>La Vita</i> | 66 |
| 6. Conclusion | 70 |
| 6.1 Conclusion | 70 |
| 6.2 Coda..... | 72 |
| 7. Bibliography..... | 74 |
| Appendix I – Translations from Italian into English..... | 83 |

1. Introduction

“Faire des vers de Sodomie ne rend pas un homme coupable du fait ; poète & pederaste sont deux qualitez differentes.”¹ Even though the point of his statement is to distinguish between poet and pederast, Théophile de Viau (1590-1626) does create a connection between these two figures when denying the accusations of sodomy he faced. Charged for his *mœurs libertines* in one of the seventeenth century’s most notorious trials, known today as “l’affaire Théophile”, the accused appears to embody the *esprit fort* of the exemplary libertine author.² Théophile’s primary opponent, the Jesuit Père Garasse (1585-1631), devoted considerable attention to elements pertaining to sodomy when analyzing the collection of poetry titled *Parnasse Satyrique* (1622) printed under Théophile’s name but containing poems written by other authors as well, which he presented in his *Doctrine curieuse* (1623) as proof of the author’s libertine irreligion. This investigation, to modern eyes, curiously reads as a queer reading of a literary text *avant la lettre*. However, according to Matthieu Dupas, the central position sodomy/homosexuality occupies in the affaire Théophile has been disregarded by historians of libertinage, following René Pintard’s separation between *libertinage de mœurs*, as a refusal of moral limits most often concerning sexual license, and the preferred *libertinage érudit*, as an intellectual movement of free thinking seeking to emancipate an individual from imposed dogmata.³ However, it appears that for Garasse there is a direct equation to be made between “la question des mœurs et celle de l’écriture”, which allows him to “mobilise la catégorie de sodomie dans la *Doctrine curieuse* pour disqualifier à la fois les écrits et les mœurs de Théophile.”⁴

The categorical vagueness surrounding sodomy in Théophile’s work is exemplary for larger libertine literary production. Indeed, related topics discussed by authors deemed libertine range from desexualized and idealized forms of male-male love, to friendships between men that did contain sexual potential; from sodomy as a wide array of non-procreative sex acts with partners of any gender, to anal sex specifically; from issues that seem to stress binary sex essentialism, to considerations of gender fluidity.⁵ Dupas has argued that sodomy as a concept, while no anachronism, is still too broad to be of much use for the history of (homo)sexuality if we do not reckon with a plurality of discourses that are invoked by the term.⁶ This polyvalence clearly resonates with the modern “queer”; an umbrella term to catch sexual and gender non-normativity, both in acts, identities, and desires.⁷

¹ Théophile de Viau, *L’Apologie de Theophile*, Paris, 1624, p. 27.

² Adam Horsley, “Strategies of Accusation and Self-Defense at the Trial of Théophile de Viau (1623-25),” 2016.

³ Matthieu Dupas, “La sodomie dans l’affaire Théophile de Viau : questions de genre et de sexualité dans la France du premier XVIIe siècle,” 2010; René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle*, 1983. See, for historiography about the topic of (French) libertinage: Stéphane van Damme, “Libertinage de mœurs / libertinage érudit. Le travail de la distinction,” 2004; Van Damme, *L’Épreuve libertine. Morale, soupçon et pouvoirs dans la France baroque*, 2008; Didier Foucault, *Histoire du libertinage. Des goliards au Marquis de Sade*, 2007. See, for a critique and state of the art of libertinism/libertinage in general: Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, “Libertinage, irreligion, incroyance, athéisme dans l’Europe de la première modernité (XVIe-XVIIe siècles). Une approche critique des tendances actuelles de la recherche (1998-2002),” 2007. See also the same volume for a number of responses to topics raised by Cavaillé.

⁴ Dupas, “La sodomie dans l’affaire Théophile de Viau,” 2010, paragraph 9.

⁵ See the following studies: Madeleine Alcover. “Un gay trio. Cyrano, Chapelle, Dassoucy,” 1999; Michèle Rosellini, “Homosexualité et esprit fort dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle: indices poétiques d’une « invisible affinité »,” 2010; Filippo D’Angelo, “Libertinage, hermaphrodisme et masculinité,” 2010; Dupas, “La sodomie dans l’affaire Théophile,” 2010.

⁶ Dupas, “La sodomie dans l’affaire Théophile,” 2010.

⁷ I will not enter into the grand debates about queer theory itself, or its applicability in historical research. For that purpose, I will gladly refer to: Eve K. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990; David Halperin, *How To Do*

Michèle Rosellini understands the adoption in writing of the above topics of sexual non-normativity – homosexuality in particular – as transgression that is typical for the expression of the libertine’s *esprit fort*: “Qu’ils jouent de la provocation sociale, de la forfanterie morale ou de la justification philosophique, ils témoignent de l’enjeu que représente la transgression sexuelle dans la définition d’une position libertine. L’esprit fort y trouve matière à exercer sa pugnacité.”⁸ Filippo D’Angelo offers a complementary view by examining how engagement with sexual transgression of all queer sorts in writing allowed libertine authors to explore the gendered nature of their masculine *esprit fort*.⁹ With these critical views in mind, returning to Théophile’s statement, we can infer that writing about “sodomy”, then, does not make you a sodomite, but it does make you a man within a libertine framework. The relation between masculinity and the (queer) writings of a group that is considered libertine will be further explored in this thesis. However, rather than focusing on seventeenth century France, I will take it as a springboard onto a particular Italian locus of libertine literature: the production of the Venetian *Accademia degli Incogniti*.

1.1 Incognito libertinism

The *Accademia degli Incogniti* has been one of Venice’s main cultural institutions in the decades after its establishment in 1630 by the aristocrat Giovan Francesco Loredan (1607-1661).¹⁰ Until its influence started to wane in the late 1650’s and the members eventually ceased to meet in 1661, the Academy kept Venice’s presses busy and played an important role in the early development of opera in the city.¹¹ The members were highly prolific authors, despite frequently writing and publishing anonymously, covering all sorts of genres from poetry to narrative prose, opera librettos and academic treatises. There were more than 300 *Incogniti* members, who frequently came together for recitals of their work. Demographical data of the members show that the group was highly heterogeneous, with members coming from various provenances – both in terms of geography and social class –, and different professions, including men of religious vocation.¹² Amongst its ranks were notorious personalities of whom the militant novelist Ferrante Pallavicino (1615-1644), and priest and naturalist philosophy teacher Antonio Rocco (1586-1652) stand out most. This is due to their work being exemplary for the baroque transgression of norms – religious and sexual – that typify libertine literature, which is taken to be one of the main cultural blueprints of *Incognito* literary production.¹³ Indeed, Monica Miato notes that “[l]a sola, vera preoccupazione degli Accademici era dare ascolto alle sfrenatezze dell’ingegno, per lasciarlo libero di esprimersi secondo natura.”¹⁴ The early years of the Academy’s activity – 1630-

the History of Homosexuality, 2002. See also Gary Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings in the French Renaissance*, 2008, pp. 5-16, for both a discussion of the debate between Sedgwick and Halperin on their differing theoretical views on the history of homosexuality, and for additional theoretical work on the topic.

⁸ Rosellini, “Homosexualité et esprit fort,” 2010, paragraph 4.

⁹ D’Angelo, “Libertinage, hermaphrodisme et masculinité,” 2010.

¹⁰ The foundational study of the *Incogniti* remains Monica Miato, *L’Accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan, Venezia (1630-1661)*, 1998. See also: Jean-François Lattarico, *Venise incognita – essai sur l’académie libertine au XVIIe siècle*, 2012.

¹¹ Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice. The Creation of a Genre*, 1990; Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence. Opera and Women’s Voices in Seventeenth Century Venice*, 2003, especially chapter 2: “Bizzarrie Femine. Opera and the Accademia degli Incogniti”, pp. 48-81.

¹² Miato has established a list of all documented members, and lists of the printed works of the main printer of the Academy, Francesco Valvasense (1616-1668): *L’Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, pp. 171-246.

¹³ See, for the *Incogniti* in relation to libertinism: Giorgio Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini. La teoria dell’impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano*, 1950, pp. 144–99; Federico Barbierato, *Politici e ateisti. Percorsi della miscredenza a Venezia fra Sei e Settecento*, 2006, pp. 173–76.

¹⁴ Miato, *L’Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, p. 61.

1640 in particular – have been noted by historians as a phase of “libertinismo trionfante” due to the *Incogniti*’s inescapable presence in the Serenissima.¹⁵ However, this triumph did not last, as they did not go unnoticed by ecclesiastical authorities. Many works ended up on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, while individuals became object of inquisitorial investigation. Even though many of the prominent members also held political power – patriarch Loredan being the prime example here –, and the *Incogniti* therefore always enjoyed relative leeway in their literary endeavors, the men of the Academy become more circumspect over the years. The trial and execution of Pallavicino in 1644 for lèse majesté and the process against printer Francesco Valvasense in 1648 in particular made a lasting impact, as noted by Mario Infelise based on a decline in production of printed books, and can therefore be seen as a tipping point in the history of the Academy.¹⁶

Giorgio Spini’s *Ricerca dei libertini. La teoria dell’impostura delle religioni nel seicento italiano*, first published in 1950, has been one of the most influential studies on libertinism in *Incognito* Venice. He explores Italian libertinism and its central personalities from the point of view set out in the sub-title, devoting a chapter’s length to the Academy. Drawing from Père Garasse’s work in *Doctrine curieuse*, Spini proposes a characterization of the libertine as follows:

colui che identifica Dio con la Natura, che rinnega trascendenza e miracolo, immortalità dell’anima e destino oltremondano dell’uomo, che annulla la volontà e responsabilità individuali in un determinismo naturalistico, che sostiene la teoria “politica” delle religioni, sogghigna della impostura dei sacerdoti, abbraccia l’etica dell’istinto e ne trae le conseguenze pratiche più sfrondate.¹⁷

However, when extrapolating the figure of the libertine to Italy, Spini notes that libertinism there does not primarily concern an individual’s philosophical inclination, but that it can be found in aristocratic way of life and thought as “un vezzo letterario, un dato del costume”.¹⁸ Spini is careful, though, not to equate libertinism with “una stravaganza individuale di pochi cervelli bizzarri”, as this would downplay the important role of its philosophical underpinnings, which have a strong basis in Aristotelian naturalism.¹⁹ Indeed, one of the major influential thinkers on the Italian peninsula of the time was Cesare Cremonini (1550-1631), chair of natural philosophy at the University of Padova, and a stout Aristotelian who discussed issues as delicate as the mortality of the soul and the natural origins of the world. Considering the inflammatory nature of these topics, Cremonini did not go unnoticed by the Inquisition. He enjoyed considerable protection of the Venetian state, however, as he both taught young Venetian men of the upper echelons of society, and was considered a personality that could grant the Serenissima high esteem.²⁰ In Venice the relation between libertinism as an aristocratic, cultural affair and its intellectual roots is thus embodied by those *Incogniti* who have been taught by Cremonini, and who further professed the topics he touched upon. According to Spini, then, the *Incogniti*, “[s]ono stati una manifestazione tangibile di tutto un clima spirituale, che traeva la propria ispirazione da una precisa dottrina filosofica di intonazione indiscutibilmente eterodossa. Sono stati anzi coloro che hanno trasportato sul terreno della letteratura e del costume quelle figure ideali, che

¹⁵ Barbierato, *The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop. Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice*, 2012, p. 166, and Mario Infelise, “‘Ex ignoto notus?’ Note sul tipografo Sarzina e l’Accademia degli Incogniti,” 1997, p. 219.

¹⁶ Infelise, “Books and Politics in Arcangela Tarabotti’s Venice,” 2006. See also his “‘Ex ignoto notus?’,” 1997.

¹⁷ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 140.

¹⁸ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 141.

¹⁹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, pp. 140, 145.

²⁰ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 146-7.

già erano state create nel corso d'una secolare speculazione irreligiosa."²¹ Many studies have indeed assumed, after Spini, that the writings of the *Incogniti* are heavily inspired by the Aristotelian professor; the Academy's fascination with sexuality is then read in light of Cremonini's view that the soul is tied to the body, which leads to physical urges being only natural, and in need of satisfaction instead of suppression.²² Although recent research calls for a reconsideration of the heterodoxy of Cremonini's thought, there is at this point not enough reason to assume that Cremonini's teaching was not of fundamental influence to the *Incogniti*.²³ It is, however, likely that the *Incogniti* took the philosophical positions to extremes, as the academic circles granted more room for literary exploration than the more controlled University environment allowed for.²⁴

Just as the *Incogniti* worked with libertinism as the intellectual backdrop for their literary production, so will this thesis consider libertinism as the *sine qua non* rather than as the main topic of interest. Spini's considerations are, evidently, no longer reflective of the actual state of the art of libertinism's various articulations in Italy, but they will suffice for grounding this thesis.²⁵ Indeed, the focus here is not on the history of philosophy, and so, we can agree with Lorenzo Bianchi that at heart "[r]imane comunque valido il fatto che ... si possa parlare di 'tendenze' o di 'tematiche' libertine, nel XVII secolo, anche al di fuori della Francia, fermo restando che queste si caratterizzano, per contenuti e attitudini, in modo meno compatto e omogeneo di quanto non avvenga per il *libertinage érudit*."²⁶ Having a specific focus on these libertine, or *esprit fort*, topics in writing of a homosocial group such as the *Incogniti*, allows for an inquiry into the masculinity of that group in the same vein as the research Rosellini and d'Angelo carried out for France.

1.2. Status questionis

However, my preliminary research has resulted in the constatation that, apart from Rocco's well-known *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, "overtly" homoerotic work is not as easily found in the literary

²¹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 147.

²² See, for instance: Maria Assunta del Torre, *Studi su Cesare Cremonini: Cosmologia e logica nel tardo aristotelismo padovano*, 1968, especially chapter "La trattazione 'De Anima'", pp. 35-49; Heller, "Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in 'L'incoronazione di Poppea'", 1999, pp. 45-6 and Edward Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Sceptics, Libertines and Opera*, 2007, pp. 72-5.

²³ This is also the conclusion of Corinna Onelli after revisiting studies into Cremonini: "Se l'eterodossia dell'insegnamento di Cremonini a me sembra francamente indubbia, così come l'influenza di quest'ultimo sulla produzione letteraria degli Incogniti, quello che invece resta da approfondire è proprio il sostegno a livello politico di cui sembrano aver goduto Cremonini e la cerchia di Loredano." See: Onelli, "La Matrona di Efeso a Venezia e la doppia verità: Osservazioni sul libertinismo degli Incogniti e di Cesare Cremonini", 2018, paragraph 48.

²⁴ This is corroborated by a significant part of Onelli's article, curiously relegated to the position of appendix, in which she argues that it is well possible that the printed works of Cremonini that are left, are deliberately not reflective of the contents of his actual lectures. See: Onelli, "La Matrona di Efeso", 2018, paragraphs 53-55.

²⁵ See, for critical discussions of Italian libertinism: Sergio Bertelli, *Ribelli, libertini e ortodossi nella storiografia barocca*, 1973; Tullio Gregory, "Il libertinismo della prima metà del Seicento. Stato attuale degli studi e prospettive di ricerca", 1981; Armando Marchi, "Il Seicento En Enfer. La narrativa libertina del Seicento italiano," 1984; Lorenzo Bianchi, "Il libertinismo in Italia nel XVII secolo: Aspetti e problemi," 1984. See also the previously mentioned work of Jean-Pierre Cavaillé for a comparative, transnational perspective on libertinismo/libertinage: "Libertinage, irreligion, incroyance, athéisme," 2008.

²⁶ Bianchi, "Il libertinismo in Italia nel XVII secolo," 1984, pp. 667-8. Whereas Bianchi's strategic extraction of "tendenze" and "tematiche" allows for a transposition of French libertinism to Italy, bypassing specific historical circumstances and developments, it is analogous to my bypassing of further specified research into the religiosity of Venetian libertinism, simply because the baseline of Spini's characterization of the libertine has not changed so much as to no longer be useful for purposes outside of the history of philosophy.

archive of seventeenth century Venice. Neither is attention to homosexuality or queerness in general evident in scholarly research on the homosocial milieu of the *Incogniti*, which strikes as surprising considering the easy comparison made to French libertinism. Regarding sodomy in early modern Venice in general, research remains scarce and, as noted by Tommaso Scaramella, is due to its few sources often being considered from a legal perspective, which primarily leads to a discussion of its repression.²⁷ More attention has been devoted to the Renaissance period, yet this bibliography too remains small enough to be covered for within a single footnote.²⁸ Limitations in time available for the present thesis would have made it impossible to find more where others have found little, which made my focus shift from the homosexual aspect within the contemporary category of sodomy, to other non-normative possibilities provided by a queer lens onto masculinity within the libertine ambience of the *Incogniti*.

Some first work on the *Incogniti* from a similar perspective has been carried out by Jean-François Lattarico, who notes a deliberate feminization and excessive sexualization of masculine protagonists of the early Venetian novel.²⁹ This new “cartographie du masculin” often leads to comical situations of homoeroticism produced by mistaken identities through crossdressing. Similar tendencies of effeminization have also been noted in opera librettos inspired by the *Incognito* “modello di eroe ‘effeminato’ e cioè ‘rammollito’ dalla passione erotica”.³⁰ Moreover, as notes Alessandro Melis, it were also the *Incogniti* that worked with the “spregiudicato uso del travestitismo e dell’equivoco sessuale come metodo per aggredire con la comicità (ma non per questo in modo meno significativo) la polarizzazione tra i generi e la correlata gerarchia maschile-femminile.”³¹ Evidently, gender relations and the queering of gender roles were a favored topic for *Incogniti* working both inside and outside the opera industry. However, while the reconfiguration – or expansion – of the masculinity of literary characters appears liberatory in matters related to gender and sexuality, some caution should be exercised with claims about attacking the gender hierarchy: oftentimes the dynamic play with gender remains inscribed in a heteronormative framework that is reaffirmed at the denouement of the narrative. Studies of gender, specialized studies of masculinity included, are always studies of power, and heteronormativity is one of patriarchy’s most invasive tools. Careful inquiry into the interrelations between masculinity, queerness and power is needed, which is why this thesis will firmly root its analyses in critical theory. So doing, it will add to the lacuna that is masculinity in studies of seventeenth century Venice, baroque literature, and the *Incogniti*. The work mentioned above is a first

²⁷ Tommaso Scaramella, *Tra sato e costumi. Governo e culture dell’omosessualità a Venezia fra Sei e Settecento*, 2018. See: Gabriele Martini, *Il “vizio nefando” nella Venezia del Seicento. Aspetti sociali e repressione di giustizia*, 1988; Romano Canosa, *La restaurazione sessuale. Per una storia della sessualità tra Cinquecento e Seicento*, 1993, pp. 237-55.

²⁸ Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, 1985; Patricia Labalme, “Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance,” 1984; Romano Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura. La sodomia a Firenze e Venezia nel Quattrocento*, 1991; Giovanni Scarabella, “Devianza sessuale e interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo,” 1980; Nicolas S. Davidson, “Sodomy in Early Modern Venice,” 2002.

²⁹ Jean-François Lattarico, “Aux frontières du masculin: L’androgynie (anti)-héroïque dans les premiers romans italiens du XVIIe siècle,” 2020.

³⁰ Maurizio Rebaudengo, “Intorno alla librettistica secentesca,” 2000, p. 1131.

³¹ Alessandro Melis, “‘Sei troppo effeminato. / Di femmina son nato’. Infrazione di codici e fluidità di genere in alcuni libretti d’opera del Seicento veneziano,” 2020, p. 105. See also: Susan McClary, *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth Century Music*, especially the chapter “Gender Ambiguities and Erotic Excess in the Operas of Cavalli,” 2012, pp. 104-25; Davide Daolmi and Emanuele Senici, “‘L’omosessualità è un modo di cantare’. Il contributo *queer* all’indagine sull’opera in musica,” 2000.

start to fill this gap in knowledge from a literary perspective, but it would benefit from a larger cultural-historical investigation.

Conversely, attention to the *Incogniti*'s masculinity will also contribute to the field of historical masculinity studies, which, in terms of published monographs, is growing yet still lacking for seventeenth century Italy. Generally speaking, the focus of scholars working on post-medieval premodern masculinity have most often concentrated their efforts on France and England, and on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³² For Italy a few studies on masculinity in literary texts have been published, but the usual focus for masculinity studies in this area is sartorial and has to do with the public image of the individual.³³ In particular, this thesis will stand in close connection to the work of Courtney Quaintance, whose *Textual Masculinity* (2015) focused specifically on literary constructions of masculinity and masculinity constructed through literary engagement in the Venice of a century before the cultural dominance of the *Incogniti*.³⁴ Alongside this temporal connection with a previous study, the present thesis will thematically be complementary to Lewis C. Seifert's work on masculinity and libertine writing in seventeenth century France.³⁵

1.3. Contents of this thesis

This thesis will explore how masculinity and writing are related within the libertine milieu of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*. The following chapter will serve as a framework for the two subsequent chapters of analysis, and consists of two parts. The first presents the leading theories for the study of masculinity, the second discusses the historical context in which the *Incogniti* operated through the lens of these theories. So doing, the chapter will ground and tie together the analytical chapters on the one hand, and theorize hypotheses for the way masculinity structures the life and works of the men under scrutiny on the other.

The first analytical chapter that follows this framework will take up Rosellini and D'Angelo's insights of the connection between libertine masculinity and the writing about sexually transgressive topics, more specifically, the connection between the libertine *esprit fort* and homosexuality. The bulk of the chapter is taken up by an extensive close reading of the *Incogniti*'s most notorious text, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, written by Antonio Rocco. The narrative consists of the efforts of schoolmaster

³² For France, see: Todd W. Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture*, 2006; David LaGuardia, *Intertextual Masculinity in French Renaissance Literature: Rabelais, Brantôme and the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, 2008. For England see: Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, 1996; Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-Semitism and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew*, 2004; Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric*, 2007; Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*, 2008; Keith M. Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity*, 2009; Per Sivefors, *Representing Masculinity in Early Modern English Satire, 1590-1603. "A Kingdom for a Man"*, 2020.

³³ For literary studies, see: Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, 2003; *The Poetics of Masculinity in Early Modern Italy and Spain. Essays and Studies*, edited by Gerry Milligan and Jane Tylus, 2010. Yael Manes, *Motherhood and Patriarchal Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century Italian Comedy*, 2011. For studies with a less literary focus, see: Carolyn Springer, *Armour and Masculinity in the Italian Renaissance*, 2010; Susan Gaylard, *Hollow Men: Writing, Objects, and Public Image in Renaissance Italy*, 2013; Douglas Biow, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy: Men, Their professions, and Their Beards*, 2015; Elizabeth Currie, *Fashion and masculinity in Renaissance Florence*, 2016.

³⁴ Courtney Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity and the Exchange of Women in Renaissance Venice*, 2015.

³⁵ Lewis C. Seifert, *Manning the Margins. Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth Century France*, 2009. It is noteworthy that Seifert discusses, amongst other things, the writings of Théophile de Viau from a queer perspective.

Filotimo to persuade the young boy Alcibiades to submit to him sexually, and depicts his eventual success in graphic detail. This immediately calls to mind both homosexually connotated terms of Théophile de Viau's statement that opened this thesis: sodomy and pederasty. Most critical readings of the work indeed focus on those terms, and explain the text's repression through this excessive sexual transgression. My reading too, will pay due attention to these sexual categories, but it will employ them to interpellate the non-normative articulations of masculinity that are present in the work. Furthermore, my reading will move beyond the text to interrogate the anxieties *l'Alcibiade* potentially provoked in its readership and the ones responsible for its printing.

The second analytical chapter has a more cultural historical focus and zooms out to the level of the members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti* as a collective, rather than staying with a single text. The chapter will focus on paratextual material – primarily dedicatory epistles and prefaces – of printed works the members collectively contributed to, as these collections were part of their programmatic strategy of coming out together. Taking the *Incogniti* as a homosocial group that constructs affective ties amongst each other through writing, this particular focus grants insight into the functioning of these bonds, and into what was deemed important in the construction of a masculine (group) identity. Special attention will be given to the gendered dynamics between the public and the private, and the way the men coped with the collective trauma that was the execution of their star member Ferrante Pallavicino.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Hegemonial masculinity

If recent critical literature about masculinity can agree on one thing, it is that the term “hegemonic masculinity” alongside the theoretical discussions and practical applications of the concept are still highly informative for critical masculinity studies.³⁶ First coined in 1987 by R. W. Connell to delineate a specific form of preferred masculinity in a given historical context that structures and legitimates unequal gender hierarchies between men and women and among men themselves, the concept has proven influential and empirically employable throughout the humanities and social sciences.³⁷ As it was not left uncriticized, a review article by Connell and Messerschmidt that was published in 2005 addressed those criticisms and updated the concept in accordance.³⁸ In the original formulation, hegemonic masculinity was understood as a historicized ideal form of masculinity, “not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.”³⁹ Whereas the reformulation abandoned generalizable claims to globality in favor of a need for analysis of a multiplicity of hegemonial masculinities at various spatial levels – specified as global, regional and local –, the *relationality* of gender relations and the *legitimation* of certain hierarchies are the two key components that passed the test of time. For Connell, “[h]egemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women.”⁴⁰ Like masculinity, femininity also exists in plural forms, and it is the performance of “emphasized femininity” that hegemonic masculinity constructs itself against to legitimate men’s domination over women; emphasized femininity, as feminine ideal, complies with patriarchal exigencies and rewards the women performing it.⁴¹ Concerning intra-masculine relations, if there is a cultural ideal of what a man should be, the propagation of that ideal assigns positions to other masculinities: those men that uphold the ideal by striving – yet never completely reaching – to be so can be considered *complicit*, and those men that deviate too much from or fail to conform to the norm can be considered *subordinate* or *marginalized*.⁴² *Protest* masculinities can be performed by men who are generally excluded from social power, and compensate with hypermasculine behavior, usually marked by aggression. Notwithstanding these various types of masculinity set out by Connell, Connell and Messerschmidt firmly oppose investigations that search to pinpoint the “real” hegemonial man at a certain time and place, or that seek to compile typological lists of masculine “character traits” that would make up the hegemonial man. These investigations often simply look for men in positions of high esteem and/or

³⁶ Messerschmidt, “The Salience of ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’,” 2019.

³⁷ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1987.

³⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept,” 2005. See the article itself for all the criticisms and responses, which are too numerous to duplicate here. Connell and Messerschmidt’s article nicely concludes with an overview of what should be retained of the original formulation, what should be rejected by now, and what new perspectives should be added to “hegemonic masculinity”.

³⁹ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, p. 832.

⁴⁰ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1987, p. 183.

⁴¹ Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1987; Mimi Schippers, “Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity and Gender Hegemony,” 2007 and Hamilton, L., Armstrong E. A., Seeley, J. L., and Armstrong, E. M., “Hegemonic Femininities and Intersectional Domination,” 2019.

⁴² When hegemonial masculinity stands to emphasized femininity as the top of their internal gender hierarchy, multiple forms of femininity could be established as well. One need only think of the feminist movement to grasp what a “protest femininity” could look like.

power, but fail to recognize that necessary aspect of hegemony that legitimizes gender inequality and upholds dominance over women and other men.⁴³ Similarly, although hegemonic masculinity is equated to patriarchal power, it is not necessarily domination by force. Rather, masculine hegemony is enforced through “cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities”.⁴⁴

Although hegemonial masculinity is not embodied by most men, it is equally unlikely “to stand out as a sharply defined pattern separate from all others. A degree of overlap between hegemonic and complicit masculinities is extremely likely if hegemony is effective.”⁴⁵ This testifies to the unstable nature of gender roles and expectations, as ideals change over time. Hegemonic masculinity is therefore open to not only change, but also challenge and contestation.⁴⁶ It is for this reason that the reformulation calls for attention to the non-hegemonic groups’ agency, and for the intersection of gender with other axes of differences such as class, age, race, etc. Indeed, marginalized masculinities sometimes offer interesting resources for the reshaping of dominant masculinities – Demetrakis Demitriou shows the example of mainstream masculine culture adopting/appropriating gay men’s fashions.⁴⁷ In an important nuance to Connell’s original theory, Demitriou deconstructs two dualities. First and foremost, he identifies two forms of hegemony: on the one hand “external hegemony” that relates to men’s dominance over women, on the other “internal hegemony” that explains the hierarchies at work within masculinities.⁴⁸ Demitriou then criticizes Connell’s view of internal hegemony as relying too much on binaristic thinking, where hegemonic masculinity is constructed as opposed to non-hegemonic forms. Rather, he argues, we should attend to hegemonic masculinity’s “dialectical pragmatism” that reconstructs it “as a hybrid bloc that unites various and diverse practices in order to construct the best possible strategy for the reproduction of patriarchy. ... It is its constant hybridization, its constant appropriation of diverse elements from various masculinities that makes the hegemonic bloc capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting to the specificities of new historical conjunctures.”⁴⁹ This is not to say that all men are always complicit in hegemonic masculinity’s reconfiguration, or receptive of “patriarchal dividend” – i.e. the usually material rewards of patriarchy –, but it does account for patriarchy’s success in reestablishing itself: the formation of the masculine hegemonial bloc due to the instability of masculinity’s internal hegemony serves the prolongation of masculinity’s external hegemony.⁵⁰ In their reformulation, Connell and Messerschmidt agree that “[h]egemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such [= diverse, subordinated or

⁴³ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, pp. 838, 847, 854.

⁴⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonial Masculinity,” 2005, p. 846.

⁴⁵ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonial Masculinity,” 2005, p. 839.

⁴⁶ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, pp. 835, 853.

⁴⁷ Demitriou, “Connell’s Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique”, 2001. It is telling that the term “metrosexual” – implying a difference of sexuality to some extent – got introduced for a man who took a care to the more femininely connoted paying attention to his appearance – an effect of Othering to protect hegemonial masculinity? Almost two decades after its appearance, today the term has all but faded away alongside a normalization of men taking care of their grooming and looks.

⁴⁸ Demitriou, “Connell’s Concept,” 2001, p. 341.

⁴⁹ Demitriou, “Connell’s Concept,” 2001, p. 348. Closely recalls Cornwall and Lindisfarne, *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, 1994, p. 12: “Meaning depends on who is speaking and who is being described in what setting. Masculinity has multiple and ambiguous meanings which alter according to context and over time. Meanings of masculinity also vary across cultures and admit to cultural borrowing; masculinities imported from elsewhere are conflated with local ideas to produce new configurations.”

⁵⁰ For patriarchal dividend, see: Connell, *Gender and Power*, 1987.

marginalized] masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by active oppression in the form of discredit or violence. In practice, both incorporation and oppression can occur together.”⁵¹

Although hegemonic masculinity is concerned with structure(s), individual men are not to be overlooked, in a similar way that the agency of non-hegemonic – either men or women – groups should not be overlooked as a potential locus of change. Wetherall and Edley suggest that individual subjects can strategically take up certain positions informed by hegemonic norms in particular circumstances, that is, “[m]en can dodge among multiple meanings according to their interactional needs. Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable; but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments. Consequently, ‘masculinity’ represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices.”⁵² Whereas they do not necessarily disagree, Connell and Messerschmidt note that “discursive perspectives emphasize the symbolic dimension,” while hegemonic masculinity has to reckon with non-discursive constraints in other dimensions as well.⁵³ An individual, rather than always being free to choose how to behave, is located in a particular setting with its rules and expectations: “[o]ne is not free to adopt any gender position in interaction simply as a discursive or reflexive move. The possibilities are constrained massively by embodiment, by institutional histories, by economic forces, and by personal and family relationships.”⁵⁴ So, rather than being the neutral to the marked feminine, masculinity too is subject to gendered, patriarchal, exigencies. Embodying or performing even hegemonial masculinity, then, does not equal having both discursive and non-discursive freedom with regard to gender. Acknowledging a plurality of hegemonial masculinities that are historically and spatially informed, as is Connell and Messerschmidt’s exhortation by distinguishing and comparing between global, regional and local levels of analysis, allows for a more inclusive insight into gendered dynamics and gender trouble.

2.2. Masculine domination

While Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Domination Masculine* (2001) has received plenty of criticism mostly for the heterosexist underpinnings of some of the arguments, historians of early modernity Todd W. Reeser and Lewis C. Seifert give a useful reading of Bourdieu’s work.⁵⁵ In what the French theorist calls “symbolic violence”, both men and women have become attuned to patriarchal social structures because a long-lasting androcentric vision of the world made it seem natural that men dominate society and culture.⁵⁶ In order to legitimate and obscure the fiction of masculine domination, biology is turned to: “[la sociodécée masculine] légitime une relation de domination en l’inscrivant dans une nature biologique qui est elle-même une construction sociale naturalisée.”⁵⁷ It might therefore not be

⁵¹ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonial Masculinity,” 2005, p. 848.

⁵² Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, p. 841, based on Wetherell and Edley, “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices,” 1999.

⁵³ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, p. 842.

⁵⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 2005, pp. 842-3. They note the high rates of suicides among transgender people as a powerful and painful example of the sometimes extremely high costs of making certain discursive choices, based on Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men*, 2003.

⁵⁵ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity in Bourdieu’s *La Domination masculine*,” 2003.

⁵⁶ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 89.

⁵⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, 1998, p. 29. This is of course nothing new within feminist thought. For a detailed critique of biology as the privileged baseline for an epistemological consideration of masculinity standing since the Enlightenment, see: Petersen, “Research on Men and Masculinities: Some Implications of Recent Theory for Future Work,” 2003.

surprising that Bourdieu's theory is a bodily one: while on the one hand, he theorizes symbolic violence to play out on bodies – whether or not with physical constraint –, and emotions and affect to be the primary regulators of the relationship between *dominants* and *dominés*, on the other hand he turns to sexual acts as the main locus where masculine domination asserts itself.⁵⁸ When men consider sex “une forme de domination, d'appropriation, de ‘possession’”, as opposed to women who valorize emotional attachment, “the sexual relation is necessarily also a social relation of domination that reveals a fundamental division between masculine activity and feminine passivity.”⁵⁹ This assertion leads to a masculine preoccupation of protecting the male body from that precise vulnerability that is projected onto the female body – i.e. the possibility of being penetrated –, by devoting both attention to making sure the male body is not marked in the way the female body is, as well as engaging in hypermasculine behavior to underscore the male body's virile potential, for example through combat sports.⁶⁰ Reeser and Seifert note that in Bourdieu's theory, the masculine body “is invisible – and thus taken for granted – but at the same time it must perform and reaffirm its dominance, which is constantly subject to challenge, especially by other men. As a result, masculinity implies an anxiety as it includes ‘une charge’ and a ‘devoir d'affirmer en toute circonstance sa virilité.’”⁶¹ While speaking about bodily performance, the recognition of anxiety as an important element to masculinity makes Reeser and Seifert's reading of Bourdieu compatible with one of the most influential studies of early modern masculinity, Mark Breitenberg's *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (1996). For Breitenberg, “‘anxious masculinity’ is intended to convey the internalization of specifically social tensions that are endemic to the early modern sex-gender system, the very tensions that produce the masculine subject in the first place.”⁶² Although Breitenberg works from a psychoanalytic perspective that is not taken up further in this thesis, his reflections clearly resonate with other approaches to masculinity; where relevant, those resonances will be highlighted in the remainder of this work.

Bourdieu's preoccupation with masculinity defined on and by a male body, and his association of masculinity with activity, and passivity with femininity, stands in stark contrast with the critique of this binary essentialism from gender and queer theorists.⁶³ In the same vein, Breitenberg's work aimed at exposing “the inherent instability and anxiety that results from constructing masculinity in this fashion, and to reveal the historical contingencies of the model in order to escape from its apparent essentiality.”⁶⁴ However, Reeser and Seifert note that *La Domination masculine* has a different agenda, and that, rather than rearticulating both the sex binary and the gender binary as essentializing, “[it] seems to posit that masculinity is both sex and gender, and is linked to both a stable male body and a social construction in the process of being naturalized.”⁶⁵ I am inclined to disagree on the stability of the male body, for how can it be stable in a theory where penetration – a bodily act – renders a man

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *La domination masculine*, 1998, p. 44; Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine*, 1998, p. 26; Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 90.

⁶⁰ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 90.

⁶¹ Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, 1998, pp. 57, 56, cited in Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003 p. 90;

⁶² Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 1996, p. 13.

⁶³ See, most notably: Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1998.

⁶⁴ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 1996, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 91. Although bridging the sex/gender binary this way, this is not to say that Bourdieu's arguments cannot be criticized for being based in (hetero)sexist ideas. Indeed, his later discussion of the effects of homosexuality on masculinity is both contradictory and again employs the association of male homosexuality with effeminizing passivity. See, for a gay critique: Frédéric Martel, “Bourdieu et la question homosexuelle”, 1998.

effeminate? I would advance that masculinity as sex, or *virilité*, is “simply” the arena that is highlighted, and where hypermasculine overcompensation might take place, when masculinity as gender is challenged. Gender, then, would be projected onto the body, and sex revealed as a gendered construction, precisely when the link between masculinity and domination is challenged.

Once more in contrast to Anglo-American work on masculinity where individual and collective anxieties and crises mark masculinity, and therefore deconstruct its seeming stability, Bourdieu does not pay much attention to this topic. Reeser and Seifert note that, for Bourdieu, “the cultural crisis is precisely that there is no perceived crisis, that male domination remains hidden and that there are not *more* transgressions or subversions of sexist structures.”⁶⁶ However, and here is where the authors start the most crucial part of their reading of Bourdieu, the fact that trouble is not visible, does not mean that there is none. Replacing attention from dominance in gender relations onto relationality of dominance within the masculine subject itself, Bourdieu notes that the nature of domination forces both sides of the relationship into a required preestablished position. This means that masculinity is now dominated by the same structure that grants it its privileged position: “[l]a structure impose ses contraintes aux deux termes de la relation de domination, donc aux dominants eux-mêmes, qui peuvent en bénéficier tout en étant, selon le mot de Marx, ‘dominés par leur dominations’”.⁶⁷ Reeser and Seifert precise: “In this way, masculinity takes the place of femininity, or men partially take the place of women by becoming subjected to symbolic violence even as they wield it. So doing, men would not simply move down, but the very hierarchy of symbolic violence would be inscribed within – and become a key element of – masculinity itself.”⁶⁸ To some extent, Bourdieu’s theory, once it is projected onto male subjectivity itself, relates to the positions of both non-hegemonic and hegemonic masculinities in Connell and Messerschmidt’s framework: non-hegemonic men are not on top of the hierarchy, but are still caught up in a web of patriarchal exigencies, while hegemonic men are also not entirely free to behave as they choose, as the very hegemony that they embody, is unstable and keeps them in check. Bourdieu’s words seem apt to describe their position: “Les dominants ne peuvent manquer de l’appliquer à eux-mêmes, c’est-à-dire à leur corps et à tout ce qu’ils sont et ce qu’ils font, les schèmes de l’inconscient qui, dans leur cas, engendrent de formidables exigences.”⁶⁹ Reeser and Seifert build on this position when they argue: “In this model, masculinity would not be defined by a simple equation with either the dominator or the dominated, but rather it would be understood as a more complicated movement between these two poles. Oscillating between the two positions of dominator and dominated, male subjectivity is thus about the tensions between hegemony and non-hegemony.”⁷⁰ Their reading of Bourdieu’s theory, then, can be summed up with: “masculinity fluctuates between an “être” and a “devoir-être” in constant tension with each other, a tension at the core of masculinity.”⁷¹ In order to make this tension, or we could say anxiety, more livable, domination is projected onto others, which appears to be an age-old strategy if we can put Reeser and Seifert’s reading of Bourdieu in a genealogical rapport with Breitenberg’s reading of early modern culture: “early modern masculinity relies on a variety of constructions of women as Other – on the perceived necessity of maintaining a discourse of gendered difference and hierarchy – that reveal in their most

⁶⁶ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity”, 2003, p. 93.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, 1998, p. 76, cited in Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity”, p. 94.

⁶⁸ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity”, 2003, p. 94.

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine*, 1998, p. 76, cited in Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity”, p. 94.

⁷⁰ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 94.

⁷¹ Reeser and Seifert, “Oscillating Masculinity,” 2003, p. 95.

excessive moments a deeper suspicion that the model itself may be merely functional rather than descriptive of inherent truth.”⁷²

2.3. Crisis of masculinity

Whether it is in a collective structure of hegemonial masculinity with its patriarchal strictures, in the individual psychic-turned-physical idea that masculinity equals domination, or in a different mold, masculinity apparently always ends up as bound to certain ideals, and both constrictive and constricting to others and to itself. Paradoxically, it is all these exigencies that render masculinity highly unstable, constantly on the lookout to reassert itself. And to do so, as Demitriou noted, masculinity sometimes searches for new constitutive elements beyond its previous borders. It is therefore not surprising that scholars often speak about “crisis” as a pertinent element in masculinity studies. In his book *The End of Masculinity* (1998), John MacInnes argues that we should ask “what historical conditions encourage men and women to image the existence of such a thing as masculinity in order to make sense of their lives in the first place?”⁷³ Historicizing the concept of masculinity in this way acknowledges that it is a construct subject to interpellation, and MacInnes asserts that masculinity has consequentially always been in crisis. The fact that this happens time and time again, becomes part of the discursive production of masculinity: “the whole idea that men’s natures can be understood in terms of their ‘masculinity’ arose out of a ‘crisis’ for all men: the fundamental incompatibility between the core principle of modernity that all human beings are essentially equal (regardless of their sex) and the core tenet of patriarchy that men are naturally superior to women and thus destined to rule over them.”⁷⁴ John Benyon builds on this, and examined (historical) scholarly work on masculinity and crisis for other periods as well, and asserts that it appeared before modernity and the feminist movements as well. Because of masculinity’s fluid nature, crisis is never far away, and it seems to become constitutive of masculinity itself.⁷⁵ Elahe Haschemi Yekani further nuances this position, by presenting crisis as a constitutive strategy of reasserting masculinity and its concomitant patriarchal privileges:

The ongoing (self-)fashioning of White masculinity under threat or in crisis, reinstalling ‘him’ over and over as the centre of attention, needs to be understood and read as a specific re-privileging narrative strategy that affects the comprehension of masculinity as a non-static concept reliant on iterative practices. ... Accordingly, one could argue that there is no crisis of masculinity but rather a continuing narrative production of crisis tendencies with specific privileging effects.⁷⁶

Yekani’s understanding of the crisis of masculinity resonates with the constant hybridization of the hegemonial bloc and with the oscillating nature of masculine domination: while subject to structural constraints, masculinity constantly seeks to reassert and redefine itself. In this constant renewal lies both a pessimistic and optimistic possibility. While it is true on the one hand that anxious crisis rhetoric “reinforces the underlying ideological assumption that patriarchal masculinity is always in crisis yet forever triumphantly faces and overcomes every obstacle”, to quote Patricia Parker’s objection, it might also lead to a radically different pattern of masculinity.⁷⁷ Ivan Jablonka notes that one man’s crisis of masculinity can become another’s opportunity: “[v]ue collectivement, cette crise n’est pas un

⁷² Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 1996, p. 11.

⁷³ MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity: The Confusion of Sexual Genesis and Sexual Difference in Modern Society*, 1998, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁴ MacInnes, *The End of Masculinity*, 1998, p. 11.

⁷⁵ Benyon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 2002, pp. 75-97.

⁷⁶ Yekani, *The Privilege of Crisis: Narratives of Masculinities in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Photography and Film*, 2011, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁷ Parker, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe*, 2001, p. 17.

problème, mais une chance : elle permet de refonder le masculin. À l'échelle des générations, le déclin de la virilité pourrait renforcer les arguments du féminisme. Une fois diagnostiquée la fin des hommes, on peut les faire renaître sous les traits d'hommes justes."⁷⁸ Indeed, aggressiveness and violence, physical or symbolic, need not necessarily be a fixed part of masculine identity, and as notes Alan Peterson: "By disrupting our taken-for-granted assumptions about men and masculinity, historical deconstruction serves an important strategic function in allowing us to imagine alternative futures."⁷⁹ Herein lies an important task for the historian.

⁷⁸ Ivan Jablonka, *Des hommes justes : Du patriarcat aux nouvelles masculinités*, 2019, p. 291.

⁷⁹ Petersen, "Research on Men and Masculinities," 2003, p. 64.

3. Historical context

Before turning to analysis of literary and historical sources of seventeenth-century Venice and the *Incogniti* milieu, a sketch of the historical context that shaped masculinity's pertinence as a focal point is needed. Indeed, following MacInnes, we need to answer the question what historical conditions led to masculinity being in crisis this time. Or, to paraphrase in a way that resonates more closely with Breitenberg, what were the endemic social tensions that contributed to the anxious formation of an early modern masculine subject in the first place? Pointers are found both in the Lagoon City's socio-economic and political situation, as well as in developments in its cultural and intellectual milieu. Rather than considering those two separate spheres of interest, they have mutually influenced each other, leading to a very specific dynamic when it comes to issues of gender, and consequentially, masculinity.

3.1. Symbolic and material ties between gender and Venetian socio-political life

Gender, in a symbolic sense, has been central to the way Venice mythologized herself and that, at its turn, was perceived by outsiders. While the rule of the Republic was in the hands of a restricted class of noble men, with a vehement exclusion of women from public life in stark opposition to the Italian courts elsewhere, one of Venice's most valued commodities was her relative liberty. Paradoxically, this liberty seems to be the product of the relative conservatism of the system, which, again paradoxically, relied on a dual feminine symbol through which its male authority expressed its power.⁸⁰ On the one hand, Venice's male rulers imagined her as the Virgin Mary, to symbolize the virtue and stability of the state, which was impenetrable and unconquerable. As Wendy Heller notes: "Venice's virginity was thus associated with the virtues of her male citizens who dominated this elegantly structured, aristocratic oligarchy. Ironically, her purity and the wonder of her accomplishments were the result of a political system that banned women from even symbolic manifestations of power."⁸¹ On the other hand, Venice was associated with various sorts of liberties through the figure of the goddess Venus by virtue of her "[f]ree commerce, lack of censorship, a flourishing pleasure industry, public festivals, and, eventually, opera."⁸² It was this dual feminine image that impacted and controlled women by relegating some to the private sphere of the house through marriage, while it forced others towards monachization and prostitution – the Virgin took precedence over the Goddess when it came to women's sexuality. By contrast, men benefitted from both of Venice's feminine symbols. Venus granted "unmatched opportunities for personal liberties and sexual license that she bestowed on her male citizens and visitors."⁸³ It also presented men – many of whom were forced to remain bachelors due to unfavorable economic and socio-political circumstances which we will return to – with a safety valve to channel their sexuality in the form of controlled systems of prostitution.⁸⁴ The Virgin positively reflected onto Venetian men with regard to their virtue and patriotism, strengthening the idea of a male collective as a powerful form of statesmanship. This was recognized by foreigners, such as the Englishman James Howell, who observed in 1651 that: "ther are few or none who are greater Patriotts than the Venetian

⁸⁰ Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 2003, p. 2. On the myth of Venice, see: Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 1981; Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice*, 1999; David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, 2001.

⁸¹ Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, p. 3.

⁸² Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, p. 4.

⁸³ Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ For marriage practices in early Renaissance Venice see: Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*, 2000. The chapter title "Subaltern Patriarchs: Patrician Bachelors" resonates uncannily with Connell's masculinity theory.

Gentlemen, their prime *study* is public good and glory of their Countrey, and civil prudence is their principall *trade* whereunto they arrive in a high measure; Yet as it may be easily observed, though these Gentlemen are extraordinary wise when they are *conjunct*, take them *single* they are but as other Men.”⁸⁵ The inextricable ties between gender and Venetian politics on a symbolic level thus led to male control over women on a symbolic as well material level; feminine symbols are used in a female-exclusory way to accrue patriarchal dividend for (other) men. It is then not hard to imagine that trouble of any kind that impacted Venice’s relative stability, would also have an effect on (material) gender relations and cause gender trouble.

And indeed, by the seventeenth century, trouble arose out of a variety of factors including the effects of the Counter-Reformation, a stagnation and even decline of population growth, and constant tension with the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁶ But perhaps more importantly, the marriage market of the Venetian patriciate collapsed, due to a variety of reasons. Economic decline impacted families’ abilities to pay for dowries, which meant that fewer daughters of patriciate families wed, and instead were forced into religious institutes to protect their and their families’ reputations and ease the latter’s financial burden.⁸⁷ Jutta Sperling suggested as an additional reason for the forced monachization of many girls that families preferred that option over marrying beneath their rank, since the number of sons that were allowed to marry was restricted as well.⁸⁸ This is reflected in a letter of Loredan to his niece in which he admonishes her not to disregard her parents’ wishes to take up religious vows: “You have been born noble, of a distinguished family, but since you do not have a dowry to match your birth, you must either marry beneath you, or hazard the inconvenience of poverty. You will encounter universal contempt if you stain nobility with inferior alliances.”⁸⁹ The restrictions on the marriage market impacted men and women differently. Whereas many men were forced to remain bachelors, and some were, like women, also required to spend their lives in religious institutes, they retained relative leeway.⁹⁰ Moreover, unlike women, their sexualities were not controlled in a repressive way, instead they were relatively accounted for through Venice’s many prostitutes and courtesans: there was clearly some recognition of the dangers of the sexuality of bachelors, which was thus to be kept in check through the use of women.⁹¹ It might be helpful to think of forced bachelors performing rogue sexuality as expressing protest masculinities who aggressively overcompensated in the sexual arena, because they were barred from the hegemonial ideal of marriage, with its concomitant patriarchal dividend in the form of social power and economic wealth. At the same time, the fact that their sexual

⁸⁵ James Howell, *S.P.Q.V. A survey of the signorie of Venice, of her admired policy, and method of government ...*, 1651. Cited in Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, p. 3, originally cited by William Bouwsma, *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History*, 1990, p. 278. Original emphasis.

⁸⁶ See, for extensive studies of the waning of Venice’s former glory: James Cushman Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility*, 1962; Brian Pullan, *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy*, 1968. See also: Muir, *The Culture Wars*, 2007.

⁸⁷ Francesca Medioli, “Monache e monacazioni nel Seicento,” 1997.

⁸⁸ Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice*, 1999. Moreover, Gabriella Zarri identified a political rationale of the Venetian rulers to limit marriages that crossed lines of class, in order to stop the growth of the patriciate. See: Zarri, “Monasteri femminili e città (secoli XV-XVIII),” 1986.

⁸⁹ Cited and translated in Letizia Panizza, “Volume Editor’s Introduction” to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 2004, p. 15. Originally cited in: Luciano Menetto and Gianni Zennaro, *La storia del malcostume a Venezia nei secoli XVI e XVII*, 1987, pp 104–5.

⁹⁰ Ferrante Pallavicino is the prime example of a man who was supposed to devote his life to religion, but took a different path marked by (sexual) polemics. See: Raffaello Urbinato, *Ferrante Pallavicino. Il flagello dei Barberini*, 2004.

⁹¹ Moreover, for problems of male sexuality, see: Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 1985.

needs were somewhat tended to stands in contrast with the realities of women facing forced monachization.⁹² Most girls had to comply with their parents' wishes, as testifies Loredan's letter above, and took religious vows despite having no religious vocation.⁹³ Whether or not we want to see their coerced position as an example of an emphasized femininity as it eventually upholds (hegemonial) patriarchal demands, or we highlight their position as victims of the patriarchal system of hegemonial masculinity, some women did object to forced monachization, albeit from within the cloister. Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652) is the prime example of such a woman.⁹⁴ With a sharp tongue and a sharper intellect, Tarabotti recognized the hegemonial gender hierarchy *avant la lettre*, and accused not only men of their abuse of power. Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater note that in her book *Inferno Monacale*, an invective against the patriarchal system's demands on women and the discontents of forced monachization, Tarabotti also points a finger towards professed nuns "for the persistence of coerced monachization, arguing that, like fathers, they knowingly deceived girls into accepting convent life."⁹⁵ So doing, Tarabotti performs the double task of locating a form of complicit or emphasized femininity, and showing that hegemonial masculinity is not only in place, but can also be challenged. Moreover, the nun's reprimand echoes clearly with Connell's insight that it is, amongst others, through cultural consent and institutionalization that the gender hierarchy is installed and crystallized, with Loredan's letter testifying to the (discursive) marginalization or deligitimation of deviance to the dominant models.

3.2. Women authors and literary fraternity

Gendered discontents have long found their way into literature, the writings of the *querelle des femmes* being an exemplary case in point.⁹⁶ Two important texts on the pro-woman side of the debate stem from the well-known Venetian authors Lucrezia Marinella (1571-1653) and Moderata Fonte (1555-1592), who respectively penned *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti et mancamenti de gli uomini* (1601) and *Il merito delle donne ... ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e*

⁹² For studies on forced monachization: Medioli, "The Dimensions of the Cloister: Enclosure, Constraint, and Protection of Seventeenth Century Italy," 2001; Medioli, "Monacazioni forzate: Donne ribelle al proprio destino," 1994; Mary Laven, "Cast Out and Shut In: The Experience of Nuns in Counter-Reformation Venice," 2005; Giovanna Paolin, *Lo spazio del silenzio: Monacazioni forzate, clausura e proposte di vita religiosa femminile nell'età moderna*, 1996; Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic*, 1999; Zarri, "Monasteri femminili e città," 1986.

⁹³ See Anne Jacobson Schutte, "The Permeable Cloister?" 2006, p. 21, where she argues that most girls were unlikely or at all unable to protest the parental/(patriarchal) dictate.

⁹⁴ See the excellent collection of articles: *Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice*, edited by Elissa Weaver, 2006.

⁹⁵ See, Ray and Westwater (editors and translators), "Introduction" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Letters Familiar and Formal*, 2012, p. 6. Although *Inferno Monacale* widely circulated in manuscript during Tarabotti's life, it has never been printed, and no contemporary copies survive. The first publication of the work is the version edited by Francesca Medioli of 1990, based on an eighteenth century anonymous manuscript. It is assumed that the work constitutes the second part of a series of critical works, following *Tirannia Paterna* (1654, posthumously printed) and preceding *Paradiso Monacale* (1654, posthumously printed). See, also for a discussion regarding the dating of her works: Medioli, "Chiavi di lettura" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *L'Inferno monacale*, 1990, pp. 158-9.

⁹⁶ See for work on Italy and Venice especially: Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models*, 1990; Virginia Cox, "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice," 1995; Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy*, 2011, pp. 236-249; Francesca D'Alessandro Behr, *Arms and the Woman: Classical Tradition and Women Writers in the Venetian Renaissance*, 2016. See also, for a study on the *Incognito* Francesco Pona from this perspective: Fabio Boni, *Il personaggio femminile nella narrative di Francesco Pona: Sullo sfondo della polemica misogina in Italia*, 2016.

più perfette de gli huomini (1600, posthumously printed).⁹⁷ It is assumed that both women, while employing different strategies to voice the worth of their sex, wrote their works in response to the, topically misogynist, diatribe against women of Giuseppe Passi, *Dei donneschi difetti* (1599). Marinella, for instance, engages topical arguments made by men against women in her philosophical defense of her sex, and turns those same accusations back onto men. Fonte stages a dialogue between women in a garden exempt from men, and has her female interlocutors complain about masculine behavior and shortcomings. This setting offers the female interlocutors, albeit temporarily, a space to freely engage intellectually with one another.⁹⁸ Feminized friendship and female communities are depicted as an important aspect for women to gain (political) autonomy in Fonte's dialogue.⁹⁹ This can be seen as the feminine reflection, denied as it usually was to women, of male homosocial bonding through intellectual engagement, which will be returned to as a fundamental aspect of *Incognito* masculinity. This theme returns in Tarabotti's attacks against patriarchy as well. In her *Antisatire* (1644), alongside denunciations of more trivial matters such as masculine fashion and hairstyles, Tarabotti argues that men "have usurped a great advantage over [women], who rarely can dedicate themselves to the noble task of writing because they are by men's tyranny kept even from learning to read, let alone from the illumination of knowledge and letters."¹⁰⁰ By banning women from the privileged intellectual domain, men establish cultural dominance over women according to rules they have set themselves. Women, however, did enter the literary domain and so doing challenged masculine authority not only by their very presence, but also by actively engaging with and shaping the direction of the *querelle des femmes*. It also has to be noted that not all men entertained the same repressive mindset towards women's learning and literary aspirations. In the case of the aforementioned authors, in stark contrast to Tarabotti's experience, it was Marinella's father who encouraged her learning, and Fonte's male kin who played an important role in her education. Both women were, while simultaneously the target of criticism, praised as exemplary women because of their learning. Even the *Incogniti* show ambivalent stances in this regard. Westwater, for instance, shows how the group's openly misogynist thought and works – literary, as well as epistolary exchange with woman authors – might have played an important role both in giving women incentive to write, while they simultaneously could be held responsible for Marinella's drastic shift in attitude towards women's position in society in her later work.¹⁰¹ Moreover, as did other authors of his Academy, Loredan exchanged many letters with Tarabotti, and even helped her publish some of her work, while discrediting her point of view in others.¹⁰²

But not only women voiced their discontents through literature. On the Italian peninsula, men clustered together in literary academies, such as the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, forming homosocial bonds through the production and consumption of literature. It is helpful to understand the attention the *Incogniti* authors devoted to issues regarding gender and women in their work as both a product of the time, and as part of their performance of masculinity, in tandem with the earlier remarks above

⁹⁷ While the works are well-known with their short titles, the long titles are indicative of the outright challenge they posed to men.

⁹⁸ Sharon L. Jansen, *Reading Women's Worlds from Christine de Pizan to Doris Lessing. A Guide to Six Centuries of Women Writers Imagining Rooms of Their Own*, 2011.

⁹⁹ Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Cited and translated by Ray and Westwater in "Introduction" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Letters Familiar and Formal*, 2012, p. 10n24.

¹⁰¹ Westwater, "Literary Culture and Women Writers in Seventeenth-Century Venice," 2012. See on the same topic also: Simona Bortot, "Come l'acqua, fedeli nell'incostanza: gli accademici Incogniti pro e contro Arcangela Tarabotti," 2011, pp. 483-518.

¹⁰² See Panizza, "Volume Editor's Introduction" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 2004, pp. 32-63.

of rogue sexuality being a potential expression of protest masculinity in forced bachelors. Rather than turning to a physical body as sexual arena, the *Incogniti* could turn, like some women authors, to a literary body in order to voice their discontents and shape their relation to gender – both with regard to the feminine Other, as well as to their masculine selves. This aligns with Nigel Harkness' concept "poetics of masculinity", that is concerned with "how the masculine is made literary, and how masculinity is bound up with processes of literary creation."¹⁰³ The *Incogniti* poetics of masculinity are informed in part by societal pressures described above, and in part by the aforementioned influence of Cremonini on many an *Incogniti* author. It is little surprising, then, to see gender and sexuality take center stage in many of the Academy's most notorious texts. Personal discontents of *Incogniti* authors regarding, for instance, their position between Venice's restricted marriage market and free commerce in prostitutes, alongside an education that stresses the naturalness of the body's sexual impulses, plus literary history's well established tradition of working with misogynist commonplaces, thus form the perfect breeding ground for testing the limits of prevailing gender ideology. The fact that the creation of this literary body happens in the context of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, allows us to interpret this literary exploration of masculinity by men as a form of "textual masculinity" shaped and performed by a "literary fraternity". The latter term, coined by Courtney Quaintance in respect to a group of men of letters active around the Venier family in Venice of the sixteenth century, describes "relationships between men that were constituted through literary and social gatherings, companionship and conversation, and, especially, the practice of exchanging texts about women."¹⁰⁴ The concept is built upon Foucault's notion "société de discours", which he characterized as serving "de conserver ou de produire des discours, mais pour les faire circuler dans un espace fermé, ne les distribuer que selon des règles strictes ... [les sociétés de discours] fonctionnent sur un tout autre mode selon un autre régime d'exclusives et de divulgation."¹⁰⁵ It is not difficult to recognize the Academy in such a characterization, as it excluded women from its ranks, limiting their participation to their events to simple presence, while at the same time writing about women and reiterating misogynist commonplaces, often in work that was only meant for an audience consisting of their own constituency.¹⁰⁶ The *Incogniti's* writing that concerned gender and the construction of their masculinities can be further grounded in theoretical accounts of textuality via David LaGuardia's *Intertextual Masculinity* (2008). Primarily focusing on Renaissance France, he argues that "reading and writing for men throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance was in large part both a continuous reflection upon the relation of texts to other texts, and a constant consideration of what it meant to be a man and to read as a man within the social context that was defined by those texts."¹⁰⁷ This framework of intertextual masculinity can be easily transposed onto seventeenth century Venice, especially when we keep in mind that in LaGuardia's view, intertextuality does not simply concern a body of literary texts. Indeed, masculinity is "inscribed within an immense intertextual corpus of legal, didactic, and pastoral works concerned primarily with appropriate and proper behaviour for men, predicated upon the usage and surveillance of sex in both public and private space, which itself was

¹⁰³ Nigel Harkness, *Men of their Words: The Poetics of Masculinity in George Sand's Fiction*, 2007, p. 147.

¹⁰⁴ Courtney Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity*, 2015, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, 1971, p. 41, 43. Quaintance quotes the English translation in *Textual Masculinity*, 2015, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ For the latter point, see, for instance, Onelli's careful tracing of a translated work of Petronius in manuscript within the *Incogniti* circles: Onelli, "Clandestinità e trasgressione nel Seicento: una traduzione manoscritta del *Satyricon* di Petronio e i suoi lettori," 2020.

¹⁰⁷ LaGuardia, *Intertextual Masculinity*, 2008, p. 4, original emphasis.

contingent upon the legislation of sex within and beyond marriage.”¹⁰⁸ Changing attitudes from various layers of society towards matters such as marriage and sexual activity that were codified in text – e.g. the Serenissima’s various laws against women having sex with men of other creeds and races to protect the “purity” of the Venetian ruling class, but also the philosophically inspired texts that embraced the “etica naturale” of sexual desire –, can then be understood as expanding the intertext on which men in the *Incognito* literary fraternity constructed their masculinity.¹⁰⁹

3.3. Revolutionary or conservative?

In Venice, gender thus relates both to literary creation as well as to socio-political circumstances. Spini already pointed to the contradictory mediation by the *Incogniti* in this regard, when he acknowledged their fundamental role in the literary translation of libertinism’s preferred topics, while criticizing the group for their politics at the same time:

Giacché per avviarsi su diversa strada, gli Incogniti di Venezia avrebbero bisogno di un animo rivoluzionario, che manca loro completamente. Per quanto ribelli alla dogmatica della chiesa, essi non partono da questa ribellione per guardare più avanti ed anticipare l’avvenire. Al contrario, restano sempre fissi su un atteggiamento fondamentalmente conservatore, misoneista, rivolto verso il passato, altrettanto insensibile agli stimoli di rinnovamento del proprio tempo, di quello del loro progenitore filosofico.¹¹⁰

Somewhat accusatory, Spini adds that the *Incogniti* “[s]i limitano a ‘piétiner sur place’, attorno ai vecchi problemi dell’anima e dell’eternità del mondo, a rispolverare il più logoro e banale naturalismo etico, a fare della letteratura parolaia e del boccaccismo di mediocre qualità.”¹¹¹ And indeed, when not debating topics such as the soul, themes that often recur without amounting to something revolutionary except on the page itself, are precisely concerned with the politically charged hypocritical motivations behind religion’s secular power; or the *ragion di stato*’s nefarious effects on individuals caught up in this web of political interest, forcing them to participate in a deceitful game of *dissimulazione* in which they lose themselves/their identities. Spini’s comment on the *Incogniti* texts not amounting to any political change, thus betraying both a conservative politics and attitude that underlie the authors’ seemingly liberal works, is in line with the contradictory tension at the heart of Venetian government that sees its liberty as the product of conservative patriarchal rule. At the same time, it should be stressed that Spini’s main interest lies with politico-philosophical elements, which overshadow the innovatory opportunities granted to the *Incogniti* by what he deems “banal” ethical naturalism. Far from mere banality, this ethical naturalism stems from Cremonini’s Aristotelian thought, that led to a reappraisal of the body and its natural sexual drives, which is transposed from philosophy to literature by the *Incogniti*’s exploration of the moral limits of love, gender and sexuality.¹¹² This exploration is only further fueled by a recognition that the more traditional topic of their literary interests, i.e. power, also exerts influence on love and identity, and by extension, gender and sexuality.¹¹³ The delimiting hold that patriarchal power has on men, is then harnessed by *Incogniti* authors to reshape the *société de discours* as way of (re)asserting their masculinity within their literary fraternity. It follows, then, that while Cremonini’s teaching of the *Incogniti* is not a

¹⁰⁸ LaGuardia, *Intertextual Masculinity*, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ See, for these laws: Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity*, 2015, pp. 13, 25.

¹¹⁰ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 149.

¹¹¹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 149.

¹¹² Del Torre, *Studi su Cesare Cremonini*, 1968, pp. 35-49; Heller, “Tacitus Incognito,” 1999, pp. 45-6 and Muir, *The Culture Wars*, 2009, pp. 72-5.

¹¹³ The most poignant example of this is Lattarico’s discussion of Pallavicino’s *Il Principe Ermafrodito* (1640): “Pouvoir et identité dans ‘Il Principe hermafrodito’ de Ferrante Pallavicino,” 2004.

constitutive element of the crisis of masculinity itself, it gave the *Incogniti* an avenue onto which to avert anxious feelings sparked by crisis elements stemming from other domains. The vehement misogyny that is present in *Incogniti* texts can then be considered an example of a re-privileging narrative strategy, following Yekani's insight that the crisis of masculinity is in fact a narrative production that recenters masculinity. Because even though they realize they themselves are not in a position of dominance, through their texts they can to a certain extent reclaim that dominance by relegating women to a marginalized position. As they themselves are men, this discursive masculine dominance over women reassures them as the center of masculine power.

Even though a focus on masculinity allows for a nuance to Spini's critique of the absence of the *Incogniti's* revolutionary spirit, an obvious question still remains unanswered. Why did they not profess a more radical politics? If we accept the above assertion that *Incogniti* literary production is a means of reasserting masculinity's privileged position of dominance, it would seem that Parker's critique that "patriarchal masculinity is always in crisis yet forever triumphantly faces and overcomes every obstacle" holds true also in this case.¹¹⁴ This is only partially correct: while many *Incogniti* members can be associated with positions of cultural authority, many of those same men simultaneously had to reckon with, or were even threatened by, papal authorities. Keeping in mind Connell's framework of hegemonial masculinity, Parker's precise formulation allows for nuance: "patriarchal" masculinity might be triumphant here, but not every type of masculinity is as easily equated to that hegemonial standard. An analysis of masculinities that keeps in mind the different hegemonial ideals according to spatial level is necessary here. Within such a framework, it becomes legible that the *Incogniti* could simultaneously be at odds and at peace with other men's authoritative exigencies. Indeed, they did not need to embrace a radical politics, as they already enjoyed a position of *cultural* dominance at the local level of the Academy and the regional level of Venetian society. At the same time, even though the adoption of topics such as questioning the immortality of the soul is not revolutionary in and of itself, it still constitutes a challenge to the Church and her dogmata, and consequentially, challenges the hegemonial religious authorities – of course masculine – at the global level. Depending on the level on which an *Incognito's* masculinity is situated, his performance could thus range from protest, via complicit, to hegemonial, all through the writing of a single text.

However, turning to a spatial analysis does not amount to a wholly satisfactory answer concerning individual *Incogniti* members' politics. When concerning *socio-political* matters, e.g. marriage, men whose attitudes on the local level of the Academy can be similar, can show highly different stances on the regional level of Venice's government. One need only turn to Loredan, as the Academy's patriarch, to see a conflict: he seems to advocate in favor of the ruling class's marriage practices, a conservative politics, while also playing a role in the publishing careers of figures as radical and distinct as Tarabotti and Pallavicino, pointing to a more lenient attitude towards others with a different point of view on the same matter.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Loredan's vision on the marriage market contrasts with Pallavicino's position as a forced bachelor – which translates to the men's differing positions in the masculine hierarchy on the regional level of Venice. The grouping together, then, of the *Incogniti* authors as a literary fraternity concerned with the creation of an (inter)textual masculinity, one that is reactionary due to the crisis of masculinity provoked by the socio-political, economic and literary changes and

¹¹⁴ Parker, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe*, 2001, p. 17.

¹¹⁵ For his connection to Tarabotti, see: Panizza, "Volume Editor's Introduction" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, 2004, pp. 32-63. For Loredan's role in the life and career of Pallavicino, see: Urbinato, *Ferrante Pallavicino*, 2004, pp. 36-42.

challenges described above, lays bare a tension. We are thus presented with the imperative to consider the various members that make up the Academy not as a homogenous bloc, but rather, in Demitriou's terms, as a hybrid one, the product of "dialectical pragmatism" that (re)constitutes an adaptive masculine hegemony on the local level. Dialectical pragmatism could also be employed to explain for the lack of revolutionary spirit as noted by Spini, when understood as the realization or the conviction that this might be the best possible reality. It might entail the realization that it is impossible to constantly challenge other hegemonial masculinities, as that would either be of detriment to the system from which men in patriarchy benefit overall, or it could lead to the ostracization of too deviant an individual man. Strategically complying with the exigencies of different gender orders, then, could provide men with a safe baseline, especially when it also provides relatively institutionalized ways of venting discontents.

3.4. Masculine writing as emotional practice

As a final note, when understood this way, it becomes evident that the *Accademia degli Incogniti* was not only a literary fraternity that constituted its own local gender order and allowed for homosocial bonding, but also that it was the place where they could share emotional experiences. Historian of emotions William Reddy proposed the concept of emotional refuge to designate a space where

norms are relaxed or even reversed; mental control efforts may be temporarily set aside. Affective connections, otherwise illicit, may be established, even celebrated. Such emotional refuges may take a great variety of forms, from private understandings, to informal sociability, to Carnival-type ritual, to international secret brotherhoods. ... They may make the current order more livable for some people, some of the time. For others, or in other times, they may provide a place from which contestation, conflict, and transformation are launched.¹¹⁶

It is not difficult to recognize Loredan's Academy as such a refuge for men within the regional gender order of Venice. Barbara Rosenwein adds to this conceptualization via "emotional communities", which she considers "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions", and which frequently overlap with pre-existing social or textual communities that share a common stake.¹¹⁷ She also notes that individuals are capable of adapting their expressions according to the need of various emotional communities that are co-existent in the same time and place; this shows a striking similarity to the spatial mapping of masculinities.¹¹⁸ Rosenwein's method of accessing an emotional community, however, focuses primarily on a semantical mapping of words relating to feelings. For our study into the literary fraternity of the *Incogniti* as either emotional community or refuge, a bypass via Monique Scheer's emotional practice is needed. Scheer develops a route to emotions in history via a person's actions, as her theory considers emotions a product of the mind-body symbiosis that is informed by the emotional *habitus*. The emotional *habitus*, at its turn, is informed by societal norms and practices, but also by an individual's trajectory of socialization in differing contexts. Discrepancies between an individual's wants and needs, and those of a larger group, might cause friction. People can then manage this via an emotional practice dubbed "mobilization", which consists of "manipulations of body and mind to evoke feelings where there are none, to focus diffuse arousals and give them an intelligible shape, or to change or remove emotions already there."¹¹⁹ Individuals often employ other people, artifacts and

¹¹⁶ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, 2001, p. 128.

¹¹⁷ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 2006, pp. 2, 24-5.

¹¹⁸ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 2006, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion," 2012, p. 209.

technologies, for this mobilization; ritual behavior, political activism, practices of courtship and (older) media use are all examples of this mobilizing of emotions. The *Incogniti*'s turn to writing and publishing, then, could be considered such an emotional practice. And while he does not name any one group or intellectual/literary movement in particular, Umberto Grassi has characterized as an emotional affair the reactive discourse throughout the Christian world "that co-opted sexual transgressions within a broader critique of the hypocrisies and fallacies of revealed religions and society on the whole" to the Church's stigmatizing any form of non-procreative sex or extra-marital relationship.¹²⁰ Libertinism, and the *Incogniti*, sure fit this description. When confronted with the limits and limitations of valent gender orders, then, the Academy's members could turn to writing to both channel their emotions and reassert their masculinities. Venetian historian Paolo Sarpi (1552-1623) had already recognized writing as a means of escape as much when he wrote: "Quando li valent'huomini scrivono è manifesto indicio che non possono operare."¹²¹

¹²⁰ Grassi, "Emotions and Sexuality. Regulation and Homoerotic Transgressions," 2020, p. 146.

¹²¹ Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 1961, pp. 208-9.

4. Analysis (I). “Amor maschio è fanciullo”: queer masculinities in *L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*”

[Trigger warning // Sexual abuse, pedophilia]

Antonio Rocco’s *L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* can with due reason be considered the major transgressive work of literature written by any member of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*. The protagonist employs criticism of both man-made and divinely inspired laws in order to vouch for the expression of sexuality free from any moral and ethical considerations and restrictions. The type of sexuality that is central in Rocco’s work is one between men: it focuses on anal sex in a pederastic rapport. Whereas Théophile de Viau reminds us that writing about sodomy does not equal professing it, as “poète et péderaste sont deux qualitez differentes”, it does allow for a consideration of Rocco and his work from the perspective of the masculinity of the libertine *esprit fort* as focalized by the work of Rosellini and D’Angelo for French libertine authors.¹²² In the pages that follow, I will first discuss the strengths and limitations of earlier scholarly work on the book by weighing it against a question sparked by a small letter written by Loredan that accompanied his gifting a printed version of the work to a fellow *Incognito*: why is the patriarch’s tone apologetic almost to the point of diminishing the work? Following this will be a lengthy close reading of the book itself, making up the bulk of this chapter. It will explore how the concepts of masculinity and homosexuality – used as a stand-in for all sorts of sexual male-male desires and acts – are related in *L’Alcibiade*, and what we might glimpse from the one by focusing on the other and vice versa. The purpose of the close reading, the preferred method for a careful consideration of the complexities of which the text is rich, is twofold: on the one hand I aim to extensively explore a queer facet of the Venetian literary articulation of libertine sexuality, on the other I wish to benefit from *L’Alcibiade*’s reputation as an exceptional text in order to extract the key components of the *Incogniti*’s construction of masculinity. These topics will then be used as entry points onto other texts in the *Incogniti* oeuvre in the next chapter.

In the novel, which is set in ancient Athens, the schoolmaster Filotimo is teaching his pupil Alcibiades about the delights and the rightfulness of (anal) sex between a man and a boy, hoping to persuade his student to put talk into practice. Eventually, Filotimo succeeds, and the dialogue style in which the book is written turns into an explicit – and very crude – pornographic scene:

E così dicendo, l’innamorato maestro, con dolcissime spinte, continuava a godere il vago fanciullo, ridotto a termine che non avendo il cazzo del suo maestro nel culo non sapeva che cosa fusse dolcezza; nemmeno credeva per altra via poter divenir perfetto al pari del suo precettore.¹²³

The above citation serves a number of purposes. First, it shows just how graphic the language of this novel can be when dealing with the topic of male-male sexuality, which is not limited to this particular citation alone. Consequentially, it serves to illustrate the most probable reason why the novel has historically been destined for an (after)life of clandestine publication and circulation ever since it was written.¹²⁴ It also explains for the emphasis on transgression in scholarly inquiry regarding *L’Alcibiade*.

¹²² Théophile de Viau, *L’Apologie de Theophile*, Paris, 1624, p. 27; Rosellini, “Homosexualité et esprit fort,” 2010 ; D’Angelo, “Libertinage, hermaphrodisme et masculinité,” 2010.

¹²³ Antonio Rocco, *L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, edited by Laura Coci, 2003 [1988], p. 98.

¹²⁴ See for a more extended argument about the work’s clandestine publication history: Salazar, “Sex and Rhetoric: An Assessment of Rocco’s *Alcibiade*,” 1999. Salazar’s main argument for this fate is the fact that later eras (and thus critics) have forgotten the importance of the rhetorical culture in which *L’Alcibiade* was written, which resulted in the book becoming nothing more than the “bare sodomitic signified” (p. 16). I agree with

Most importantly for this thesis, it points directly towards the interplay of a variety of masculinities. Indeed, we have the “innamorato maestro” and the “vago fanciullo”, who seem to play the typical roles of the lover and the beloved, the *erastes* and the *eromenos*, in a seemingly pederastic model where the youth sees his passive role in the sexual relationship as the way to become “perfetto al pari del suo maestro”. But even though pederasty is the overarching paradigm in which male-male sexuality is articulated in Rocco’s book, it is not the only window onto the topic, as the cited passage above depicts the culmination of the entire novel’s worth of Filotimo’s arguing to persuade his pupil, and Alcibiades’ counterarguments to resist his teacher’s advances. It has been noted that the dialogue overall seems to serve as a “systematic *apologia pro sodomia*, in effect working through every ‘discipline in the curriculum’”, as the teacher speaks from a position of, amongst others, “an art connoisseur”, “an anatomist”, “an anthropologist”, “a legal and cultural historian” and he even “adds biblical scholarship to his credentials”.¹²⁵ Filotimo appropriates a wide variety of discourses from those fields, and twists and turns commonly known tropes and topoi regarding male love and sexuality in such a way, that the reader glimpses different – and positive? – ways of framing and constructing the subject matter. At the same time, the work’s paratextual apparatus imposes a firm mold: the sonnets and the prefatory texts that surround the text proper cast Filotimo as a stereotypical sexually abusive schoolmaster and as a sodomite. This, of course, steers towards the interpretation of *l’Alcibiade* as a sodomitical text, and of Filotimo’s arguments as pro-sodomy.¹²⁶ However, even more so than pro-sodomy, I would propose to read Filotimo’s discourse, both in its specific arguments and in its line of reasoning in general, as critical of anti-sodomy discourse. This makes it possible to sidestep the opposition between the paratext as anti-sodomitical and *l’Alcibiade* proper as pro-sodomitical, and attend more seriously to the queer slippages that occur throughout Rocco’s work.

4.1. Loredan’s letter: the problem of *l’Alcibiades’* subversiveness

Rocco’s work is often mentioned in passing when writing about the *Incogniti*, yet is not often studied for itself. When chosen as primary object of study, the work’s transgressive and graphically depicted sexual contents are often explored from a book historical angle and/or from an approach that seeks to read the sexual alongside the rhetorical and the philosophical – (ab)used by Filotimo, the main interlocutor of the dialogue. The interest in the publication history of the work is sparked by its long history of clandestine publication, starting with Loredan himself.¹²⁷ The *Incogniti* patriarch received the work in manuscript form from Rocco around 1630, and held onto it for about twenty years before having it anonymously published. Even though the authorship question remained unanswered until the nineteenth century, when resolved by Achille Neri, the *Incogniti* themselves were well aware to

Cavaillé that this view sidesteps too easily the fact that the sexual permeates everything in the work, including the use of rhetoric: “Antonio Rocco, *Alcibiade enfant à l’école*. Clandestinité, irreligion et sodomie,” 2006, pp. 28-9.

¹²⁵ James Grantham Turner, *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France and England, 1534-1685*, 2003, p. 100. Whether or not *l’Alcibiade* is an apology for sodomy is also one of the main questions Cavaillé poses in “Antonio Rocco,” 2006.

¹²⁶ Despite the fact that the term “sodomy” or any derived form is never explicitly mentioned in the text itself (it is in the paratext), it is overly clear that Sodomy is a lurking shadow. Armando Maggi reads the biblical myth of story as the fundamental intertext for *l’Alcibiade*. See: Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom in a Seventeenth-Century Venetian Text,” 2003, pp. 42-3.

¹²⁷ See, for an overview of the history of its publication, circulation, attributions: Salazar, “Sex and Rhetoric,” 1999; Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003. See, for an overview of the extant copies: Coci, “Nota al testo,” *L’Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, 2003 [1988], pp. 104-5.

whom the work was to be attributed.¹²⁸ Indeed, in 1651, the year of its publication, Loredan wrote two letters to fellow *Incognito* member Angelico Aprosio, with the first reading:

L'ordinario venturo prometto a V.S. un libretto da Carnevale intitolato Alcibiade in Scuola.

And the second, somewhat more extensive:

Riceverà un libretto da Carnevale, non valevole però, credo, a perturbare la tranquillità del suo animo. Vien attribuito a D. Antonio Rocco. Può essere che negli anni suoi più giovanili possa haverlo composto, e sono 20 anni che l'ho avuto a penna.¹²⁹

Even though both letters describe *l'Alcibiade* as the product of carnival, likely a conscious move to mitigate the obscene contents, the apologetical tone of the second letter is striking. Why did Loredan feel the need to add emphasis on Rocco's young age when the book was written; was it another mediating factor for Aprosio's potential judgment of the work?¹³⁰ Does it have to do with the fact that the book that Aprosio was about to receive, could be the first printed version of *l'Alcibiade*, and that Loredan felt the need to distance himself a bit further from the contents now that they would be more readily available? Jean-Pierre Cavaillé has argued that the work was, at that point, already well known in the wider *Incogniti* circles, as Rocco's academic discourse *Amore è puro interesse*, printed in 1635 as part of a collection titled *Discorsi Academici de' Signori Incogniti*, contains a graphic passage that more or less samples a passage of *l'Alcibiade*: "il suppose que les auditeurs connaissent cet écrit [*l'Alcibiade*], et il atteste donc de la diffusion du manuscrit parmi les habitués de l'académie, à l'époque où Loredano dit l'avoir reçu."¹³¹ The practice of circulating texts in manuscript over print, destined for a broad yet still relatively restrained public such as the *Incogniti*, is indeed well attested.¹³² Could Loredan's letters to Aprosio be a sort of pretext that excused his role in having *l'Alcibiade* pass from manuscript to print? This might point at a significant difference between the two forms of spreading a text, even though the text in question was already known. It might also point at Loredan's realization that Rocco's text had potentially strayed too far from the moral border that it crossed.

Philippe-Joseph Salazar argues, however, that *l'Alcibiade* would not have been as outrageously transgressive for contemporaries as it would become for later readers. His argument lies in the close connection between speech and sex, which would have been recognized by seventeenth century readers, making *l'Alcibiade* a raw exposé of the power of Aristotelian rhetoric, played out in its pragmatic dimension on the body of the listener.¹³³ As Renaissance pedagogical teaching codes lost their potency over time and the cultural value of rhetoric diminished, "what was left was the bare sodomitic signified" – the reason why the work became subject to censorship, with a particular ferocious attempt at purging the work in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹³⁴ While acknowledging that this argument is partially just – and this is probably located in the established link

¹²⁸ Achille Neri, "Il vero autore dell'*Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*," 1888. Previous attributions had been to Pallavicino and even to Pietro Aretino.

¹²⁹ Both letters are cited in Neri, "Il vero autore", 1888, pp. 221-2. Neri references to the two unedited letters as follows: Biblioteca della R. Università di Genova, cod. E. V. 19.

¹³⁰ Cavaillé notes that Loredan's mentioning of Rocco's age could be topical, rather than factual, as Rocco was already 44 years old in 1630, when Loredan received the work. We do not know at what age Rocco actually wrote *l'Alcibiade*. See: Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco," 2003, p. 24n23.

¹³¹ Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco," 2003, pp. 20-1.

¹³² Corinna Onelli, "Clandestinità e trasgressione nel Seicento," 2020.

¹³³ Salazar, "Sex and Rhetoric," 1999, pp. 13-4.

¹³⁴ Salazar, "Sex and Rhetoric," 1999, p. 16-17, 6-7.

between sex and rhetoric, which would indeed have been recognized by the Academic readers of the text –, Cavaillé calls this position insufficient, “parce que, ce sont moins les discours que la tension désirante du maître pour son jeune élève, c’est-à-dire l’excitation sexuelle elle-même, qui se trouve mise au premier plan ...”¹³⁵ While sex and rhetoric are indeed conflated in *l’Alcibiade*, the sexual dominates over the rhetorical as it permeates all levels of the text.¹³⁶

Paolo Fasoli is equally interested in “the relational model that connects the realms of *eros* and *logos*” both in *l’Alcibiade* and in Ferrante Pallavicino’s *La Retorica delle Puttane* (1642), showcasing the *Incogniti* interest in the connection between sexuality and certain domains of academic learning.¹³⁷ He argues that Rocco’s literary career shows a particular interest in destabilizing authoritative rhetorical and philosophical models. When comparing Rocco’s discussion of the topics related to love and sex in *l’Alcibiade* to his academic discourses *Della Brutezza* (1635) and *Amore è puro interesse* (1635), intertextual resonances abound, yet they are more often ambiguous than consistent.¹³⁸ Fasoli argues that “with Rocco, everything (every philosophical, ethical, even religious posture) hinges on a paradoxical regiment of discursivity.”¹³⁹ He goes on to place this within the context of the *Incogniti* and notes that “it is a demonstration of sheer pleasure for sophistic virtuosity, an exercise that can be applied, in complete unendoxal fashion, to every possible topic, in order to generate academic divertissement.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, arguing from multiple sides on a wide variety of topics was one of the main endeavors of the *Incogniti*, so it is no surprise that Rocco’s oeuvre reflects this by presenting multiple stances on related topics.

An important locus of the *Incogniti*’s play with words and meanings – and indeed, ambiguity –, is paratextual collaborative practice. In the case of *l’Alcibiade*, after the text proper, four sonnets close off the work, and another prefaces it, alongside both an author’s and a printer’s note. All of these texts are assumed to have been written by someone else than Rocco himself.¹⁴¹ The entirety of the paratextual apparatus asserts a disavowal of sodomitical practices and pederastic tendencies of teachers. Keeping this in mind, Fasoli argues that regarding “the general issue of the interpretation of *l’Alcibiade*, we have to consider that, after all, baroque culture indulges in antiphrastic allegory, oblique interpretive inclinations and radical amphibologies.”¹⁴² In this line of reasoning, the paratext therefore does not serve as a moralizing guideline on how *l’Alcibiade* should be read. Rather, it “might be seen as a peripheral and collaborative exercise in polysemy ... written by a different author. Oblique reading of famous texts was a practice not at all uncommon.”¹⁴³ In fact, the addition of the paratext in the

¹³⁵ Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003, p. 28.

¹³⁶ Cavaillé gives the example of the auctorial voice who is embodied in the text, as he references his sexual excitement and gratification in writing and telling the story. Indeed, he admits turning to masturbation: “altra mia penna viva”. Cavaillé interprets this as an indication that not the persuasive effect of rhetoric on the boy is of primary importance, but the erotic stimulation that the text gives the reader. Although the rhetorical leads to the sexual, the sexual is overarching. Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco”, 2003, p. 29-30.

¹³⁷ Paolo Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’: Sex and Rhetoric in Early Libertine Venice, 1642-51,” 2013, p. 103.

¹³⁸ Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2013, p. 110. It is to be noted that twisting and turning of discourses thus appears both as fundamental to Rocco’s oeuvre, as to Filotimo’s speech.

¹³⁹ Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2013, p. 110

¹⁴⁰ Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2013, p. 111.

¹⁴¹ Turner suspects the poems to have been written by someone belonging to the Venier family or its related circles. Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 2003, p. 89n51. For the Venier family, and their literary production, see: Quaintance, *Textual Masculinity*, 2015.

¹⁴² Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2013, p. 111.

¹⁴³ Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2013, p. 111.

printed versions could make *l'Alcibiade* only a more pleasurable read within the reading culture of the *Incogniti*. This does not explain, however, the distancing position Loredan takes in his second letter. It is not likely that it served as yet another layer in the collective game of oblique reading, even though the letter accompanied the book-as-gift, precisely because it was a private affair between two men. Besides Aproso, no one would read the letter.¹⁴⁴ And if the two men shared the same reading code, why send it? Was Loredan anxious for some reason that has to do with the content after all?

A closer look, past the level of a reading of the text as demonstration of rhetorical and discursive play, is thus warranted. Two primary reasons appear obvious as to why *l'Alcibiade* is likely to stand out as subversive even within the literary production of the *Incogniti*: the first is the fact that sex with boys is the main topic, the second is that it performs sexual acts in graphic detail right on the page. But it is argued by Cavaillé that the true subversiveness of *l'Alcibiade* is not so much located in its overt sexuality, but in the way sophistry collapses into the philosophical position adopted and propagated by Filotimo.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, Filotimo is presented as a perverted schoolmaster whose speech is not at all aimed at teaching his pupil, but at submitting him to his own sexual desires (sophistry). His only argument that is not based on the appropriation of pre-existing discourses, and is therefore to certain extent valid per se, lies in a reasoning that stems from a naturalist position disentangled from sexual ethics: sex with boys gives pleasure, pleasure is natural, and as everything that is natural is not inherently wrong, there is nothing inherently wrong with the two of them having sex either (philosophy). This is a bold example of how excessive a naturalist philosophical point of view – the product of Cremonini's teaching of the *Incogniti* authors – could become when applied to literary fiction. Cavaillé notes that *l'Alcibiade* “ne propose rien de moins qu'une éthique alternative, fondée sur la raison naturelle pour laquelle la sodomie entre consentants cesse d'être un crime et devient un acte parfaitement innocent.”¹⁴⁶ Innocent, apparently, as the only possible perversion to this philosophical maxim is violence, which is expressly refuted by Filotimo.¹⁴⁷ Cavaillé states explicitly to disagree with Laura Coci on the topic of violence in the novel: while Filotimo rejects violence and insists on mutual consent in a sexual context, Coci reads the persuading of Alcibiades with libertine discourse as “violenza mentale”.¹⁴⁸ When engaging with Filotimo's concept of violence in good faith, Cavaillé uncritically clings to too narrow a definition of violence as physical only. Building on Coci's notion by stressing that physical violence is not the only possible type of violence in a sexual context, leaves one wondering whether Cavaillé's assertion that the true subversiveness of *l'Alcibiade* lies in its propagating of a philosophical position (i.e. sex that is consented to is good), so radical that it renders even pederasty an ethically innocent practice, is not clouded by the fact that Filotimo does not act from that position himself. Was framing consent as the absence of violence another trick from Filotimo, not to scare the boy off again? Understood this way, what is left once again is the “bare sodomitic signified”, as the philosophical position adopted is not as unblemished as Cavaillé presents it.

Whether *l'Alcibiade* depicts pederasty as morally acceptable in some situations based on a philosophical position taken to extremes, or simply remounts to a depiction of the trope of the

¹⁴⁴ The private dimension of these letters is further evidenced by them not being included in Loredan's book of published letters: *Lettere ... Raccolte da Henrico Gibleto Cavalier, Quarta Impressione*, Venice: Guerigli, 1655.

¹⁴⁵ Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003, pp. 36-7.

¹⁴⁷ Argued by Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003. 36. Based on *L'Alcibiade*, p. 69: “Dove dunque è commune e uniforme il consenso, ivi bandita la violenza e vi entra amore, pace, naturalezza e incentivo di lode. È tirano l'uomo violento; questa violenza è aborrita dalla natura e da Dio, l'assenso è da l'uno e da l'altro gradito.”

¹⁴⁸ Coci, “Antonio Rocco,” *l'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1988], p. 10; Cavaillé, “Antonio Rocco,” 2003, p. 36.

pederast, its male-male dimension is central to the problem that triggered some form of anxiety in Loredan. It becomes necessary to have a closer look at that aspect, what today would be considered homosexual, in order to interrogate the related contemporary concepts of “sodomy” and “pederasty” and to what extent those concepts were queer and subversive in this text. How do they impact the males and the masculinities involved? Armando Maggi touches upon these questions when he reads *l’Alcibiade* from a psychoanalytical perspective as an exploration on a sodomitical level of Rocco’s theory of love as argued for in *Amore è puro interesse*. In that academic discourse, love is explained as a selfish longing for power with which to satisfy personal desires. In order to acquire power over the beloved, every type of discourse is manipulated: “[i]n *L’Alcibiade*, the Bible, history, human anatomy, philology, and philosophy go through a farcical reinterpretation/distortion.”¹⁴⁹ This focus on the relationship between love/desire and power has great implications for the interpretation of the story, as it, again, points to an understanding of Filotimo as desiring to submit Alcibiades to his sexual desires, purely for the sake of it. The psychoanalytic lens adopted adds a gendered dimension to the desiring of power: it is the masculine subject that desires and subjugates the beloved. However, in *l’Alcibiade*, masculine desire and power are barred, as Alcibiades refuses Filotimo at first. In order to maintain control, the teacher starts to speak, eventually persuading the student. Maggi notes that through speaking, Alcibiades’ own desire has been awakened. However, this also means that “the master needs the other’s desire to fulfill his own.”¹⁵⁰ This leads to the paradoxical situation in which “[t]he sodomite master fulfills his lust, but he actually becomes the prey of the other.”¹⁵¹ Because both Filotimo and Alcibiades had to desire the other in order for that desire to be fulfilled, a psychoanalytic reading troubles their masculine subjectivities as they were both not only dominant, but also dominated. Although I am not inclined to pursue further psychoanalytic reading, I do believe Maggi offers a highly pertinent analytical strategy by combining masculinity, desire and dominance.

4.2. Close reading of *l’Alcibiade*

While I owe much to previous critics’ attention to the contents of Filotimo’s arguments and the ways he alters and appropriates prevailing discourse on gender and sexuality, the following close reading of *l’Alcibiade* will have a different focus. I will primarily concentrate on the constructions of masculinity and on the ways these constructions influence and are influenced by discourse of (masculine/male) same-sex sexuality. What makes a man, in what way do the males in the book either conform to or deviate from those aspects? I will first present an assessment of the two characters and their forms of masculine embodiment. As will become apparent, these embodiments are mutually constitutive, and the discussion of Filotimo will therefore necessarily also concern Alcibiades, and vice versa. Both the paratext and the main, decisive arguments of the teacher to his pupil are constructed upon a pederastic framework, and I will therefore first discuss their masculinities in regard to this paradigm. However, I believe that the most important insights that the book offers a study of masculinity are located in the slippages that move away from that frame. I will therefore also discuss the characters and their constructions of male-male sexuality in light of “homosexuality” informed by queer theory. What can *l’Alcibiade* teach us about *Incogniti* masculinity?

¹⁴⁹ Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003, p. 44.

¹⁵⁰ Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003, p. 54.

¹⁵¹ Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003, p. 55.

4.2.1. Filotimo

When Filotimo is first introduced as the lucky teacher to whom Alcibiades is entrusted, he is described as follows: “questo, d’età virile, venerabile d’aspetto e di maniere, con tal misura aggiustava l’opre della mente e del senso, che con incomparabile prudenza e providenza si rendea grato; sapea trasformarsi con tutti, e nell’infonder soda e profonda dottrina ne’ petti altrui, mostrava che ne aveva vera intelligenza dell’operare.”¹⁵² While his name is indication enough of his supposedly virtuous character – in ancient Greek his name means “love of virtue” –, the various elements of the description above cement his name and reputation.¹⁵³ Recalling the ancient principles of *agathos kai sofes* (ἀγαθὸς καὶ σοφός) and *kalos kagathos* (καλὸς κάγαθός), Filotimo is the quintessence of the masculine ideal – an honest and virtuous man, harmonious in body and soul. In the early modern context of *l’Alcibiade*, the fact that “con tal misura aggiustava l’opre della mente e del senso” would have been particularly signifying of the masculine ideals of self control and moderation.¹⁵⁴ It is also this fundamental character trait that is shattered beyond repair when Filotimo first lays eyes upon Alcibiades.

Loss of self-control

While agreeing with Maggi that Filotimo’s masculinity is threatened due to desire, I believe that this is not necessarily located in the fact that Alcibiades’ desire for Filotimo is required in return, but rather because Filotimo’s own desire for the boy is beyond reason. The problem is not that Filotimo is unable to be the only one desiring and therefore dominant – one of the main issues of sodomitical masculinity for Maggi –, but because he is being dominated by his own desire to begin with.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, excessive sexual desire was often conceptualized as a defining trait of woman, and any man who was too easily triggered by his lusts was therefore suspect of becoming “effeminate”. Breitenberg writes that “desire is the basis of masculinity *and* emasculation, the form of differentiating masculine subjectivity *and* the potential source of its dissolution into nothing.”¹⁵⁶ And Filotimo’s desire for Alcibiades, and for a very specific sex act, has been excessive right from when the boy was first entrusted to his care: “Già il bolzone che aveva ricevuto nel core dal impeto incomparabile di Cupido, con influssi incomprensibili inaffiato, era germogliato e cresciuto tanto sproporzionatamente davanti, che se non gli dava il trapianto nel ameno giardino del putto lo tirava sino alla morte.”¹⁵⁷ After the teacher has convinced his student of kissing with tongue, Filotimo loses self-control and is described as having “[a]nima inescata da vezzi di ridente e legiadro fanciullo è furia agitata nell’inferno, se non è moderato l’ardore dalla speranza, se non è finalmente refrigerato e fatto sano dalle opere.”¹⁵⁸ He becomes so obsessed with the delights of kissing his student, that he is no longer able to attend to important matters, and has to take some time off. The reader then learns that Alcibiades is far from the first boy Filotimo has desired in his role as teacher, but that there is an important difference between this youth and the others: Filotimo “né trovò mai fanciullo così restio nelle sue scole che, vinto dalle sue umane e cortesi

¹⁵² *L’Alcibiade*, p. 43.

¹⁵³ At the same time, it is noteworthy that φιλότιμον is sometimes used in a negative/ironic sense, as “covetous of virtue”, especially in Plato. It is not unlikely that Rocco, considering his teaching of rhetoric and philosophy, was familiar with the term’s ancient varying usage. An ironic reading of the name would then hint at Filotimo’s desire for a very specific “virtue”.

¹⁵⁴ Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity*, 2006.

¹⁵⁵ Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003. The psychoanalytic reading positions the power dynamics of desiring and dominating at the same level, while in the novel Filotimo is the only one who is physically able to dominate Alcibiades. The penis is not simply symbolic in *l’Alcibiade*, as we will also see later.

¹⁵⁶ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 1996, p. 166. Original emphasis.

¹⁵⁷ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁸ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 49.

maniere, non si rendesse vinto nelle sue braccia, non gli concedesse quanto bramava”.¹⁵⁹ Alcibiades, however, resists his teacher’s advances at multiple occasions, which only fuels Filotimo’s desire. Wanting more than just kisses, “[o]r sopra questo spasimava il maestro, quivi era rivolto ogni suo sforzo, in questo importante negozio raccolto, languiva in ogni altra sua azione. Di questo parlava figuratamente il giorno, si sognava continuamente la notte; parevagli ardua l’impresa, pericoloso il tentativo, di scandalo e vergogna l’esecuzione: e tutto era niente rispetto a’ suoi martiri, a’ suoi tormenti.”¹⁶⁰ From this a number of important conclusions can be inferred. Firstly, Filotimo’s excessive desiring of Alcibiades impacts every facet of his life, from his sleep, to his work, to his emotions; he has no control. Secondly, his desire increases because of Alcibiades not giving in easily, and this makes him want to act on it even more; the fulfillment of his sexual wants are more important to him than Alcibiades’s thoughts and feelings. Thirdly, Filotimo is well aware that his following actions will not be tolerated if found out by anyone.

Consent

That Filotimo is egoistic, and cares more for his own wants than his pupil’s, is not only made evident by the obvious fact that during the whole novel he is persuading Alcibiades of sexually surrendering to him. Despite doing this through words, and not by violence, there are two significant situations at the beginning of the novel – and before Filotimo starts the “actual” lecture – where he ignores both Alcibiades’ physical reaction to his advances and the youth’s explicit refusal. Although Alcibiades lets Filotimo kiss him without objection at first, the moment Filotimo asks Alcibiades to kiss him back with tongue and performs what he asks for himself, the boy’s posture changes: “Risospintosi alquanto adietro a questo novello *assalto*, il fanciullo divenne pallido e tremante.”¹⁶¹ Filotimo then starts to smooth things over by arguing in favor of kisses between teachers and students, as a way to physically transfer knowledge, after which Alcibiades gives in. “No” pronounced by body language is not a no for Filotimo, for whom the reader knows kissing is only a gateway to anal sex. At a later moment Alcibiades meets his teacher in the privacy of the latter’s own room, where Filotimo is visibly sexually excited and embraces his student. The language with which Filotimo’s erection is described is significant in the context of consent as it evokes a sense of imminent violence: Alcibiades sees Filotimo’s “maschile schiavone, che già aveva accostato il cannone per battere ed entrare nel forte.”¹⁶² This time, Alcibiades does not freeze, but instead accuses Filotimo of abuse, employing the trope of the pederast teacher, and explicitly withdraws consent by verbally stating “non voglio acconsentirvi”, and physically removing himself from the embrace.¹⁶³ We then read that Alcibiades “si pose seco in altri famigliari discorsi, talché ravivò la quasi estinta speme del maestro, e tanto gli scoperse di confidenza, che s’arrischiò di parlargli in questo modo”.¹⁶⁴ This is significative, as we can infer that Alcibiades is well aware of topical arguments (“famigliari discorsi”) against pederasty. This, unfortunately, only sparks

¹⁵⁹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁰ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 49.

¹⁶¹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 48. My emphasis

¹⁶² *L’Alcibiade*, p. 52. This metaphorical description, employing language related to warfare, interestingly resonates with Alonso’s description of man’s penis as a weapon, with male-male sex a battlefield, in Pallavicino’s *Il Principe Ermafrodito* (1640): “Possono fraporsi lacci d’amore tra due uomini o allignarsi le forze di Cupido in soggetti del sesso medesimo i quali, guerreggiando con le stesse armi, non hanno con che vicendevolmente oppugnarsi?” While this connects the penis to the masculine act of domination, might Rocco’s use of “schiavone”, however, point at the recognition that Filotimo’s desire renders him less moderate a man than he is supposed to be? See for Pallavicino’s text the edition of Roberta Colombi, 2005, p. 125.

¹⁶³ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁴ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 52.

Filotimo's cunning, as he still sees the possibility of braving the *risk* of being caught as fruitful, this time by appropriating the arguments raised by Alcibiades to reach his goal anyway under the heading "teaching". Alcibiades' final enthusiastic assent to sex is thus actually the result of manipulative persuasion, and therefore not only of mental violence, but of sexual violence as well, since consent has sneakily been enforced.¹⁶⁵

Risk

Filotimo is well aware that desiring Alcibiades, more precisely, acting on that desire, could get him into trouble. There is a reason the lecture takes place behind closed doors: Filotimo's own estimation deems "pericoloso il tentativo, di scandalo e vergogna l'esecuzione". The teacher clearly disconnects the attempt from the execution, and if we were to think with him, we could conclude that the risk of the attempt is located in scaring off his pupil – and having the boy denounce his sexual advances to others –, and the risk of the execution is tied to public opinion. Indeed, considering that Filotimo is overcome by his desire for his student, on top of his history with other youths, his own attitude towards the sexual act would not be one of scandal and shame.¹⁶⁶ Alcibiades, however, has given proof of having internalized this anti-sodomitical discourse, although he might just have picked up the topical arguments, rather than the affectual stance. The cunning Filotimo uses that to his advantage by employing other "famigliari discorsi" to persuade Alcibiades in staying: he presents an argument in which Alcibiades is described as the beautiful beloved of both neo-platonic and Petrarchan discourse, and himself as both a loyal yet afflicted lover *and* teacher of considerable esteem. Alcibiades then admits that his refusal is indeed topical: "Io non m'oppongo a' vostri desiri perché non conosca i vostri meriti, perché brami il vostro tormento ... ma l'onestà si vergogna, le leggi e la natura lo proibisce," later even specifying the source of these arguments: "quel ch'io sento da uomini peritissimi, che nelle mie case conversano con miei maggiori, è vizio questo nefando abbinato dalla natura, e contro natura lo chiamano."¹⁶⁷ Filotimo's sexual advances are thus refused by Alcibiades, because he heard adults in a familial – and authoritative – context condemn sodomy.¹⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that the adults *spoke* of sodomy in such way, as even calling it "vizio nefando" defeats the purpose of that descriptor when Alcibiades was clearly able to make the connection to the sex act Filotimo is soliciting. We do not know, however, whether the adults – and by extension Alcibiades – condemned anal sex in general, anal sex between males, or anal sex between a man and a boy in particular. While the paratextual apparatus frames the latter as the main problem of Rocco's novel, the narration in the text proper also helps to make an educated guess. Indeed, although Alcibiades keeps refusing Filotimo, he also eagerly keeps returning to him, which does not go unnoticed by Alcibiades' other tutors, who praise Filotimo for it. However, a small sidenote tells us that not all of the other men are unconditionally laudatory: "se ad alcuno cadeva in pensiero altri zeli, altro desio, la buona fama del precettore gli s'opponeva, né lasciava che si desse il consenso all'immaginazione."¹⁶⁹ A looming shadow is thus cast over Alcibiades' education, hinting towards a recognition as teacher-student relationships as a locus for sodomy, taking the form of pederasty. At the same time, this also confirms the fact that Filotimo's reputation, which

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Coci, "Introduzione," *L'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1988]; opposed to Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco," 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Even more so for his adhesion to the naturalist philosophy in which pleasure is good, and no sex act should be disapproved of morally. Cf. Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco," 2003.

¹⁶⁷ *L'Alcibiade*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶⁸ Earlier, when accusing Filotimo of abusing his office, Alcibiades indignantly asked Filotimo if he had anal sex with other boys as well, and what their parents/fathers would have to say about that, clearly underscoring the paternal authority. *L'Alcibiade*, p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 51.

now protects him from accusations of the very thing he is guilty of, can be heavily threatened by Alcibiades going public.

Filotimo keeps risking getting outed as a pederast, which would both destroy his good reputation as a right and just man, and make him into the embodiment of the stereotype of the sodomite teacher. This entails that he risks *being known* by the general public, not in the masculine way as a virtuous subject, but in the feminine way as an object of masculine knowledge, as a construct of masculinist sexual discourses.¹⁷⁰ In order not to be exposed, Filotimo thus carefully has to balance the opposition between how he is known in public and how he behaves in private, which finds a parallel in the inside/outside and body/mind oppositions regarding his sexual desires. We read that in other instances when Filotimo is sexually excited, “era di solito in simili accidenti dar l’alternativa alla commutazione degl’oggetti, senza venire a questo atto da manuale”, while right now “tiratosi in disparte, gli fece un volontario sacrificio di sua mano.”¹⁷¹ He experiences his desire in such excess, that he not only disregards his usual masturbatory abstinence, but also fully conscientiously commits himself to “ridurre alle sue ultime voglie il fanciullo.”¹⁷² It is easy to read Filotimo’s drive to subjugate Alcibiades to him sexually as a simple consequence of his desire, but let’s pause for a moment on the gendered mechanisms behind this. Learned as he is, especially with regard to sexual discourses, it would not be far-fetched to assume that Filotimo was well aware of the femininely connotated nature of his excessive desire; of its effeminizing effects.¹⁷³ In order to retake a masculine subject position, Filotimo has to fulfill a dominant sexual role again. While it would seem a better idea to abandon his sexual conquest of the boy in order not to risk public denouncement, and take up Alcibiades’ offer – “prendete quello che lecitamente e con voglia prontissima vi concedo: baci, gl’abbracciamenti, il tatto indifferente e gl’altri vezzi li concederò cortesissimo sempre; ma non pensate ad altri effetti più oltre.” – Filotimo’s threatened masculinity requires him to counter his effeminizing desires by, paradoxically, giving into them.¹⁷⁴ This explains why Filotimo reads Alcibiades’ offer as the tipping scale towards being “grandemente consolato con indubitata speranza che con più duri assalti, con più maturo consiglio, averia al fine espugnata la rocca, e nelle guerre d’amore averia trionfato di dolcezza ed eretti trofei di gloria.”¹⁷⁵ Both components of the juxtaposition between “più duri assalti” and “più maturo consiglio”, while seemingly contradictory, aim at the same goal: the stabilization of Filotimo’s unstable masculinity. However, if he sexually assaulted the boy in a physically violent way, what remained of his

¹⁷⁰ See Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 1998, p. 154, for the masculine need to construct a sexual other that he can “know”, in order to know himself as a man. While Breitenberg speaks about the construction of “woman”, the same could be argued for queer masculinities.

¹⁷¹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 54.

¹⁷² *L’Alcibiade*, p. 55.

¹⁷³ And indeed, as part of his contrasting misogynist discourse later on, Filotimo notes that having a secret female lover/maîtresse “vi rende appresso ognuno di cattiva fama, di vile ed effeminato, scioperato e poco prudente.” This then leads to “lasciare i negozii serii e perder se stessi”, which happened to the letter to Filotimo himself. And later as a response to Alcibiades’ question “Perché usate questa parola di temperato, o caro maestro?": “Perché l’eccesso, come vi dissi, offende – rispose il maestro – non per difetto dell’oggetto goduto, ma per l’uso.” *L’Alcibiade*, pp. 81, 85.

¹⁷⁴ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 54.

¹⁷⁵ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 55.

masculinity would be undone by the public consequences of his action, so his assault is located in that other masculine domain: speech.¹⁷⁶

4.2.2. Alcibiades

“Era il fanciulllo Alcibiade di quella età appunto, in cui la natura industrie, con piacevoli scherzi, sotto sembianze divine, confonde con maraviglie amorose il sesso femminile. E di donzella tal era forse allor Ganimede, quando ebbe forza di tirar Giove dal cielo in terra, per rapir lui dalla terra al cielo.”¹⁷⁷ *L’Alcibiade* opens with the above description of the title character. Other comparisons to mythological figures follow suit, but interestingly enough, they are all *goddesses* whose beauty pales next to Alcibiades’. Only Ganymede, thus, can compare, introducing the homoerotic topic of the book right from the second sentence. It is the youthful androgynous look that is so attractive, but despite the references to “il sesso femminile” and “di donzella”, it is androgyny placed on a male body that is the actual object of praise. But not only comparisons of mythical proportion are used to observe Alcibiades’ beauty. His physique is the object of a blazon that describes every feature of his face and decries the clothes the boy wears, as they cover up the rest of his body. The description then turns somewhat pornographic, as the perfect features of the boy’s face are fantasized to be comparable to his private parts. After his whole body has been besung, the description reaches a crescendo: “Ma la gioia inestimabile di questo tesoro era l’angelico della favella: egli con voce tanto soave esprimeva prontamente i caratteri delle parole, con pause così ordinate terminava i periodi del ragionare, che a guisa di sirena incantava gl’animi di dolcezza, non per privarli di vita, ma per tormentarli, vivendo, d’amore.”¹⁷⁸ Although body and voice are both being celebrated, they are also being objectified through feminizing gendered description: Alcibiades’ body “di donzella” is presented as the obvious target of the male gaze, while his voice “di sirena” is the ensnaring trap for men through their ears. The boy is thus at once the divine feminine and the monstrous feminine. However, the *use* of his voice is an indicator of gender trouble on the way: while the siren sings, the boy uses his voice for “parole” and to express the products of his “ragionare” – a distinctively masculine prerogative, as seen with Filotimo.¹⁷⁹ While at this time, it is still the sound of his voice that dazzles – and can we assume that, like his appearance, his voice is still boyish too? –, we can read a masculine subjectivity trying to emerge into it.¹⁸⁰ It is therefore too simplistic to interpret Alcibiades as a flat character, present only

¹⁷⁶ This comprises a different perspective to Maggi’s interpretation, who also reads Filotimo’s speech as the major site of the character’s masculinity, yet interprets this as the result of Alcibiades’ denying of Filotimo’s desires. Cf. Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003.

¹⁷⁷ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 43.

¹⁷⁸ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ There lies an interesting parallel in the presence of women at the events of the *Incogniti*: it is generally assumed that they could attend as guests (and not members), but could not speak. See: Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi, ‘virtuosissima cantatrice’,” 1978, pp. 246-7, especially note 23. Rosand discusses an anecdote reported in Loredan’s *Bizzarrie Accademiche* (1670), in which a woman attending one of the Academy’s meetings spoke up and argued against Loredan’s discourse. However, Rosand stresses that this was “clearly extra-curricular to the formal academic meeting”. See also, for women’s presence at meetings, Miato, *L’Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, pp. 107-13.

¹⁸⁰ Maggi notes about the boy’s physique and voice: “Rocco thus grants Alcibiades both an active and a passive character. Whereas his physical appearance makes him a woman and thus a receptacle of male desire, his voice manifests his strength, his virile being, and his power of persuasion.” Maggi, “The Discourse of Sodom,” 2003, p. 45.

as the necessary interlocutor that incited and entertains Filotimo's speech, and risks overlooking the richly gendered and sexual signifiers in both his description and in his speech.¹⁸¹

The gender of boys

Like the narrator, Filotimo also underscores Alcibiades' androgynous beauty. When prompted by the boy's question whether anal sex is not "contra natura", Filotimo first frames that expression as a misconception due to linguistic ambiguity. Instead of reading it moralistically, it actually concerns anatomy: we call the vagina "nature" since it gives birth, which places the anus literally "against nature".¹⁸² This misconception out of the way, Filotimo seizes the opportunity to further develop his theory of Nature as a sort of providential deity who created everything for human pleasure.¹⁸³ When one does not use Nature's gifts this way, one "si disnatura e gli diventa ribelle", since experiencing pleasure is the prime way to honor Nature.¹⁸⁴ This theory both naturalizes Filotimo's desire, and also explains for why Alcibiades is so attractive to him: "Non ha l'istessa natura inserto amore tra più simili? Or non ha maggior somiglianza col maschio fanciullo l'uomo, che il maschio con la donna? L'aver a' fanciulli dato sembianza di donzella all'aspetto, non ha insinuato che si converta l'uso in un altro uso?"¹⁸⁵ Paradoxically, Filotimo notes that a boy is more similar to a man than a man is to a woman, while at the same time stating that a boy is woman-like ("sembianza di donzella") and can therefore be used sexually. Will Fisher's reflection on the early modern gender of a boy offers a window onto this paradoxical tension:

Boys ... were quite literally a different gender from men during the early modern period. Although we currently tend to see the difference between men and boys as being a matter of degree (boys are diminutive versions of men) and the difference between men and women as being a matter of kind (women are entirely distinct from men), we need to remember that in the Renaissance, sexual differences were, as Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated in *Making Sex*, often conceptualized in terms of degree. Thus, the distinction between men and boys would have been analogous to that between men and women.¹⁸⁶

Considering the boy a different gender based on "degree" in Laqueur's one-sex model is helpful, as it introduces a gendered scale of sex in which "boy" occupies a position someplace between the polar male and female ends, marked by the degree of perfection of sexual organs.¹⁸⁷ Alcibiades' androgyny, or boyhood, is thus a male femininity: it is located more towards the masculine pole of the scale because of his penis, but not close enough to claim (male) masculinity because he is marked by youthful femininity. Returning to Fisher's conclusion, the distinction between men and boys is indeed analogous to that between men and women when considered in absolute terms: you're either a man,

¹⁸¹ Unfortunately, this seems to have been the judgment of both Coci, "Introduzione," *L'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1988], p. 13 and Fasoli, "Bodily 'Figurae,'" 2012, p. 110.

¹⁸² *L'Alcibiade*, p. 56-7.

¹⁸³ Cavaillé aptly discusses the "déiste" nature of Filotimo's discourse, and its philosophical explanations. Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco," 2003, pp. 34-6.

¹⁸⁴ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 58.

¹⁸⁵ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁶ Will Fisher, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England," 2001, p. 175. Much has been written about boyhood as a different gender position, especially in regard to Renaissance England's boy actors. See, especially, Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, 1996 and Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, 2006.

¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the one-sex model presupposes the sameness between a man's and a woman's sexual organ; the difference is located in the fact that the man's has fully developed towards the outside of the body, while the woman's remains underdeveloped inside the body. See: Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, 1990. See, for a critique of this model: Patricia Parker, "Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain," 1993.

or a not(-yet) man. The metaphor of degree, however, implies relative terms that enable a further distinction between women and boys, based on the development of the penis. It also implies mobility: a boy has masculine potential, despite being a not(-yet) man at this point.¹⁸⁸ The masculinist politics of Filotimo impose yet another gendered scale, or rather a dichotomy, over the gendered scale of sex: domination. Along this logic, anyone who does not embody “man”, and therefore “not(-yet) man”, also embodies “dominated”. This suggests a similarity between women and boys, as their distinctive trait in a masculinist informed sexual politics, is not their sex/gender, but their availability as objects of sexual desire for men.¹⁸⁹

Penetrating masculinity

However, the masculinist telos of the one-sex model intersects meaningfully with the dominance-model, as Filotimo underscores boys’ superiority over women as sexual partners when he naturalizes male desire for boys by saying “[n]on ha l’istessa natura inserto amore tra piú simili?”¹⁹⁰ If there is indeed a natural attraction between two people who resemble each other, Alcibiades’ question has the potential of exposing Filotimo’s sophistry: “Non potrebbe l’uomo con l’uomo, senza distinzione d’età puerile – disse Alcibiade – prender questi piaceri? Se in ciascuno di essi si ritrova quanto è nei fanciulli, e d’avantaggio?”¹⁹¹ Filotimo’s answer, however, underscores that a difference in age is a fundamental component: “L’età mutano specie e natura nei trastulli amorosi – disse il maestro – si mangia delicato il capretto, che fatto becco è fetidissimo; ma quelli che a questo caproni attendono sono ribelli d’amore, sono bestie di ferino e corrotto senso. L’amor maschio è fanciullo.”¹⁹² Interestingly, those who wait for a boy to become a man in order to enjoy him sexually, are described as “ribelli d’amore”, just like the people who refuse Nature’s gift of sexual gratification have been described as rebels earlier. Rather than confirming Filotimo’s earlier stated philosophy that desire is always natural as “[a]more, saettando i cori, non discerne né condizione, né età, né sesso”, it instead makes clear his disapproval of sex between men of the same age.¹⁹³ The words with which Filotimo describes the difference between men and boys recalls to the letter his earlier description of the size of the perfect penis, underscoring the male member’s significance not just as a metaphysical aid to discuss the potential of Alcibiades’ gender, but as a concrete body part to which a man can be erotically attracted: “la smisurata molle dà inizio che di capretti siano divenuti becchi: ... così sordidi e puzzolenti sono questi; se ben non mancano alcuni che, piuttosto per mutar vena che per star nell’ufficio dovuto, di questi hanno diletto maggiore. Ma io non intendo di far il mondo alla riversa.”¹⁹⁴ Penis size is thus directly linked to suitability as sexual partner and rightful sexual behavior: when a boy/a boy’s penis has grown too much, his expected sexual position on the dominance scale (“l’ufficio dovuto”) has changed with it. Sex between men without an age difference requires a man to be sexually

¹⁸⁸ There existed a cultural anxiety about women’s masculine potential through spontaneous sex-change. Although this was feared, it was of course also quite rare. See, for instance, Parker, “Gender Ideology,” 1993.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations*, 1996; Lisa Jardine, “Twins and travesties: gender, dependency, and sexual availability in *Twelfth Night*,” 1992.

¹⁹⁰ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 57.

¹⁹¹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 85.

¹⁹² *L’Alcibiade*, p. 85.

¹⁹³ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 53.

¹⁹⁴ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 76. It is not just the lexicon that returns: it is also significant that Filotimo chooses to speak here about men who desire being penetrated, as this topic was not yet introduced and did not *have* to be introduced either in order to make his point. Apparently, wherever masculinity seems to slip, it has to be policed, even by masculine subjects that do not embody the norm themselves, prolongating the masculinist politics of dominance and Othering.

dominated, and is therefore “il mondo alla riversa” and incompatible with masculinity. Here, Filotimo does not only belie his naturalist philosophy by explicitly disavowing a certain type of desire/pleasure (sex between two adult men), but also presents a biologically essentialist view of gender by tying masculinity inextricably to a penetrating penis.¹⁹⁵ This projects a vision of masculinity as exclusive – and exclusionary – onto adult men who penetrate, and simultaneously confirms a constructed gendered hierarchy whereby the non-masculine is relegated to a position of sexual inferiority and vice versa.

Queer sex to speech

Alcibiades’ body, then, becomes the site where Filotimo’s masculinist fetish of domination can be played out. We might even argue that the boy’s masculine potential, alongside his refusal, fuels Filotimo’s desire, as it would put him at the apex of masculine sexual dominance if it can be claimed and taken. Filotimo’s desire for the boy, however, exceeds a “simple” pederastic longing for Alcibiades’ behind as the teacher also finds pleasure in the boy’s penis. Indeed, not only does Filotimo describe the perfect penis (and the functioning of a penis-in-action) to Alcibiades with a list of adjectives that can only be interpreted as stemming from a fixation, he also admits that the boy has the perfect member; in later descriptions of the sexual act between a man and a boy, the boy’s penis also plays a role.¹⁹⁶ It is striking that Filotimo shows such an interest in the exact part of Alcibiades’ body that signifies his masculine potential, and that will have the potential of challenging his own. Filotimo’s sexual desire for Alcibiades is thus not only excessive in its intensity, but also exceeds the molds of “common” constructions of male-male sexuality – in other words, Filotimo experiences a queer desire for Alcibiades.¹⁹⁷ However, as we have seen, Alcibiades’ refusal bars the teacher easy access to his body, which leads to words and rhetoric becoming the main arena of domination. Indeed, if the boy cannot be anally penetrated, he will have to be aurally penetrated first. And if it is not Filotimo’s penis that does the penetrating, then speech as the other masculine signifier has to do the work. But just as penis and speech form complimentary components of Filotimo’s masculinity, so do they for Alcibiades’ masculine potential: he is still a boy and thus not able to penetrate, and his speech is also not yet powerful enough to dissuade Filotimo, even though he offers arguments and counterarguments. As we have seen before, Alcibiades’ interventions are mainly topical, rather than an unwavering understanding of the contents. Yet, this masculine potential in speech incites Filotimo’s cunning through queer appropriation of the arguments, just as Alcibiades’ bodily masculine potential incites Filotimo’s queer lust. Then, on both levels, Filotimo strives to repress Alcibiades’ masculine potential by both overruling his words with speech of his own, and by subjugating him sexually.

Intellectual desire

Let’s refocus on Alcibiades. We have already seen that he mainly refused Filotimo’s advances because of the threatening shadow of “sodomy”, and that he countered his teacher based on what he overheard his parents say:

¹⁹⁵ The importance of genitals as primary sex/gender marker is unstable and challenged. See for premodernity, for instance, Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 1990 and Parker, “Gender Ideology,” 1993. Genitals are also a polemical topic in today’s societal debates over transgender identities and bodies.

¹⁹⁶ *L’Alcibiade*, pp. 75-6; 77-8. Moreover, sexual pleasure for the boy in itself exceeds the pederastic model, where pleasure is the reward of the teacher, and knowledge that of the student.

¹⁹⁷ The queerness of Filotimo’s desire is underscored by Alcibiades. When the boy imagines himself as having the insertive role in the future, he notes with regard to the penis of his receptive partner: “E io, in questi congressi amorosi, mentre facessi l’agente non lo stimerei troppo in altri.” *L’Alcibiade*, p. 77.

Le vietano le nostre leggi; l'abborisce Pallade nostro nume singular in Atene; e narrano che i dei prendeva castigo col foco, col solfo e col bitume d'alcune città macchiato di questo fallo, sí che ne restorno estinte e somerse; e per memoria del fatto si credono ancora ivi i luochi sulfurei, con arbori e frutti in apparenza vaghi, entro però siano pieni d'orride faville e di cenere, vestigie della seguita vendetta di Dio. Né che le pene temporali siano meta al castigo ma che nell'animo separate si essercitino pene incomprensibili eterne.¹⁹⁸

And he continues: “Non volete ch’abborisca? Che mi spaventi e fugga?”¹⁹⁹ What becomes apparent above all is Alcibiades’ intense emotions regarding the subject: the way sodomy is commonly constructed and spoken about – by authoritative figures and as a consequence also by law – teaches him to feel a certain way. It frightens and disgusts him. Discourse on sodomy is where his feelings stem from, and Alcibiades underscores this by replacing his arguments from the domain of secular law and order, into a moral and religious one. While he depicts the destruction of cities by fire and sulfur as a mythical event, his argument slips into a moral and religious one when the “dei” that punished these cities – of course intertextually referencing the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah – become the vengeful “Dio” of Christianity. This is cemented by the fact that the punishment of the crime is not merely a bodily death by fire, but becomes the eternal punishment of the soul. One wonders whether Alcibiades offers another intertextual reference here to Dante’s *Inferno*, canto XV, in which Dante’s teacher Brunetto Latini is eternally punished by fire for sodomitical tendencies.²⁰⁰ In any case, Alcibiades shows himself to be oppressed by discourse, not really understanding it that well – indeed, Filotimo is able to twist all of his arguments with relative ease –, and asks his teacher to explain: “E voi come non temete queste minacce? Come v’arrischiate a sí fatti pericoli? *Liberatemi* da questi dubbi, o abbandonate l’impresa e il pensiero.”²⁰¹ While Alcibiades has thus internalized the feelings that Sodom’s discourse are supposed to incite, he leaves room for Filotimo to explain himself and to show him how to develop a counter-discourse.²⁰² Alcibiades asks Filotimo not just to explain the contents of the topic under discussion, but also how to become a master of discourse – “*liberatemi*” is meaningful here. Over the course of dialogue, Alcibiades’ arguments become less topical, and more focused on exposing inconsistencies and gaps in Filotimo’s speech, of which the question above whether men could not just have sex with men is the prime example. At the same time, Alcibiades keeps explicitly asking Filotimo to explain things to him: “Ricevo sodisfazione apieno dal vostro discorso ... ma vi prego spiegarmi ...”²⁰³ And later, when close to assenting to sex: “Non voglio altrimenti ... che cessata l’occasione di persuadere sarete piú languido e forse anco renitente nel dire. Seguite pertanto, e non temete del resto.”²⁰⁴ What matters most to Alcibiades is to learn, and thus for Filotimo to speak. And while I believe that the boy is certainly interested in the contents of Filotimo’s speech, I also think that this is primarily in order to be able to *argue from a place of knowledge*. And who, in this regard, is a better

¹⁹⁸ *L’Alcibiade*, pp. 55-6.

¹⁹⁹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 56.

²⁰⁰ This would of course posit a firm parallel between Dante-Latini and Alcibiades-Filotimo. Despite being placed in hell with other sodomites by Dante, Latini is portrayed as highly beloved by the author-narrator-protagonist, and this positive affect might reflect back on Filotimo. Can this intertext be read as another mitigating argument for the sin that sodomy is considered as?

²⁰¹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 56. Emphasis mine.

²⁰² That discourse on sodomy is supposed to function as an affective subtext that incites these negative feelings, is further confirmed by Filotimo: “E se alcuno si mostra restio, non è questo perché la sua natura non l’inclini, ma per l’abito di timore imbevutogli da chi per leggi o per altro li persuade che sia vergogna e peccato.” *L’Alcibiade*, p. 92

²⁰³ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 73.

²⁰⁴ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 90.

teacher than Filotimo, who is obviously knowledgeable about all the varying discourses involved, but also knows how to manipulate this in order to be rhetorically persuasive?

Queer speech to sex

Alcibiades' "ragionare" is developing, but it still needs to be cultivated in order for it to grow, and consequentially, in order for his masculinity to fully emerge. And as he is still unable to fully distinguish sophistry from philosophy, the teacher seizes his opportunity when Alcibiades asks: "Ditemi, caro signor maestro ... come per questa via si diventi ingegnoso e saputo, come or ora diceste."²⁰⁵ Filotimo then sees his chance to make his final case, linking knowledge to sex by presenting an argument about the nature of human sperm: it has the potential to transfer the intellectual qualities of the lover by heating up the cold brain of the beloved, a transmission made possible when inserted through the nerves of the anus. He then adds that: "Né è permesso a fanciullo alcuno diventar pari al suo maestro, se non per questa via; non negherò però che da ogni seme non si riceva qualche utile nel cervello, essendo ognuno de chi si sia giustamente tepido e temperato, ma piú ove ha piú del qualificato e del nobile."²⁰⁶ The teacher presents himself as the perfect lover, as his "tepido e temperato" character, for which he is well-known, has the potential to make Alcibiades grow intellectually. However, Alcibiades is ignorant to the fact that this is a false argument, as Filotimo is not at all temperate, but overcome by his desire, and the boy thus unfortunately gives in: "Ecco – disse – amantissimo maestro, che il desire del vero sapere, posposta ogn'altra cosa, ai vostri piaceri mi piega. Eccomi apparecchiato a contentarvi di quanto bramate."²⁰⁷ Again, Filotimo succeeds in convincing Alcibiades that submitting to a certain sexual act is the way of becoming knowledgeable – and consequentially of becoming a man –, as he did likewise when arguing for kissing with tongue. Right now, however, upon receiving what he wanted, Filotimo does precisely what Alcibiades feared all along when he admits: "Questo [culo] dunque sarà il centro de' miei pensieri; da lui riceveranno il moto; sarà regola infallibile delle mie azioni, scopo e meta d'ogni mio bene e felicità. E cosí, come a mio nume e deità, ti consacrerò il mio core."²⁰⁸ Filotimo stops speaking, and proves that his ultimate goal was not to teach the boy, but to lose himself in the boy's anus. Alcibiades, who tellingly does not speak anymore at all after offering his body, is left a lost cause: "*ridotto* a termine che non avendo il cazzo del suo maestro nel culo non sapeva che cosa fusse dolcezze; nemmeno credeva per altra via poter divenir perfetto al pari del suo precettore."²⁰⁹ Even though he believes that there is no other way to become perfect – a masculine man, who knows how to deploy language – he is permanently relegated to a position of sexual inferiority, and is thus denied precisely what he desires so much. *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* therefore depicts the tragedy of a boy utterly corrupted by his schoolmaster, a fate that reverses the myth that surrounds the character's historical namesake.²¹⁰ Indeed, the original Athenian Alcibiades was already so corrupt, that even the teachings of Socrates could not save him.

Non-normative masculinities

Both characters, in the end, fail to adhere to the ideal of masculinity, even when considered in the pederastic frame of the book. While Alcibiades performs well his role as the beloved that desires to

²⁰⁵ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 95.

²⁰⁶ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 96.

²⁰⁷ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 96.

²⁰⁸ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 98.

²⁰⁹ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 98.

²¹⁰ See also Maggi, "The Discourse of Sodom," 2003, pp. 45-6 for a small comparison between Rocco's Alcibiades and the historical figure. Note that rumors of pederasty also implicated this pairing of student-teacher, but also that Alcibiades famously tried to seduce his teacher instead of the other way around.

learn, he will never reach his goal. This is due to Filotimo failing to perform his expected masculine role: instead of enjoying the sexual pleasure he receives from Alcibiades as an added benefit of his teaching, that teaching, or rather misleading, is actually a dishonest means to an end. Personal sexual pleasure has always been his main objective, as the narrator underscores: "Fortunato maestro, che facendoti servo di tanta bellezza fosti anco padrone di goderla, in conformità del tuo desiderio."²¹¹ This could be read in an ironic tone, with "servo" pointing to the fact that Filotimo has been dominated by his desire all along. This way, when we read his desire to penetrate Alcibiades as an attempt to stabilize his threatened masculinity because of this effeminizing desire, we have to conclude that he fails: when the moment is there and the pupil submits, Filotimo only *further* loses himself as evidenced by his blasphemous blazon of the boy's anus, instead of "simply" penetrating the boy as end-goal. At the same time, Filotimo is actually fortunate when considered from his own perspective: he has complete dominance over the object of his sexual desire, and, moreover, because Alcibiades is so tightly in his grip, Filotimo will not be at risk of public exposure. He is thus both the boy's master, as well as the master over his own reputation. So even though the teacher-student dynamic has not been the "rightful" "masculine man helping feminine boy reach his masculine potential", but "effeminate man abusing feminine boy denying his masculine potential", it all takes place behind closed doors and therefore remains invisible. The homoeroticism that so often served as a *rite de passage* fails to actually produce normative masculinity, as it becomes ensnared by Filotimo's deviant desire. Non-normative masculinity is what succeeds in this book, as it is not policed, except maybe by the paratext. But then again, considering the oblique reading that was so prevalent in the community where this book circled, we can doubt its success.²¹² Moreover, if we are correct to assume that the paratext only accompanied the text proper in its printed version, and that *l'Alcibiade* circulated in manuscript for years before that, many men would have read the unpoliced version of a story in which non-(hetero)normative masculinity is at the apex.

4.2.3. Male-male sexual activity as (homo)sexual identity?

One of the central issues of the novel is thus the unpoliced non-normative masculinity that goes rampant, as both characters are corrupt(ed) because of non-heteronormative – queer – sexuality gone wrong, both in desire and acts. Despite pederastic models having a certain discursive currency in the early modern era still, the teacher-student relationship in *l'Alcibiade* is without doubt problematic. We could wonder whether Filotimo is a rotten apple amongst teachers, or whether the unequal power dynamic – inherent to teacher-student relationships and at the same time a prerequisite in masculinist sexual politics – functioned according to the maxim of "the opportunity makes the thief" and could therefore be extended onto all men in a position of power. Indeed, the paratext warns the readers for sexually abusive practices of teachers, and thus reinforces the idea that every teacher potentially experiences and acts upon queer desire. But not only the paratext suggests this; in the text proper both Filotimo and Alcibiades confirm the stereotypical connection. We read of Filotimo's frustration when Alcibiades does not assent to sex as easily as his other pupils usually do, and Alcibiades counters Filotimo by making a claim to common discourse – and thus common occurrence – once more: "Pur i padri non vogliono – soggiunse Alcibiade – che i lor figlioli sono ridotti a questo uso da' precettori,

²¹¹ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 98.

²¹² To this we might add that the printer's note promises a sequel: "Ti prometto in breve la seconda parte, intitolata il *Trionfo d'Alcibiade*, che tanto più sarà curioso, quanto che è parto della più dotta penna di questo paese." Read alongside the final sentence of the text-proper "Ma come poi continuassero i loro godimenti e gl'amorosi amplessi, nella seconda parte più lascivamente intenderete", we can only wonder what readers would have thought about the work as a whole. *L'Alcibiade*, pp. 42, 98.

come anco li precettori ne ricevano poco buona fama: segno che sia stimata azione illecita e indegna.”²¹³ However, the fact that it are some of Filotimo’s colleagues – other teachers thus – who are suspicious of the exact nature of his relationship with Alcibiades, might point at the fact that it is not the teacher-student relationship that is suspect, but the individual teacher. There is thus a tension between homosexuality as potentially concerning everyone within a certain demographic and it being of importance to a limited few, which Sedgwick has articulated in her framework of a “contradiction between seeing the 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 a 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).”²¹⁴ This minoritizing/universalizing tension – here applied to teachers, a male figure most aristocratic boys of the time would be in contact with –, can be extended to other categories of males as well. With regard to the figure of the boy, for instance, it usually was of lesser concern whether or not he would incline towards male-male sexuality anyway, but all the more so that his very gendered position made him legible as a sexual object.²¹⁵ Alcibiades indeed confirms that he has been the object of sexual affection of other men, even before Filotimo sparked his interest: “Non nego – rispose Alcibiade – che da numeroso stuolo d’amanti non sia stato vagheggiato e seguito; ma la sicura custodia de’ miei maggiori hanno impedito il lor gusto.”²¹⁶ Alongside the non-normative masculinity that is central to *l’Alcibiade*, Sedgwick’s framework offers the tools to delve deeper into the particularly queer components of that non-normativity, and give due attention to the homosexual masculine in particular.

Taste

Alcibiades’ use of the word “gusto” here above when describing the desire of would-be-lovers before Filotimo is significant in a discussion of homosexuality. Gary Ferguson has shown that the lexical field of taste was a diffuse category that in the early modern era could describe both interest in specific sexual activities and body parts over the broad range of the sexual spectrum, but could also hint at (exclusive) same-sex attraction and desire.²¹⁷ The latter type of taste was bound up in discussions of it being an innate characteristic of a person’s nature, a view which became more and more prevalent over time, at least since the late seventeenth century onward. When discussed in Sedgwick’s model of homosexuality, Ferguson notes “the supplanting in the early modern period of a universalizing pederastic model of homosexuality by a more egalitarian model of homosexuality considered as a fundamental or innate characteristic and associated with a particular minority”, but adds that we need to be hesitant to accept this in a teleological sense, in which a modern “born this way” understanding of sexual identity is the endpoint.²¹⁸ Rather, we must attend to the coexisting tension between minoritizing and universalizing aspects in both earlier and later texts, in order to find instances of historical queer (homo)sexuality.²¹⁹

²¹³ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 87.

²¹⁴ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990, p. 1.

²¹⁵ For male-male erotics in unequal relationships, especially pederasty, discussed in universalizing/minoritizing terms, see: Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings*, 2008, pp. 16-24.

²¹⁶ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 90

²¹⁷ Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings*, 2008, pp. 43-9.

²¹⁸ Ferguson, *Queer (Re)Readings*, 2008, p. 48.

²¹⁹ Ferguson underscores the importance of this tension for the Renaissance/early modern era: “it is also the coexistence in the historical period in question of positions likely to strike the modern student as contradictory – the fact that same-sex desire was not understood in terms of one of a pair of binaries (universalizing or

At a certain moment, Alcibiades asks why Filotimo is so fixated on having anal sex with him, when a woman also has an anus, which is described as a fruit. Filotimo answers:

La donna non dà volentieri i suoi pomi, non apre volentieri l'orto del giro, perché le sue voglie sono altrove: il suo piacer l'attende dalla natura, cioè a dire nella potta, talché è di gusto amaro; e quando anco volessero, è così differente il dolce di quello da questo, come la carne di vacca da quella di vitello. Nel modo dunque che il gusto accuratamente distingue nel cibo, in alcuni ritrova il dilettevole, in altri l'abominevole: ogni parte, ogni boccone di vacca è di vacca, e quello di vitello è vitello. Così il tatto ne' piaceri amorosi.²²⁰

Fleshing out the lexicon of taste with culinary references, Filotimo admits that a woman's anus is indeed favorable to her vagina, describing it as sweet and fruity rather than bitter. Filotimo thus connects taste to a specific sexual act/body part. In and of itself this taste is sodomitical: it is not based on procreation and it is anally fixated to boot. He then continues by comparing a boy's anus to a woman's anus, with the boy being the winner solely based on individual taste. Whereas a woman is compared to beef, a boy is compared to veal, and like an individual can have a preference in meats, so can he have a preference in his sexual partner's gender.²²¹ At the same time, Filotimo measures preference in (exclusory?) extremes, deeming some meats, and thus sexual partners, "dilettevole" and others "abominevole". Slyly, he also takes away the male-male sodomitical charge from the latter term and transforms it into a word that can simply be used to describe something you do not like. Here we see taste being a stand-in to an exclusive sexual interest in one's own sex. Filotimo, however, never explicitly states that this concerns him. Alcibiades does not pick this up either – despite Filotimo presenting some additional arguments about a woman's abhorrent genital physique –, and asks his teacher whether marrying a woman would not be a solution to her outrageous jealousy as a lover.²²² Filotimo's answer is again constructed in a lexicon of taste: "il cibo continuato senza variazione fa nausea, di modo che vi induce a morir di fame e di desire. E poi per diletto sí facile, per piaceri così comuni, per dolcezze concesse sino alle mosche perder se stesso? Privarsi della miglior parte dell'anima, della libertà, che sono incomparabili?"²²³ Repetitive sex with a woman (as would happen in marriage) is distasteful according to Filotimo as there would be no variation. Indeed, beef remains beef, and should therefore be alternated with veal.²²⁴ Taste, then, points towards a universalizing view of homosexuality in which "la miglior parte dell'anima" is equated to having the liberty of choosing a diverse sexual object according to your desires in the moment. At the same time, Filotimo's negative attitude towards sex that is "easy", "common" and even related to the lowest of animals, could also be read as a deprecating stance towards heterosexual sex, implying homosexuality as not just a diverse sexual act, but as the superior preference. This would allow for another reading, where taste would point at a minoritizing view in which homosexuality is equated to "la miglior parte dell'anima", which is an incomparable good, alongside the liberty to experience and practice this. Understood this way,

minoritizing, institutionalized or stigmatized, recuperated or marginalized) but must be seen as potentially occupying all of these positions at once – that in no small part makes, for us, such queer reading." *Queer (Re)Readings*, 2008, p. 49.

²²⁰ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 78.

²²¹ Curiously, beef/"vacca" and veal/"vitello" do not only reflect the age of the animal and thus of the sexual partner, the Italian words are also gendered in accordance to their being stand-ins for women and boys respectively.

²²² This was indeed another argument of Filotimo's as to why boys are better lovers than women. His arguments are steeped clearly in the *querelle des femmes*, to whose textual production is referred in passing: "Vi sono uomoni di molto ingegno che ne hanno scritti i volumi". *L'Alcibiade*, p. 81.

²²³ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 82.

²²⁴ Having sex with another woman would therefore not be a sufficient means of variation.

there is a clear resonance to modern parlance of sexual orientation as an innate characteristic of identity.

Even though Filotimo's arguments thus give reason to see both a universalizing and a minoritizing view of homosexuality at work in *l'Alcibiade* via a discourse of taste, it should be stressed again that not all forms of homosexual preference are allowed to be "*la miglior parte dell'anima*". Indeed, recalling his earlier disavowal of (sex with) adult men based on their penis size, we see Filotimo constructing a hierarchy: "così sordidi e puzzolenti sono questi [= penises]; se ben non mancano alcuni che ... di questi hanno diletto maggiore."²²⁵ A minoritizing view is evident here, as there are "alcuni" that experience "diletto" – the word appears in both citations above and is thus implicated in a discourse of taste – in sex with men of their age. However, Filotimo disapproves of this sexual preference as, like the vagina which was "di gusto amaro", adult penises are "sordidi e puzzolenti", words we can easily imagine describing rotten fruit. It seems Filotimo hierarchizes a minoritizing male-male desire by stressing age difference as a characteristic of utmost importance: subjects of adult homosexuality (like heterosexuality) are actively Othered, while the pederastic is presented as the rightful form. However, Filotimo's hierarchizing does not stop there, as he further singularizes male-male desire alongside an additional axis of difference: class.

Class

Filotimo distinguishes between suitable and unsuitable partners in the pederastic relationship. In the case of the man this is determined by his behavior. "Discreti amanti" are supposed to always keep the boy's wellbeing and pleasure in mind when attending to their own. Their suitability thus "dipende dalla disciplina e dalla destrezza."²²⁶ If not, and unfortunately this occurs often, these men are nothing more than animals: "Questi tali non sono amanti, ma lupi; non fruitori de' beni sopremi, ma micidiali e nemici della natura e del mondo."²²⁷ Moderation returns once more as a false argument; it is probably no coincidence that Filotimo frames certain men as predators, "lupi", as an attempt to deflect this from himself. In the case of the boy, the difference between good and bad is based on an array of aspects that can be linked to social position. Indeed, "il discrete amante de' fanciulli non ha da esser indifferente con tutti, non ha da ricercar per suoi godimento ognuno che sia putto. ... Deve dunque esser nobile, civile, adorno, ridente e senza macchia il fanciullo amabile: né sarà pregiato, se non fia tale."²²⁸ Not *all* boys are thus potential sexual partners, as a universalizing homosexuality constructed upon pederasty would have it, as it is being presented as restricted to the upper echelons of society. Paradoxically, this creates an understanding of homosexuality precisely as a universalizing aspect within a social minority; indeed, all males belonging to the aristocracy could be involved in pederastic relationships.²²⁹ Pederasty, then, could be presented as a culturally significant form of homosexuality within a group that would recognize its aristocratic demarcation and historic roots. As a cultural marker, or rather, a marker of culture, Filotimo is able to construct pederasty as an ideal that is not necessarily tied to material reality, despite *l'Alcibiade's* highly graphical contents. By grace of its restricted locus, pederasty could be constructed as an elevated form of masculine sexuality, which in a queer way can be considered reproductive. Indeed, not only could pederasty be seen as a necessary

²²⁵ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 76.

²²⁶ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 92.

²²⁷ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 93.

²²⁸ *L'Alcibiade*, p. 79.

²²⁹ Social minority has of course to be understood in terms of the size of the demographic, not in its usual connotation as a marginalized position within a society.

step forward towards realizing masculine potential, but Filotimo literalizes male social reproduction when he asserts: “Non è mai sí ricco né sí potente l’uomo che a certo tempo non abbia bisogno dell’altro uomo, e chi fa beneficii ne attende ancora.”²³⁰ Pederasty thus serves masculinity according to a pay-it-forward model, as it both leads to the emergence of a man (the feminine boy being brought to masculine potential), as well as it grants masculinist pleasure to a man (the man reasserts himself as a man as he penetrates). Two important caveats have to be noted with regard to *homosexuality*. On the one hand, this explanation disregards historical social reality, in which pederasty was not necessarily understood as an elevated practice, but rather frowned upon (also reflected in *l’Alcibiade’s* paratextual apparatus).²³¹ On the other, not all men abandoned a passive position in male-male sexual relationships when they outgrew their position as the boy in a pederastic frame, nor did they necessarily adhere to the presupposed imperative age difference in their later sexual relationships.²³² This then leads to the conclusion that pederasty might be explained as a universalizing articulation of homosexuality when considered in its conception as an aristocratic ideal, but that it does not preclude lived experiences in which pederasty led to the discovery and articulation of minoritizing forms of homosexuality.²³³

In line with the coexistence of these two views, Alcibiades’ articulation of homosexuality does not have to match Filotimo’s: even if the boy acts from a universalizing position and Filotimo desires from a minoritizing position, the latter’s desires will be met. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Filotimo has a personal agenda, and that his arguments are not always to be trusted at face value. The universalizing idealization of pederasty through its exclusionary locus in aristocracy, could thus be read as another trick to convince Alcibiades. The boy might more readily assent to sex if he understands this as some elevated practice matching his social position, rather than as an act that defines him as a deprecated figure. The idealized and non-material form of pederastic sexuality, however, is threatened by debasement. This threat is located both in boys that do not fit the ideal of “nobile” and “civile”, and by analogy do not stem from the higher social classes, and in boys that do not submit to a man with the noble goal of masculine (re)production in mind.²³⁴ Concerning the latter, the material reward for the boy should be located in sexual pleasure (as the passive partner right now if he is lucky, but in any case as the active partner when the roles have reversed later), but not in financial gain.²³⁵ Indeed, “altro sono i mercati, e altro le cortesie” explains Filotimo when Alcibiades asks him why a boy cannot receive money for his submission.²³⁶ The discussion of sex for money – not so strange a topic in Venice where prostitution was everyday’s business and openly so – is sparked by Alcibiades’ question

²³⁰ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 72.

²³¹ See also: Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 1985 and Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, 1996.

²³² See: Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 1985 and Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 1996.

²³³ Moreover, since idealizations of pederasty are concerned with a particular social class, there is a whole array of homosexuality (understood in a minoritizing sense) possible outside this demographic.

²³⁴ It should be noted though, that in Filotimo’s discourse, even “base” boys are better sexual partners than women, which reads queerly in light of this reasoning. “Ma dato che alcuno di questi difetti si ritrovasse in qualche putto novello, per povertà ridotto a qualche termine d’immondizie, o per inesperienza, il tutto è nulla, in comparazione degl’intrichi, de’ mestruai, e delle conseguenze pestifere delle donne.” *L’Alcibiade*, p. 80. This, again, points towards a minoritizing desire in Filotimo, rather than one stemming from him fulfilling his social role in a universalizing view.

²³⁵ Uncharacteristically, as mentioned before, in Filotimo’s discours, sexual pleasure of the boy is an important ordeal. He even explains how some boys are anatomically more suitable to enjoy submitting sexually than others. *L’Alcibiade*, pp. 93-4.

²³⁶ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 72.

“[p]erché dunque i fanciulli che alli piaceri degl’uomini condescendono con obbrobrioso nome di bardassi vengono dispreggiati e stimati infami?”²³⁷ Once more, Alcibiades shows to have picked up a way of speaking about male-male sexual activity, in this case being able to connect the term “bardassa” to sexual passive youths.²³⁸ Filotimo has an answer ready, in which he vilifies the debasement a monetary compensation brings to the pederastic bond. “Questo nome di bardassa – rispose il maestro – non conviene né deve darsi, e in effetto non si dà, a fanciulli che per termine d’affetto e di cortesia fanno graziosamente copia di se stessi agl’amanti civili e meritevoli. ... Il bardassa vuol propriamente dir putto mercenario e venale, che solo per semplice mercede, quasi un tanto per misura, vende se stesso, né altro attende che il guadagno civile.”²³⁹ Interestingly enough, it is the boy that commits the wrong by asking for money, instead of the man who – in the case where sex is actually sold – pays. Filotimo thus stresses that the boy has to be careful to offer his body for the right reasons, as his youth does not automatically excuse wrongful sexual behavior. Underscoring the idealized nature of the pederastic bond once more, Filotimo concludes: “Glorioso e divino fanciullo, che senza fine di mercenario interesse beatifica gl’uomini in terra; vil mercenario infame, che a prezzo vende se stesso, che dal esser giardiniero e tesoriere delle gioie d’amore diventa vil macelaggio delle sue proprie carni.”²⁴⁰

Conclusion about homosexuality

According to Filotimo’s reasoning, the right form of homosexuality is taking either the active/adult or passive/youth role in an idealized pederastic relationship, and is thus located in a highly restricted number of males – noble and civil (i.e. aristocratic) boys and adults who strive for masculine (re)production. Wrong forms of homosexuality thus exist, such as relations between adult men, relations between unequal partners for material gain, and relations wherein the adult is behaving too aggressively. Universalizing and minoritizing views coexist in a certain tension: Filotimo appears to favor a universalizing view of homosexuality as pederastic practice, but also speaks quite casually and positively about a minoritizing inclination in the adult pederast, while at the same time condemning a same-sex preference in males outside of a pederastic framework. Alcibiades adds to the further restricted localization of homosexuality when he admits that he has had sexual relations with boys of his own age, but that the missing age difference made them unsatisfactory: “Ho però procurato scambievoli questi dilette con fanciulli coetanei compagni, ma non li ho stimati molto, né li ho uguagliati a quei piaceri che forse si ricevono con gl’uomini; anzi, me li ho rappresentati tanto diversi quanto è un frutto acerbo da un maturo.”²⁴¹ Significantly, Alcibiades uses a comparison to fruits to discuss same-sex relations between peers, in a reverse parallel of Filotimo’s disapproval of same-sex relations between adults.²⁴² It appears as if the only correct way of doing homosexuality, is doing it Filotimo’s way. At the same time, we have already seen that Filotimo does not only *not* adhere to his supposed role in the ideal pederastic relationship (he does not teach, but only desires to subjugate), he *also* queers both roles. Indeed, his fixation on Alcibiades’ penis and his insistence on pleasure on the boy’s

²³⁷ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 71.

²³⁸ Stemming from an Arab term for a young slave, the adoption of the word “bardassa” as a pejorative term for a sexually receptive youth in male-male relations, forges an Orientalizing connection to the racial/ethnic Other as effeminate as well. It is telling that one of the few negative depictions of homosexuality that remain standing should have these linguistic roots, especially considering Venice’s history with the Ottoman Empire.

²³⁹ *L’Alcibiade*, pp. 71-2.

²⁴⁰ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 71.

²⁴¹ *L’Alcibiade*, p. 90.

²⁴² Does this reflect Alcibiades gradually becoming receptive to Filotimo’s arguments?

part explode the pederastic framework. Thus, after all, Filotimo's idealized pederastic way of doing homosexuality, remounts to another false argument, and another appropriated frame, in order to convince Alcibiades.

What becomes apparent is that homosexuality cannot be equated with a single, fixed identarian construction; however, there is a recognition in *l'Alcibiade* of a plurality in forms of homosexuality in acts and tastes/preferences, that sometimes do relate to something that could be considered a person's sexual identity. What Filotimo does, however, is acting as a judge on a moral level, deeming all constructions of homosexuality – both universalizing (e.g. every boy is legible as sexual object) and minoritizing (e.g. adult male-male desire) – that do not serve his own desires as wrong, and (falsely) presenting his own ideal as the only rightful form. So what to make of Filotimo's actual articulation – as opposed to the projection behind which he “hides” – of homosexuality? While showcasing a minoritizing form in his specific taste for “vitello”/boys, he projects this onto a pederastic framework, and thus transforms it into a “common” practice located in an aristocratic microcosm. This then points towards Filotimo practicing a universalizing form. However, as he keeps refining and restricting the suitable types of males (or rather, masculinities and male-femininities) that can correctly perform pederasty, and, finally, abandons this position himself altogether, his articulation of homosexuality is neither universalizing nor minoritizing. Indeed, there is no minority left with which to identify.²⁴³ This, I would argue, hints at something that could point towards an idiosyncratic form of homosexuality, that is minoritizing in as much as it concerns a same-sex desire that is identifiable with a certain minority group (pederasts) or is exclusive in and of itself (like male-male desiring adults), but with a preponderantly specific taste (i.e. boys; narrowed down even further with regard to their provenance and what kind of sexual acts performed with them). It boils down to this: unlike “regular” pederasts, Filotimo desires sex with boys not for the sake of (re)producing masculinity, but for the sake of itself. This desire is put into practice, with excessive energy spent on disregarding/evading/destroying any protective barriers erected by the unwilling sexual object. When critiquing as a modern reader, there is a clear resonance between Filotimo's character and the modern formation of the abusive pedophile/pedosexual, a resonance that itself is unfortunately tangled up with queer history and the history of the stigmatization and repression of sexual and gender minorities.²⁴⁴ It is therefore that I want to stress that Filotimo's preference, despite being centered in *l'Alcibiade*, is only one of the many forms that are addressed in the book. I also want to add that Filotimo's sexual disposition should be disconnected from homosexuality as a male-male desire per se, and it is highly possible that contemporary readers of *l'Alcibiade* understood Filotimo's deviant behavior as child sexual abuse before connecting it to a certain form of homosexuality.²⁴⁵

End of close reading

²⁴³ As he no longer performs the “right” pederastic role, abandoning his duty of educating the boy to bring out his masculine potential.

²⁴⁴ Even today, accusations of child sexual abuse are easily employed against queer people. See, for instance, the following news items: Aja Romano, “The Right's Moral Panic over ‘Grooming’ Invokes Age-Old Homophobia,” 2022; Steven Blum, “The Alt-Right's Ongoing Obsession with Demonizing Gay People as Predators,” 2017.

²⁴⁵ Joanne Ferraro presents convincing readings of archival documents for the argument that there was a growing conception in early modern Venice that children should be protected from sexual peril formed by adults. She also shows that laws do not adequately reflect that growing sentiment in common people living in the Republic. See: Ferraro, “Youth in Peril in Early Modern Venice,” 2016.

4.3. Conclusions

L'Alcibiade offers interesting windows onto *Incognito* masculinity, regarding both its constructions and functioning, on various levels. Within the text, normative masculinity is troubled; we can even wonder whether there actually is such a thing as normative masculinity in the book, as even the supposedly “correct” performances are already marked by deviant male-male sexual aspects. Outside of the text, Loredan’s letter could potentially reflect *l’Alcibiade*’s capacity to invoke gender trouble amongst its readers. And even if we choose not to read his letter as a product of anxious feelings, the patriarchal microcosm that is the Academy and its readers invites speculation on the impact the circulation of Rocco’s book could have had before and after its publication in print. What is clear beyond doubt, is that from Rocco’s original text – the version of *l’Alcibiade* devoid of the paratextual apparatus – there is no anxiety discernable as potentially experienced by the author himself in writing about this topic. On the contrary, the text reads as an easy exploration of the intricacies of masculinities on the one hand, and, on the other, of the heights of excess that an employment of those masculinities articulated through an explosion of libertine idea(l)s could lead to.

The masculinities central to the book are Alcibiades’ and Filotimo’s, and do, to a certain extent, reflect the binary positions in a pederastic model, respectively the boy and the man, the passive and the active. Both of these masculinities, thus, require same-sex sexual acts, and are therefore easily placed under the signifier of the homosexual, but as the goal (of both males involved) should be the emerging of a masculine subject, this is not troubling per se. Indeed, an idealized pederastic homosexuality could be considered in universalizing terms, and therefore as necessary yet fleeting moments within masculine subject formation. In *l’Alcibiade*, however, other constructions of the homosexual masculine emerge as Filotimo’s intentions do not conform to his expected role. The paratext frames the pederast teacher as a sodomite, and the text proper offers many moments where Filotimo’s actual, predatory, aim becomes apparent: for the teacher sex is not intended to realize Alcibiades’ masculine potential, instead Filotimo experiences an excessive, effeminizing, desire to penetrate his student for its own sake.²⁴⁶ His form of homosexuality is not in line with universal views, but reflects a minoritizing view in as much as he is uniquely interested in sex with boys. He goes to extreme lengths arguing to convince Alcibiades of why this is the rightful form of sexual activity, vilifying women and same-sex attracted adult men in the process. Filotimo’s specific taste in aristocratic boys should thus be understood as an idiosyncratic sexual preference within a same-sex attracted minoritizing view of homosexuality. Filotimo’s masculinity is thus far from normative. When we dissect his character, however, we find that he is made up of two primary components: desire to dominate sexually, and mastery over speech. As Filotimo succeeds in appropriating all types of discourse raised, he matches the masculine ideal of possessing knowledge and mastering rhetorical skills; he dominates linguistically, which serves his goal of dominating sexually as well. In this sense, Filotimo embodies hegemonial masculinity, all the while being far from normativity. Alcibiades seems to have internalized this hegemonial masculinity as the ideal, since he is finally convinced to submit sexually when Filotimo stresses that there is no other way to become knowledgeable, and by extension, a man. What is shocking in *l’Alcibiade* is that non-normative masculinity is disguised as hegemonial masculinity, and that the book thus exposes to what kinds of extremes the hegemonial masculine ideal can lead. It is not, as Cavaillé argued, simply Filotimo’s philosophical position that allows for sodomy/pederasty/child sexual abuse, but it is the

²⁴⁶ Or, for *his* own sake. In that case it should be understood as an imperative act, to resolidify his masculinity under threat by effeminizing desire. In any case, Filotimo’s desire to penetrate Alcibiades is egoistical, and not conform his expected role.

principal components of masculinity itself that are complicit. The pederast trope, the sexually abusive teacher, is then exploded onto all men, making all men potential abominable monsters. Masculinity is thus made suspicious, and while it uses the homosexual queer as the specter of this threat, that is not where the menace originates. *L'Alcibiade* stages queerness to expose the crisis of masculinity, to expose the dark side of embodying the hegemonial gendered position in a patriarchal system. Indeed, what happens (to other men, to masculinity) when a non-normative man hides behind a hegemonial masquerade and gets away with it? What are the implications of Filotimo's abusive sexual behavior going unnoticed by his colleagues, because most of them choose not to investigate suspicions since he has such a good reputation (based on his rhetorical skill, i.e. a masculine character trait)? What would happen when the rot is exposed, especially when it is exposed as potentially spreading?

Here we have already entered the level beyond the text, by speculating about the power *l'Alcibiade* as a book has. If it casts masculinity as suspect, what impact would it have made on its audience, that is, on the *Incogniti*? What could we say about the meaning of Loredan's role in the publication process, and about his letter to Aproso? It can be assumed that it was the patriarch who had the paratextual apparatus added, which led to the reiterating within (and beyond) the same circles of a well-known text, alongside additional interpretive cues and/or correctives. As noted before, the paratext adds a seemingly condemnatory layer to the text proper in which teachers are cast as pederasts that are considered sodomites, and thus serves at first glance to discredit (this form of) homosexuality. While Fasoli notes that the *Incogniti* delighted in oblique reading games, and that paratextual collaboration that led to polysemy was in vogue, I would argue that Loredan had a particular reason for his paratextual work beyond textual delight.²⁴⁷ I suggest we take the condemnation in the framing poetry of pederasty-as-sodomy serious, even though it does so in burlesque fashion and therefore mixes morality with humor. As this strange mix could raise an amused eyebrow, it is likely that it was also able to fixate the reader's attention on pederasty as the locus of interest in the rest of the book. The reading of the paratext as anti-sodomitical as opposed to the text proper as pro-sodomitical, would then be the desired effect of the paratext's addition, drawing attention away from the problematic crisis of masculinity. Loredan's addition of the paratext would then be a containment strategy, relocating threatening masculinity back onto the established trope of the abusive pederast, on the non-(hetero)normative masculine. This trope makes the teacher suspect; is he used as a safety valve? Does masculinity need a masculine scapegoat?²⁴⁸ We will probably never know why Loredan decided to have *l'Alcibiade* pass from troublesome manuscript to mediated print at the moment in which he did so. The above suggestion, however, might explain the second letter he sent to Aproso, but it has to be acknowledged that the following is mere speculation: the *Incogniti* patriarch might have had to appease Aproso – an Augustinian monk, scholar and professor – as the latter would have come across *l'Alcibiade* eventually, and potentially reading it as another attack on his professions backed by the *Incogniti* who now had the work published. Better for Loredan to prevent any ill feelings before they were conceived by managing personal and professional relations. If Rocco's work is presented as a product of carnival, written when he was much younger still, this could make a direct affront less harsh. An image of Loredan as mediator of the reputation of the teaching profession arises, as well as of

²⁴⁷ Fasoli, "Bodily 'Figurae'," 2012.

²⁴⁸ It is then, once more, the man with ties to (suspicions of) homosexuality that is thrown to the wolves. For an account of early modern homosexuals as scapegoats elsewhere, see Jonas Roelens, *Citizens & Sodomites: Perception and Persecution of Sodomy in the Southern Low Countries 1400-1700*, 2018. Roelens shows that in times of economic and societal crisis, witch-hunts and burnings of sodomites increased in intensity.

personal emotions of men belonging to this group, as Loredan is both responsible for a reiteration of that profession as a locus of sexual abusers, yet also has many of these men within his close circles.

A final word about Rocco as *l'Alcibiade's* author. It has frequently been noted that Rocco bears an uncanny similarity to Filotimo in terms of profession and subjects taught. Moreover, Rocco's oeuvre is known for conflicting discourses, and destruction of prevailing discourses and authorities.²⁴⁹ To this also has to be added that the *Santo Uffizio di Venezia* possessed some testimonies against his way of life, of which one passage in particular resonates clearly with Filotimo's philosophy/sophistry: "il signor Rocco spesso ci domandava quanto tempo era che havevamo usato carnalmente, o naturalmente o contro natura, e noi gli dicevamo alcune volte di sí, et egli soggiungeva, havete fatto bene perché quello instrumento è stato fatto dalla natura, perché noi ne habbiamo i nostri gusti e diletti."²⁵⁰ Rocco's libertine way of life and thinking must have been well-known, which fuels identifications of *l'Alcibiade's* protagonist with its author. Indeed, Maggi notes that Rocco could have intended the work as auto-ironical, speaking against sodomy by speaking out.²⁵¹ I would take it further: *l'Alcibiade* is not necessarily *about* sodomy. It is neither an auto-destructive attack on it, nor an apology for it. Rather, I take *l'Alcibiade* as a cynical portrayal of *libertinismo's* suicidal extreme: in auto-ironical fashion, Rocco turns *Incognito* liberty onto itself. With his tendency to undermine authority and prevailing discourse, Rocco has created the ultimate libertine work with *l'Alcibiade*. The book exposes masculinity's best kept secret, its concealed anxious crisis; it exposes *libertinismo's* masculinist politics. Loredan's attempt to intervene, to conceal, then, breaks down to patriarchy's flailing last-resort to protect masculinity from itself, proving what *l'Alcibiade* shows.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Fasoli, "Bodily 'Figurae'," 2012 and Coci, "Introduzione," *L'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1988], pp. 27-8.

²⁵⁰ Venezia, Archivio di Stato, Santo Uffizio, Processi, busta 103; inc. *Padre lo nel corso di mia vita*. Confessione rilasciata da un *Henricus Palladius Udinensis, Artium et Medicinae Doctor*, ad Aquileia, il 23 novembre 1648, cited in Coci, "Introduzione," *L'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1998], p. 27.

²⁵¹ Maggi, "The Discourse of Sodom," 2003, pp. 45, 55.

5. Analysis (II). “Io ti presento ... una parte delle sue Glorie”: coming out as men

If we read Rocco's *l'Alcibiade* as an explosion of libertinismo's masculine/masculinist *esprit fort*, and therefore, paradoxically, as its masterpiece, we cannot but acknowledge the centrality of a number of topics. Of course, the ubiquitous queer sexuality has been the main point of discussion in the previous chapter. But going with this interpretation allows for the teasing out of the text of an additional number of key components of a prevalent local model of masculinity. Indeed, the boy's insistence on wanting to learn alongside the teacher's mastery over a wide variety of discourses, point towards the importance of knowledge and skills regarding language and letters within the construction of the right kind of man. This is not surprising, given the environment in which this type of man is the desired form of masculinity: a literary academy. Apparently, education is key, a point also noted as unfairly gendered with due frustration by Tarabotti.²⁵² At the same time, if education is important to *Incognito* masculinity, it also becomes a locus of attention for those authors. And as we have seen, libertine attention is at times quite inflammatory. Next to *l'Alcibiade*'s perversion of the Socratic dialogue, an additional example is Pallavicino's *La Retorica delle Puttane* (1642), which degrades the Jesuit teaching model *De Arte Rhetorica* (1568) of Cypriano de Soarez (1524-1593). In the blatantly misogynist work, the art of speech is perverted as it is no longer used for rightful male instruction, but abused by an older prostitute with the aim of not only seducing men, but also “teaching” a young girl the ways of her profession.²⁵³ The fact that Rocco and Pallavicino's texts, which are frequently presented as the most notorious *Incogniti* productions, both not only attack religion and authority, but also conflate education with something transgressively sexual, is no coincidence.²⁵⁴ It suits Rosellini's observation of transgressive sexuality being the main domain of an *esprit fort*'s pugnacity, which can thus be extended towards the *Incogniti* authors.²⁵⁵

Another aspect of importance in *l'Alcibiade* is the teacher-student relationship. Although scandalously portrayed by Rocco, it could stand for constructive homosocial exchange and affective bonds between men that help build and protect one another's career and reputation.²⁵⁶ This is also evidenced by Filotimo's colleagues who ignorantly shield the man from valid suspicion based on his intellectual merit over his behavior. In epistolary exchange of *Incogniti* authors, we see this reflected in men advising each other on literary matters, in order not to risk any faux passes with potential grave outcomes. Pallavicino, for instance, warns Loredan not to follow through with printing his biblical novel *l'Adamo* (1640): “Ricordo che la *Vita d'Adamo* è una istoria sacra, cioè a dire soggetto nella cui descrizione deve moderarsi quel fervore d'intelletto ch'altrove, quasi prospero vento, conduce alla gloria.”²⁵⁷ Always

²⁵² Ray and Westwater, “Introduction” to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Letters Familiar and Formal*, 2012, p. 10n24.

²⁵³ See, for an excellent discussion, the introduction to the text of the critical edition prepared by Laura Coci: *La Retorica delle Puttane*, edited by Laura Coci, 1992.

²⁵⁴ Fasoli, “Bodily ‘Figurae’,” 2012.

²⁵⁵ Rosellini, “Homosexualité et esprit fort,” 2010, paragraph 4.

²⁵⁶ A more obvious word would be “friendship”. While friendship has been noted as a central element to the *Incogniti*'s cohesion as a group both by contemporary authors and modern critics, I cling to the benefits these friendships provided in literary and career-oriented affairs. See: Miato, *l'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, p. 59. Cited by Miato on the same page are the words of *Incognito* Valeriano Castiglione (1593-1663): “in esse con la conformità degli studi si stabiliscono le Amicitie, e col mezzo dell'emulatione si raffinano gli spiriti più generosi.” *Lo statista regnante*, Lyons, 1628, rag. XXVI, pp. 144-45.

²⁵⁷ Pallavicino's letter is printed at the end of the first edition of Loredan's novel: *L'Adamo*, Venice: Sarzina, 1640, p. 134.

remaining thoughtful and in praise of his friend, Pallavicino does not criticize Loredan for an innate lack of talent, but stresses that his position has not allowed him the time needed to carefully study the Bible and the various writings of ecclesiastical authorities: “E quale prattica deve supporsi in V. Sig. Illustrissima di questi libri, mentre lo stato suo, e occupazioni così pubbliche come private l’obligarono mai sempre ad altri studii? Come, dall’altro canto, non versata nella Bibbia e nell’intelligenza di questi dottori, potrà essa o non vacillare ne’ concetti, o forse non errare nelle esposizioni?”²⁵⁸ Whereas Pallavicino’s letter seems contradictory to his usual ardor in critiquing religious authority, it should not be read as a moral statement.²⁵⁹ Instead, it makes sense in the context of friends looking out for each other in a potentially hostile environment. In the same vein, yet geared towards a different aspect of the literary industry, is Antonio Santacroce’s warning to Loredan. The fellow *Incogniti* member advises the patriarch to be careful with allowing work to be dedicated to him: “così vi avvertiamo di non permettere ch’è tal fine vi siano dedicati certi libricciuoli; accioche non si faccia qualche sinistro giudizio della vostra persona.”²⁶⁰ Loredan himself also sent letters in which he warned the addressees to remain careful with their satirical work, as the objects of scorn have the power to hurt authors. In his letter to Pallavicino, for instance, he writes: “La Satira muove il riso de gl’ascoltanti, ma fa piangere per ordinario gli Autori. ... Chi dice male di chi può far del male, se non merita il titolo del pazzo, non può fuggire quello d’imprudente. Le soddisfazioni, che nucono si possono paragonare a quelle medicine, che aggravano l’infermo in vece di risanarlo.”²⁶¹ Note the metaphor of writing satires being medicine, and the satisfaction this grants the author. This cements the interpretation that *Incogniti* writing could serve as the mobilizing of emotions. The fact that this metaphor is used within a warning points to the limits of the *Accademia* as an emotional refuge. All of the above warnings hint at something else as well: whereas literary expressions of masculine *esprit fort* within *Incogniti* circles are appreciated, the men recognized the further spread via the printing press as a potentially dangerous road ahead.

5.1. Method and focus of this chapter

This brings us to the two main concepts of the analysis in this chapter, namely Quiantance’s literary fraternity, and Foucault’s *société de discours*. The *Accademia degli Incogniti* has already been identified as a literary fraternity, in which the circulation of texts (about women) serves as a means of masculine bonding. The thematic contents of the texts in circulation align with the specific charge this *société de discours* takes on within the Academy, and for this we can rely on Spini’s characterization of *Incogniti* libertinism as a – primarily – reactionary literary preoccupation with critiquing power, both secular and religious, and sexual ethics. Foucault’s concept, however, stresses the circulation and reproduction of discourse within exclusive, and somewhat secretive, circles. This explains the admonitory tone of the above letters, as the printing of texts steeped in those discourses allow them to reach a broader audience than the initiates of the Academy – our discussion of Loredan’s intervention in the printed version of *l’Alcibiade* in the previous chapter is a prime example of the anxiety and danger this breach of brotherhood could lead to.

Letters can be understood as paratextual material to works proper, but when trying to lay bare the dynamics of the *Incogniti* literary fraternity, I propose to study them in their own right. Gérard Genette’s influential *Seuils* (1984) has pointed toward the paratext as an important locus of inquiry,

²⁵⁸ *L’Adamo*, 1640, pp. 134-5.

²⁵⁹ Erminia Ardissino, “Riscritture bibliche del Seicento: *L’Adamo* del Loredan,” 2012, p. S158.

²⁶⁰ Antonio Santacroce, *La segretaria d’Apollo*, Venice: Boccafranca, 1653, p. 488.

²⁶¹ Loredan, *Lettere*, 1655, p. 245.

which has been picked up by historians.²⁶² Analyzing the construction of Loredan's literary fame and immortality through a focus on paratext, Lucinda Spera has primarily concentrated on the dedication as a genre. She notes that "nella dedica – o nella molteplicità di scritti ad essa assimilabili quanto a funzione e obiettivi – il discorso si muove lungo un asse che utilizza il testo come strumento per l'acquisizione ... di benefici, di vantaggi che partono e tornano al mittente" and that most often have nothing to do with literary matters.²⁶³ In the following pages, I aim to build upon her work by showing that paratextual material was not only an instrument in the construction of Loredan's literary persona and afterlife, but was central in the promotion of the *Incogniti* as a masculine collective. As such, the praxis of writing dedications and dedicating writings within the *Incogniti* circles was a gendered affair with a literary function, as it was an instrument in the assertion of their literary fraternity. Indeed, Santacroce's above letter to Loredan concerning dedicatory practice confirms its social importance, as does the inclusion of the sections "Lettere di dedicatione" and "risposta a lettere di dedicatione" in Loredan's *Lettere*.²⁶⁴ Jelena Bakić has shown that paratext and dedicatory epistles in particular from early modern Adriatic woman authors are rife with emotional content, which strengthens the assumption that the same holds true for texts written by men.²⁶⁵ A focus on paratextual material, then, might give insight in the bonds men tried to create between each other.

What can we learn about *Incognito* masculinity when we acknowledge the tension between the *esprit fort* as the ideal discourse of the somewhat private Academy – indeed their *société de discours* –, and the need to publish as a way to voice emotional discontent? Dedicatory epistles as a means of constructing affective ties would then be caught up in this tension, as they at the same time should and cannot comment upon the eventual radicality of the author and his work. The following pages will discuss prefatory work from two primary perspectives. At first the earliest collective *Incogniti* productions will be analyzed: if homosocial bonds are a central part of their masculinity, printed work that contains contributions of various authors should be an interesting locus for investigation. After this, work that comments upon Pallavicino's death will be discussed, as this was a traumatic event for the *Incogniti*: if publishing radical work is central to their masculinity, Pallavicino's execution for *lèse majesté* should be felt in their later writings. It is likely that it increased anxiety, as the papal retaliation against the *Incogniti*'s main way of expressing their masculinity then painfully made clear the limits of their emotional refuge. In the later years of the Academy's activity, then, the *Incogniti*'s masculinity was caught up in dire tension.

5.2. Collectively published work

5.2.1. *Discorsi dei signori Incogniti* (1635)

In 1635 the *Incogniti* published a collection of academic discourses titled *Discorsi dei signori Incogniti*, in which a number of members of the Academy showcased the *Incogniti*'s penchant for linguistic and rhetoric play by arguing for and against topics that could be deemed bizarre, all the while allowing the authors to discuss more serious topics in a playful way.²⁶⁶ "Bizarre" is not a qualitative judgement, as

²⁶² Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, 1987. For the paratext in the Renaissance, see for instance: *Renaissance Paratexts*, edited by Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, 2011.

²⁶³ Spera, "Giovanni Francesco Loredan e la fabbrica del consenso," 2015, p. 73.

²⁶⁴ Loredan, *Lettere*, 1640, pp. 426-380.

²⁶⁵ Jelena Bakić, *Defense from the Margins. Women Authors and Paratext between the Two Shores of the Adriatic. Three Case Studies from the Sixteenth Century*, 2017; Bakić, "Renaissance Dedicatory Epistles and History of Emotions," 25 May 2022.

²⁶⁶ Evelien Chayes, "Crossing Cultures in the Venetian Ghetto. Leone Modena, the Accademia degli Incogniti and Imprese Literature", 2017.

it is a description stemming from the Academy's own vocabulary. Indeed, a couple of years later, Loredan published an individual collection of discourses that he pronounced at the *Accademia Delfica*, titled *Bizzarrie accademiche* (1638).²⁶⁷ According to Lattarico, this genre of writing is best understood as an "esthétique anti-conformiste [qui] réunit en effet l'ensemble de ces discours placés sous l'autorité moins d'une institution en tant que telle qui, contrairement à d'autres, ne fut pas régie par des statuts coercitifs ni par une organisation stricte de ses activités, que du paradigme de la bizarrerie qui apparaît de plus en plus comme une donnée constitutive de l'esthétique baroque, héritage direct d'un maniérisme triomphant."²⁶⁸ Despite the fact that the Academy did not have any formal statutory documents, the *Discorsi* do reveal unspoken rules. Indeed, a quick glance at the contents of the speeches shows a high number of Latin citations, and references to both ancient and earlier Italian authors. This makes the *Discorsi* highly intertextual documents, and requires a certain level of education from its audience in order to make sense of it, revealing its exclusive and exclusionary nature. Indeed, women without a classical education in letters are quick to be excluded, mirroring to some extent their material exclusion from the Academy's ranks and limited participation to events.²⁶⁹ The published collection could then be considered an element in the *Incogniti's* intertextual masculinity, to recall LaGuardia's concept, as to read and write as a man is limited to those who can engage with other masculine production. It also points to Quaintance's literary fraternity, as most of the discourses within the collection are printed with a dedicatory epistle to another man from the same group, which often praises the addressee's virtue, talent or quality of his work.

The printer, Giacomo Sarzina, dedicates the entirety of the work to the French ambassador to Venice, the only dedicatee outside of the *Incogniti*, opening with the following statement: "L'Academia degl'Incogniti non può stare Incognita; e chi potrà sì coprire di nubi il Sole, che ei da se non si palesi? La loro modestia è una nube; mà all'eccessivo lume delle loro Virtù facilmente si risolve."²⁷⁰ Sarzina fashions himself as Prometheus who stole something highly valuable and made it available to a community who was in need of it to be better off. This mythological analogy establishes a hierarchical relationship between the Academy and the audience of the printed *Discorsi* that consists of non-members. Sarzina then praises the ambassador as "l'Ercole della Gallia" that could "liberarme da' lacci importune, che i troppo rigidi censori potrebbono circondarmi in pena d'havere troppo preteso."²⁷¹ The threat Sarzina seeks protection from is further specified in the next paratextual addition of the printer in "Lo stampatore a chi legge". He mentions that the *Discorsi* contain many references that could be understood as irreligious by those "che hanno il giuditio solamente ne gli occhi", but he explains and excuses: "[questi] sono semplice tratti di penna, non veri sentimenti del cuore. Gli abusi dello scrivere, non pregiudicano a i debiti del credere. S'adula il secolo, che appetisce simili vaghezze, non s'inganna se stesso co'l partirsi dai dogmi della fede."²⁷² Whether or not we should take his words at face value, which would bring us to Spini's interpretation that the *Incogniti* indeed were little radical, it does at least point at the fact that their writings contain *esprit fort* elements. Printing them together,

²⁶⁷ A second volume appeared in 1646.

²⁶⁸ Lattarico, "Sous l'autorité du bizarre. Le discours académique des *Incogniti* entre tradition et subversion," 2013, p. 1.

²⁶⁹ See for women and Latin: Ray and Westwater, "Introduction" to Arcangela Tarabotti, *Letters Familiar and Formal*, 2012, p. 10, especially note 25. See for women's presence at *Incogniti* events: Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 1978, pp. 246-7, especially note 23, and Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, pp. 107-13.

²⁷⁰ *Discorsi Academici de' Signori Incogniti Havuti in Venetia, Nell'Accademia dell'Illustrissimo Signor Gio: Francesco Loredano*, Venice: Sarzina Stampatore dell'Accademia, 1635, p. ar.

²⁷¹ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. av.

²⁷² *Discorsi*, 1635, p. b2r.

Sarzina testifies to this being a central element in their *société de discours*, especially when taking into account that he offers no further comments on other substantive aspects of the discourses. Any potential blame that could arise out of the publication of this is his: “Devi esser avvisato in primo luogo esser’ io stato l’Autore di così degna raccolta, ambizioso d’honorar le mie stampe con gli Discorsi dottissimi di tanti sogetti. Il segretario a cui incumbeva questa carica distratto in altri impieghi non hà potuto assistervi: tanto più, che gli Autori immortalati per l’altre loro gloriose fatiche non si curavano, che si vedessero questo.”²⁷³ But apparently there was enough to be gained from going public, and Sarzina presenting himself as the sole responsible is soon revealed as false, since many dedicatory epistles to the *Discorsi* note that the authors have been asked to write one, and thus agreed to.²⁷⁴ It is likely that the *Incogniti* planned to go public as a collective, with the *Discorsi* merely being the first work five years after the founding of the Academy, as Sarzina mentions that the next projects are already in preparation: “I presenti Discorsi ti siano una caparra di quanto vanno machinando questi elevatissimi ingegni: Ti prometto in breve, de gli stessi Academici una raccolta di Poesie. Due Deche di Novelle Amoroze. Gli Huomini Illustri dell’Academia sotto nome di Glorie de gl’Incogniti un volume d’Imprese con mille altre fatiche, che giornalmente si preparano in quel virtuosissimo congresso.”²⁷⁵

The first discourse titled “La miseria humana” is written by Guido Casoni and dedicated to Loredan. Interestingly, the author of the dedicatory epistle is another man, Nicolo Santo Fiore. This dedication appears to be the blueprint of the ones following, and contains many of the most prominent elements that cement the *Incogniti* dedication as a building block in their literary fraternity:

Questi due Discorsi ... consacro à V. S. Illustrissima, perch’ella co’l lume della sua virtù scopre l’innata infelicità de gli huomini, e con l’attioni degne dell’ammirazione del Mondo, guida felicemente i suoi giorni, & anco perche recitati nella sua Academia, à lei si dovevano di ragione: s’aggiunge, che più volte hò inteso dall’Autore, ch’egli vive più in lei, ch’ in se medesimo, tanto può là conoscenza delle sublimi, e hormai celebrate doti dell’animo di V. S. Illustrissima. Io che riverisco il suo gran merito, e stimo la virtù del Sig. Cavaliere, ho preso confidenza d’honorare me stesso con questo dono, ch’accompagno co’l donare me medesimo à V. S. Illustrissima, alla quale bacio riverentemente la mano.²⁷⁶

In line with the dedicatory epistle’s generic conventions, Santo Fiore commends his dedicatee with exaggerated praise and ends on a note of performative topical humility. Similar to Sarzina’s way of describing *Incognito* intellect, Santo Fiore also speaks about “lume”. It is too easy to deem this merely topical, as we have established that knowledge and education are an important aspect of the masculinity valued within the academic circle. The same holds true for the almost homoerotic tone of phrases such as “donare me medesimo” and “egli vive più in lei, ch’ in se medesimo”. Of course, this too is topical, but it is also significant within a community that holds homosocial bonds, and bonding, in high esteem. In a literary fraternity, this bonding is effected through the gift of texts, and the author of the dedication explicitly presents the writing of another man as a “dono” to his dedicatee, and stresses the fact that this brings honor to himself too. We see affective lines of praise going from Santo Fiore to Loredan, from Santo Fiore to Casoni, from Casoni to Lordan via Santo Fiore, and from Santo

²⁷³ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. br.

²⁷⁴ The dedicatory epistles of Agostino Lampugnano to Domenico da Molino and Nicolo Foscolo are exemplary in this regard. A nonchalant sense of pride to be included amongst the first *Incogniti* that come out together emanates from his dedications to respectively Domenico da Molino (“Per tributo reco questo mio Discorso della Bruttezza, che animato da chi per debito mi comanda, non può fare, che non esca alle stampe.”) and Nicolo Foscolo (“Il Discorso della Bellezza è in carriera per fare Scena con alcuni altri de’ Signori Incogniti. Non lo posso negare a chi lo mi chiede.”). *Discorsi*, 1635, pp. 215, 237.

²⁷⁵ *Discorsi*, 1635, pp. b2r-b2v.

²⁷⁶ *Discorsi*, 1635, pp. 1-2.

Fiore to Loredan via Casoni, all mediated through a text as a gift. A final yet fundamental element in the dedication is Santo Fiore's recognition of the Academy as the place where Casoni's text has been conceived, and the acknowledgement to Loredan for having created this place – both men are presented as indebted to the patriarch. The genre of the dedication allows for topics of indebtedness and subservience to be expressed, whereas in other locations this would be untenable considering masculinity's devoir of dominance.²⁷⁷

Despite appearing to be so, another argument for the fact that the dedicatory epistles in this collection are not simply rearticulations of conventions within this paratextual genre, added as an afterthought or even as a quick scribble when asked, and are, on the contrary, central to the project of constructing a masculine identity, is found in literal statements of the affective dimension of these texts. Even though Agostino Lampugnano, in the dedication of his own work to Nicolo Foscolo, conventionally disavows the quality of his own work by contrasting it to the brilliance of his dedicatee, he also asserts: "Resti servito in tanto, che dove non arriva l'effetto, arrivi l'affetto."²⁷⁸ Apparently, even if Foscolo did not like Lampugnano's discourse "La bellezza lodata", he would still be appreciative of the gesture of dedication. Paradoxically, the transferral of "affetto" is then the desired "effetto" of the text now that it appears in print. This is further corroborated in the dedication Felice Ciatti wrote to Loredan: "Se con aprir le porte della sua gentilezza gradirà più del dono l'affetto del donatore, il dono sarà ammesso nel Tempio dell'immortalità col suo nome, & il donator dalla sua gratia riceverà la luce, che brama."²⁷⁹ The masculine bonds that the men affirmed by gifting each other texts thus reflected positively onto both the work and the author. One could speculate that dedicating a work to a fellow *Incognito* was worth more than having the discourse printed in the first place, as the contents were already known in oral form. The added benefit of passing the discourse to print is that the bond between the men was now publicly immortalized on the page, consequentially adding to the construction of the (inter)textual masculinity of their literary fraternity. In light of this intertextual masculine bonding, it is moreover highly significant that Ciatti makes a punning reference to one of Loredan's successful published works, *Scherzi Geniali* (1632) in his dedication to him: "Vostra Signoria Illustrissima, che dal Genio apprese à scherzare (benche i suoi scherzi siano i vezzi di Alcide, & il suo Genio sia vero figlio di Giove) apranderà anche à gradire i scherzi, anzi i schizzi miei prodotti dal solo Genio di compiacere à Vostra Signoria Illustrissima."²⁸⁰

Curiously, the author of the single dedicatory epistle to two of Rocco's discourses is shrouded in mystery. The address of the dedication reads "All'Eccellent.mo Signore | Segretario | dell'Academia | Clemente Barrera." but a second name is absent.²⁸¹ The name Clemente Barrera also misses from the later published *Glorie*, which is surprising considering its mentioning here points to it belonging to a person of importance; and neither has Monica Miato included an individual with this name in her table

²⁷⁷ It is because he could hide behind generic conventions of the genre that Lampugnano was able to present himself to Domenico da Molino as follows: "Il nome di V. Eccel. e per lettere, e per altro valore è celebre dentro, e fuori della Patria, e con soave violenza rapisce gli animi altrui a rendergli omaggio di riverenza, e d'ossequio. Io mi sono uno di queglii, che di buona voglia a questo incanto soggiaccio." *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 215.

²⁷⁸ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 238.

²⁷⁹ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 94.

²⁸⁰ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 93.

²⁸¹ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 149. The period after "Barrera" has been copied intentionally. The usual typographical makeup of the dedicatory epistle in this printed work inserts a period after both the addressee and the sender. If Clemente Barrera was the sender, we would expect a period after "Academia" as well.

of known *Incogniti* members.²⁸² The name does appear once as an addressee in Loredan's *Lettere*, but this does not help to individuate a person as those few lines do not contain any personal information.²⁸³ The fact that the author admits to having stolen Rocco's discourse in order to have it printed, might help explain the reason behind this particularity.

La modestia del Sig. Dottor Rocco non voleva acconsentire, che i suoi discorsi recitati nell'Accademia per obedire a i Padroni si vedessero alle stampe sotto la censura de i dotti. Non perche egli tema la libertà dei giuditij, ma perche, traviando dalla sua professione dubita di meritare anzi di repressione, che lode. E se bene i prieghi di molti l'astrinevano alla publicatione, attestando la varietà delle dottrine, la vivezza degli spiriti, la singolarità dell'inventione, che s'attrovano in quei discorsi, con tutto ciò tenace nella sua opinione hà sempre confutate le ragioni, e pregato molti a non molestarlo. Io, non volendo levar questa gloria all'Accademia, né l'ornamento al volume, che V. S. prepara, hò preso resolutione d'involargli questi due qui annessi: sapendo che nelle cose, che giovano al publico sono non men gloriosi i furti, che i doni.²⁸⁴

It is significant that Rocco did not want his discourses to be printed because he might have foreseen trouble, even though many people have asked him to. It almost seems like the author of the dedication mentions some of the topics Rocco was so well-versed in only in passing, yet this offers the explanation for both the demand and the refusal: the *esprit fort* of the author was considered a valuable yet inflammable asset when put on the printed page. Considered in terms of *Incognito* masculinity, this would remount then to his work enriching the literary construction of their collective identity. Having the content of his discourses available in print could potentially bring so much glory to the Academy, that in this case the interpersonal masculine bonds *Incogniti* authors desired and fashioned could be overridden, as Rocco's own wishes in the matter were disregarded. It can only be called hypocritical that Rocco's personal concerns and the effects this could have on his career and life were ignored, while the author of the dedication hides in public behind a pseudonym.²⁸⁵ The exact same dedicatory address precedes Tomà Cocco's discourse "Visio per Extramissionem", in which "Clemente Barrera" again admits to theft for rendering "più ammirabile il giogiello, che prepara alle glorie del nostro Secolo".²⁸⁶ This time, the author of the dedication states that, alongside his desire to help grow the reputation of the Academy, he also aims for his personal immortality. This is of course incongruent with the mystery that surrounds his identity, which can only lead to a single conclusion: being part of the *Incogniti* suffices for this individual.

The *Discorsi dei Signori Incogniti* can thus be understood as the first published body of work with which the literary fraternity goes public to establish itself. Whereas the contents of the discourses are a clear product of their time and place, the excessive paratextual material that enriches the body of the collection should not be overlooked. It is there that the *Incogniti* establish in the public eye the affective bonds they share through writing praise and gifting texts to one another. A reader of the collection as a whole could then very well understand the *Incogniti* as a close community with shared values. It holds true that the dedicatory epistles, the thresholds between the inside and outside, the private and the public, testify less openly to a central element of the masculine ideal within this literary fraternity: the shared literary code that favors a radical *esprit fort* in reading and writing. But the

²⁸² Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, pp. 237-40.

²⁸³ Loredan, *Lettere*, 1655, pp. 249-50.

²⁸⁴ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 149.

²⁸⁵ There is some speculation possible on the role of the printer, who already anticipated criticisms regarding irreligion. We can also only wonder what Rocco's reaction on the printed version of the *Discorsi* and this dedication would have been.

²⁸⁶ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 253.

anonymous dedication to Rocco's work, and Sarzina's mediating comments on the same issues, do bridge that gap to a certain extent. The mere fact that affective masculine bonds form the framework within which the actual discourses are made public, testifies to the importance of radicality in text to a masculine *Incogniti* identity. As a final note on the *Discorsi* as the model text for the *Incogniti's* literary fraternity, it has to be noted that in Quaintance's formulation of the concept, sharing texts about women is constitutive to a literary fraternity. However, in the *Discorsi*, only Giovan Battista Doglioni wrote a text explicitly on the topic. His discourse "Le meretrici", dedicated to Pietro Michiele, seems to comment upon the necessary vice that holds the Venetian stability in check: "l'amore illecito sia permesso à doverne partorire un altro più perfetto col trarre dalla dishonestade altrui la conservatione dell'altrui pudicitia."²⁸⁷ If texts about women had been a more central element to the literary fraternity of the *Incogniti*, Doglioni's would not have been the only text regarding the subject in the first identity-affirming group publication of the Academy. I would thus argue that while for the *Incogniti* women (and their sexuality) are indeed one of the favored topics in their writing, it is rather *libertinismo's* critical attitude towards gender and power in general that is the main subtext of this particular fraternity.

5.2.2. *Cento Novelle Amoroze* (1651) and *Le Glorie dei signori Incogniti* (1647)

Over the course of the years after the publishing of the *Discorsi*, various volumes of the *Novelle Amoroze* appeared in print.²⁸⁸ In 1651 the final version was published with a dedication to the Venetian *Accademia dei Delfici*, many of whose members were also members of the *Incogniti*, as acknowledged by Maiolino Bissaccioni who wrote the dedicatory epistle: "Et à chi altro, che alla Nobilissima Accademia dei Delfici, convenivansi le fatiche gentilissime della Incognita? gran parte de nostri Illustri lumi sono Stelle del vostro Delfico Cielo. I nostri *Incogniti* vengono à palesarsi trà vostri oracoli."²⁸⁹ This means that, despite being dedicated to a different Academy, the ties that are forged between men again concern the ingroup.²⁹⁰ While the printing of the *Novelle Amoroze* makes the *Incogniti's* work more readily available for readers outside of the academic spheres, its distribution is still primarily meant for readers of its own constituency when tracing the lines drawn through dedications. The programmatic going public of the *Incogniti*, then, shows that the literary fraternity they constitute remains relatively delineated despite their usage of the printing press. The motto of the Academy, "ex ignoto notus", does never speak against itself. This holds true even for *Le Glorie degli Incogniti. O vero gli Uomini Illustri dell'Accademia de' Signori Incogniti di Venetia*, printed in 1647 by Valvasense, which is often considered to be the group's main self-asserting publication.²⁹¹ The work contains biographies of 106 members of the Academy with engraved portraits of the individuals, which testifies to the costly nature of the printed work. Historians have shown that the *Glorie* had been years in the making before printing, which further corroborates the importance the members attached to their cultural visibility.²⁹² While Loredan was central to the organization of the project, and Giovan Battista Fusconi,

²⁸⁷ *Discorsi*, 1635, p. 69.

²⁸⁸ Tiziana Giuggia edited a critical edition of the collection: *Cento Novelle Amoroze de i Signori Accademici Incogniti. Editio princeps, Venezia, 1651*, 2017.

²⁸⁹ *Cento Novelle Amoroze dei Signori Accademici Incogniti*, Venice: Guerigli, 1651, pp. a3r-a3v.

²⁹⁰ For a brief discussion on the ties between the *Accademia degli Incogniti* and the *Accademia Delfica*, see: Giuggia, "La risonanza delle *Cento Novelle Amoroze de i Signori Accademici Incogniti* nel panorama accademico seicentesco," 2017, pp. 1-2, 1n3.

²⁹¹ See for an excellent discussion: Anna Langiano, "L'Accademia rappresenta se stessa," 2015.

²⁹² Simone Testa notes that this did not as much spring from a desire to compete with other Academies and centers of cultural power, but rather from imitation of others and the need to enter in literary networks. See: Testa, *Italian Academies and their Networks, 1525-1700: From Local to Global*, 2015. Testa proposes the *Glorie*

the secretary of the Academy at the time, the principal compiler of the biographies, it is now generally assumed that the *Glorie* are not only the presentation of the *Incogniti* as a collective, but that the members also collectively worked on the composition.²⁹³

Again, the paratext offers an interesting window onto the work, and onto the work the project itself was supposed to do. Interestingly, the *Glorie* are not dedicated to anyone. Instead we find the secretary addressing the reader: “Io ti presento, ò Amico Lettore, di commissione dell’Accademia de’ Signori Incogniti una parte delle sue Glorie.”²⁹⁴ This first sentence is insightful as it shows there were no third parties involved in the decision-making, as was the case with the *Discorsi* where the printer took much responsibility upon himself, and with the *Novelle Amoroze* where the secretary explicitly mentions to have chosen the dedicatee himself. With the *Glorie*, however, it was instead the Academy that “commissioned” it. A certain sense of pride emanates from this assertion, especially when read with the recognition of the work at large presenting the Academy’s members as the *Glorie*. Yet, even though the Academy’s glory consists of the individuals who make up its ranks – and this individuality is stressed through the personalized biographies, original engravings and Latin mottoes –, they are asserted as a collective through the publishing of this work. This mirrors James Howell’s description of Venice’s rulers, who bring glory to the state “when they are *conjunct*” yet as individuals are “but as other Men”.²⁹⁵ This sameness of the members of the Academy is reflected in the way they are alphabetically ordered in the document, disallowing any sense of hierarchy within the ranks.²⁹⁶ Not even the secretary is singled out by signing off with his name. The only one who, to some extent, enjoys an exceptional position is Loredan, as he is lauded for being a parent to the *Incogniti* and for bringing them out of the shadows: “At, caecis olim tenebris quae mersa latebant, / Nomina nostra iubet Sol tuus esse palàm.”²⁹⁷ This praise, however, is not only offered in Latin as opposed to the Italian everywhere else in the work (with the exception of the mottoes underneath the engravings), it is also limited to the liminal space of the paratext – amongst the biographies, Loredan can be found as one of the many members under the letter “G”. Moreover, while the two poems praise Loredan, they abound with references to the *Incogniti* as a numerous group, again stressing the exceptionality of the men as a collective.

Even though the *Glorie* are a document with which the *Incogniti* professed their group identity to the outside world, the reader that is being addressed by the secretary is a fellow member. Indeed, the author mentions that anyone who is not content with their biographies should have provided more adequate information, and informs the members that are not present in the current volume that “[s]i servano gl’altri Accademici dell’esempio, e volendo essere nel secondo Volume, che di già si v

as the *Incogniti*’s effort to enter the Republic of Letters. Unfortunately, he overlooked the fact that the men already considered themselves as partaking in this literary network as noted in their *Discorsi*. See for instance the references to the *Repubblica Literaria* in Sarzina’s “Lo stampatore a chi legge” and Annibale Campeggia’s dedication to Loredan, *Discorsi*, 1635, pp. b1v, 80. For the *Incogniti*’s international ties, see: *Gli Incogniti e l’Europa*, edited by D. Cornieri, 2011.

²⁹³ Miato, “Accademia e autoprofilo. *Le Glorie degli Incogniti*,” 2001; Langiano, “L’accademia rappresenta se stessa,” 2015, pp. 196-7.

²⁹⁴ *Le Glorie de gli Incogniti*, Venice: Valvasense Stampator dell’Accademia, 1647, p. a3r.

²⁹⁵ James Howell, *S.P.Q.V. A survey of the signorie of Venice, of her admired policy, and method of government ...*, 1651. Cited in Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, p. 3, originally cited by Bouwsma, *A Usable Past*, 1990, p. 278. Original emphasis.

²⁹⁶ Langiano, “L’Accademia rappresenta se stessa,” 2015, p. 195.

²⁹⁷ *Glorie*, 1647, p. a4r.

preparando, mandino à tempo l'informationi necessarie per essere serviti."²⁹⁸ There is thus a mismatch between the document's supposed effect on the world beyond the Academy, and its actual functioning within. So again, we have a document that is at once public and private. This might also explain why there is such an obvious lack of meaningful content throughout the *Glorie*: the work presents the men who make up the Academy, but their biographies mostly contain references to their illustrious familial provenances and a list of publications. The latter, in combination with their presentation as a male collective, strengthens interpretations of the *Incogniti* as a literary fraternity that reasserts their masculinity through intertextuality. Yet this is limited to the mere mentioning of titles, there is no further elaboration on the contents of those works. Langiano too notes the superficial contents of the biographies, but stresses that interpersonal connections between men, and the friendships they maintained with each other and with figures of power elsewhere, featured heavily.²⁹⁹ There is, then, little information to answer questions about *what* makes the individual *Incogniti* and their works such glorious additions to the Academy, feeding into the interpretation of the *Glorie* as a mere gallery of illustrious men, or even a semi-institutionalized *album amicorum*. Even the *Discorsi* were more explicit in hinting at the *esprit fort* being a central element to the masculine group identity of the *Incogniti*, despite being covered for by Sarzina as something merely literary. Why then are the *Glorie* so modest content-wise, especially considering the fact that the work had been announced already twelve years earlier in the *Discorsi*?

5.2.3. Collective work, collective identity

Whereas the paratext of publications that the *Incogniti* worked on collectively does not necessarily testify much to their *esprit fort* as a central tenet of their *société de discours*, and consequentially, as one of the structuring ideals of their *literary fraternity*, we can say with relative ease that the *Incogniti* worked hard to present themselves as a close community to the public eye. While the *Discorsi* were the first self-affirming publication of Loredan's Academy, we see the *Incogniti*'s comfort of being an individual within a collective best reflected in the *Glorie*: the work presents the individuals as a glorious fraternity to the outside world because they are printed as such, even though the text is directed towards the members themselves.

This public-private dynamic prompts additional considerations. Alongside a *société de discours* pertaining to relatively private circles, we also recall that in the case of the *Incogniti*, going too public with *esprit fort*-inspired writing could entail trouble with authorities. This might very well be the reason of the *Glorie* being so modest in this regard, merely providing readers with a list of publications rather than a discussion of the ideas expressed in those works. Indeed, many of the *Incogniti* works ended up on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, and prominent figures within the literary network faced trouble with the law. Mario Infelise has shown that *Incogniti* production stagnated after the trial of printer Francesco Valvasense in 1648, who had taken over the role as main printer of the *Incogniti* after Sarzina's death. Although Valvasense benefited from his relations with Loredan, and was therefore eventually acquitted from the charge of printing prohibited books, the *Incognito* printing business never really recovered.³⁰⁰ Moreover, Valvasense's trial happened after an even more traumatizing event, the arrest and beheading of prodigy Pallavicino in 1644. As Pallavicino was known for his radical

²⁹⁸ *Glorie*, 1647, p. a3r.

²⁹⁹ Langiano, "L'Accademia rappresenta se stessa", 2015, pp. 203-5.

³⁰⁰ Mario Infelise, "Books and Politics in Arcangela Tarabotti's Venice," 2006. See also his "'Ex ignoto notus?'," 1997. And see Miato for an overview of the *Incogniti* production in graphs: *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, pp. 130-66.

attacks against secular power wielded by the Barberini pope Urban VIII, his death could be tied to his politically informed writings, resulting in a shock for the *Incogniti*. The following pages will deal with the aftermath of this event, exploring *Incogniti* writing about Pallavicino's reputation as a final case study by means of conclusion.

5.3. Il mito di Ferrante Pallavicino

If a radical *esprit fort* expressed in literary creation was a central element of *Incognito* masculinity, Pallavicino was the prime example of its embodiment. Giorgio Spini devoted a chapter's length to the creation of the myth that surrounded the author after his beheading, that consisted of the printing of original work within the Venetian *Incogniti* circles in the first years after his death, and the reprinting of the author's legacy on a wider European scale up until the 1680's.³⁰¹ The *Incogniti* who wrote about Pallavicino after his death, however, do not necessarily present him as a martyr, as much as they give an overall balanced view of his person and work. His biography in the *Glorie*, for instance, contains praise for his authorial ingenuity, but also notes that his "l'agevolezza del comporre lo fece alcuna volta cadere nelle Satire", which eventually led to "il punto fatale delle sue infelicità."³⁰² His life story reports the events in a very matter-of-fact way, which might not be all too surprising considering the fact that the *Glorie* were supposed to present the *Incogniti* as a strong collective. They could not show to be too affected by Pallavicino's death.

5.3.1. L'Anima

It is different with *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*. It is generally assumed that the work was published not long after his death in 1644, with the author possibly being Loredan, or another prominent *Incognito*.³⁰³ *L'Anima* relates a discussion between the spirit of the deceased Pallavicino and his friend Enrico, which calls to mind the pseudonym Loredan often took: Henrico Gible. Published as two different parts – *Vigilia prima* and *Vigilia seconda* –, the dialogue continues where Pallavicino left off in life, and further critiques the abuse of power of the papal court.³⁰⁴ Rather than analyzing the main text, I turn to the paratext once again. In the preface to the *Vigilia prima*, "Al lettore scrupoloso", written by a certain printer Giorgio Fallardi, that is probably a false name, we read that the text itself already circled around, and that the printer had no doubt "che subito sieno devorate" should he print it.³⁰⁵ Apparently, the printer recognized the (commercial) worth of the text, which points to a demand – possibly motivated by the shock Pallavicino's death had caused in these circles. The author then asserts that while the *Vigilia prima* is a work of satire, its point was never to commit blasphemy. On the contrary, it seeks to expose those wrongs in the world, that some people who deem themselves Christians desperately seek to conceal. Doing so, the author asserts, the Spirit shows himself to be the most devout Catholic, and that he enjoys divine approval: "Piacesse a Dio, che così non fosse perche non essendo fatto, non verrebbe scritto."³⁰⁶ The author of this preface, thus, does not try to paint a balanced picture of Pallavicino as did the author of his biography in the *Glorie*, and instead reiterates his most poignant critique with clear approval.

³⁰¹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, pp. 190-248.

³⁰² *Glorie*, 1647, p. 138.

³⁰³ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 192.

³⁰⁴ For a discussion of the themes of religion and (abuse of) power in the work, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, pp. 192-202.

³⁰⁵ *L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*, Villafranca: Fallardi, 1643, p. A2r. Like the printer, the place and date of publishing are false.

³⁰⁶ *L'Anima*, 1643, p. A2v.

The tone of this preface is rather calm, which stands in stark contrast to the more aggressive tone of the “A chi vuol leggere” that is printed before the *Vigilia seconda*. The author, still Fallardi, opens by saying: “Ti protesto, Amico Lettore, quello, che ti dissi nella prima Vigilia. Se hai scrupolo per la verità; se la odii, perche forse la coscienza si risente; se temi di udire rimproverata, ò la tua empietà, ò la tua ignoranza; non spender denari in questo Libro, che ti troverai pentito.”³⁰⁷ The printer laments the flattery of authorities who do not deserve it, and reproaches the current age for restricting the printing press and only allowing the publishing of lies. He warns the reader that the *Vigilia seconda* again concerns a talking spirit, that will not be silenced as it is already dead and therefore detached from any earthly tethers. The author clearly approves of the literal *esprit fort* in this work, and proclaims the contents of a third *Vigilia*, which has actually never been written within the *Incogniti* circles: “Nella terza Vigilia, che ti prometto, e che si v`a preparando, non si discorrerà d’altro, che de’ Giesuiti.”³⁰⁸ This topic is not foreign to Pallavicino’s published oeuvre, one recalls *La Retorica delle Puttane*. While the tone of the two *Vigilie* vary amongst each other, the printer of *L’Anima* clearly appreciates the contents of the work and pushes back against the religious authorities that tried to silence this strand of literary production through the beheading of Pallavicino. *L’Anima*, then, is a work that testifies to the *esprit fort* of the *Incogniti*, and that tries to keep it alive by keeping the remembrance of Pallavicino alive.

4.3.2. *La Vita*

The final work considered will be the more detailed biography, *Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino*, known to have been published by Girolamo Brusoni in 1655.³⁰⁹ In 1660 this text was attached to a collection titled *Opere scelte di Ferrante Pallavicino ... Di nuovo ristampato, corretto, & aggiuntovi la Vita dell’Autore, e la Continuatione del Corriero*, which also included *L’Anima*. The addition of *L’Anima* and the anonymous sequel to the *Corriero* points towards the proliferation of Pallavicino’s reputation within *Incognito* circles. Indeed, by means of a preface, the *Vita* opens the collection, but is signed off with “Scritta dall’Aggirato Accademico Incognito”.³¹⁰ Contrary to *L’Anima* and more in line with the biography in the *Glorie*, Brusoni paints a balanced picture of Pallavicino. Despite being presented as someone whose intellect was central to the *Incogniti*, and whose name has to be kept alive, Pallavicino is depicted as a man who was easily persuaded by others, be they men of letters, or women. It is this flaw of character that Brusoni notes led to his ending: “Ma lasciatisi poscia trasportare non meno dal proprio genio, che dalle altrui persuasioni à toccare delle materie, che mai si toccano senza rischio, ò della vita ò dell’honore, venne finalmente à procacciarsi con diverse compositioni, e scritture indegne della sua nobiltà, e della sua professione, con un fine male aggiustato alle sue qualità, una perpetua macchia d’infamia alla sua riputatione.”³¹¹ Brusoni does not hesitate to call some of his writings unworthy because of the themes discussed. This is an interesting given, as Rocco was lauded for his discussion of similar topics in the *Discorsi*; the difference between the two authors was that Pallavicino’s biting critique was aimed at *individuals* within the system of ecclesiastical authority. If this holds true, it can be asserted that libertine writing could be allowed up until the moment this critique became an attack of power on a higher level than the author in question is situated. If we recall the spatial mapping of hegemonial masculinities, and thus patriarchal power, we could propose that Pallavicino went too far in performing protest masculinity, when considered from the global

³⁰⁷ *Dell’Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino. Vigilia Seconda*, Lyons: Fallardi, s.d., p. A2r. Again, the place is false.

³⁰⁸ *Dell’Anima*, s.d., p. A2v.

³⁰⁹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 191.

³¹⁰ “Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino,” 1660, p. 1.

³¹¹ “Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino,” 1660, p. 4.

hegemonial perspective that is papal authority. Brusoni could then deliver this critique of Pallavicino without damaging his reputation or going against the ideals of *Incognito* local hegemonial masculinity, as other *Incogniti* members would have understood the rules of the delicate game he was playing.

In the letter to Pallavicino and Santacroce cited earlier, Loredan had already warned that satires of people in higher ranks of power could backfire. The fact that Pallavicino had been warned against this, was common knowledge within *Incogniti* circles, as Brusoni writes about the beheading: "Fine indegno della sua nascita e delle sue qualità; mà predettogli sempre da' suoi più intrinseci Amici, e forse degno della sua contumacia d'haver portato la penna sopra luoghi, e persone per lacerarle nella vita e nell'honore, che dovea riverire con la lingua per terra."³¹² This corroborates a number of assertions made. At first, it underlines the assumption that it was Pallavicino's attack of individual people that cost him his head and reputation, not necessarily the topics he discussed in his writing. Second, it testifies to the protective function of friendship within the literary fraternity, even though Pallavicino did not heed their warnings. Brusoni also testifies to the importance of friendship, by explicitly calling him "un buon' Amico e fedele, e d'animo schietto, ed ingenuo", and praising his intellect.³¹³ As we have also seen in the dedicatory epistles in the *Discorsi*, masculine intellect should be built upon through engagement with texts of others, which was the case with Pallavicino: "era nondimeno così fortemente imbevuto di una eloquenza naturale accresciuta dalle osservazioni de' buoni Autori assaggiati ne' primi anni de' suoi studii, e rassodata dalla pratica delle cose del Mondo, che anche i suoi abbozzi riuscivano pregiabili al pari delle altrui più limitate composizioni."³¹⁴

Even though Brusoni notes that Pallavicino met his fate because he attacked powerful individuals, and he deems that a spot on his reputation, the author also aligns himself with the excusatory remark of the author of the preface to *Vigilia prima of L'Anima*: "Che se bene satirizasse talvolta oltre il dovere sopra le attioni delle persone Ecclesiastiche, e titubasse nella licenza de' costumi, non ammise però mai nell'animo suo sentimento alcuno di disprezzo della dignità, ò dell'Autorità loro, nò, che pregiudiziale à' dogmi sagrosanti della Religione Cattolica Romana."³¹⁵ Once more, while Pallavicino is presented as a satirist, he is also protected from accusations of irreligion, even though the assertion that he felt no disdain at all against ecclesiastical authority is easily refutable. While Brusoni does not refrain from pointing out Pallavicino's flaws and mistakes, he also works hard to protect his reputation in death, especially when he is falsely accused of having authored works that are not his – *L'Anima* being a case in point:

mentre frà lo stile (per tacer d'altro di quello abbominato Divortio) o le opere di Ferrante si vede quella differenza, che sarebbe trà una giovane Donna viva e un cadavero dipinto. Ma il Mondo, che vive d'opinione più che di giudizio, veduto che l'Autor dell'Anima di Ferrante, che tanto gli si professa parziale, gli hà tosta (così trattano gli Amici moderni) una macchia sìza far enorme sul volto della riputatione, si l'hà agevolmente bevuta questa menzogna senza farvi sopra consideratione alcuna. Anzi è trascorsa tanto oltre la trascuraggine, e la impertinenza di molti ignoranti, che d'altre opere ancora scandalosissime, che alcuni anni dopò la sua morte sono state composte e publicate, vogliono crederlo e predicarlo Autore.³¹⁶

With the exception of *Il divortio celeste*, the work that also in the *Glorie* is noted as having been the final straw, yet is interestingly enough the first work of the author that follows the *Vita*, Brusoni praises

³¹² "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 19-20.

³¹³ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 27.

³¹⁴ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 20.

³¹⁵ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 24-5.

³¹⁶ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 25-6.

the outstanding quality of Pallavicino's work, and blames the world for their uncritical minds in believing that every radical work must have been Pallavicino's. It is with this disavowal of "Amici moderni" – and it is easy to mentally add "as opposed to our friendships here within the Academy" – that Brusoni posits himself in an opposite position to the author and printer of *L'Anima*: whereas Fallardi praised the radical *esprit fort* of Pallavicino's *Anima*, Brusoni here recognizes that this is what got the actual Pallavicino executed, and seeks to protect his afterlife from the same fate. However, it would be too quick to argue that Brusoni disapproves of that theme per se, as he does not go into further detail about what exactly makes him disassociate Pallavicino from those later published works, except for calling them "opere scandalosissime". Scandal is not necessarily a bad thing for the *Incogniti*, so it might be the case that the true reason is simply the fact that there is a distinct difference of stylistic quality, analogous to the difference between "una giovane Donna viva e un cadavero dipinto". The impossibility of pinpointing the exact reason might very well have been deliberate here.

In the final pages of the biography, Brusoni admits that it is impossible to judge Pallavicino in absolute terms:

Onde non si saprebbe ben discernere qual parte preponderasse nella sua Persona, il vizio, ò la virtù; come che certo le qualità del suo ingegno, se le avesse nobilmente coltivate, fossero inarrivabili. Così è pur vero, che non si trovi in questa vita mortale cosa alcuna intieramente compita, e avvenga sovente, che quelli, che possiedono migliore ingegno degli altri uomini riescano nelle proprie attioni, con scandalo de' semplici, peggiori de' gli altri uomini; verificandosi parimente à giornata il divulgato Proverbio, che i Grandi Ingegni fanno anche i grandi errori.³¹⁷

It is obvious that Brusoni, and we recall he speaks not as himself but as "l'Accademico aggirato" and by extension for the *Incogniti* as a collective, is in awe of the quality of his work and the brilliance of his intellect. Indeed, he is considered to have been of such cultural importance and influence that he could be included within the ranks of those that could make the worst mistakes. Singled out above other men, it is evident that Brusoni recognizes the cultural power Pallavicino held, and I propose we read this oscillating judgement of Pallavicino's person, "il vizio, ò la virtù", as a nod towards the various planes on which the deceased could operate because of this standing. If literary *esprit fort* was so central to the *Incogniti*, Pallavicino could certainly be considered virtuous in that area. When talking about vice, however, one wonders whether Brusoni does not again consider his inflammable authorial voice in terms of regional and global levels of patriarchal power. In that case, "vice" would not necessarily be a negative judgment of character, but on the one hand a strategy deflection, in order to protect other *Incogniti* occupied with the same themes in their work. And on the other hand, it would be a nod of recognition of Pallavicino's protest masculinity – when considered from the global perspective of the hierarchy of masculinity –, which paradoxically aligns with the hegemonial ideal on the local level of the Academy. Brusoni's oscillating presentation of Pallavicino, then, would be an appreciative signal to the *Incogniti*, hidden in plain sight on the printed page, that they still value a radical *esprit fort* in writing as a central tenet of their literary fraternity; and that they still follow the *Incognito* tradition of baroque literary vogue in which a multiplicity of points of view and ideas are held in high esteem. So, the conclusion of the biography of one of the *Incogniti*'s idols, while appearing modest and even somewhat tame, speaks to the opposite values, and thus speaks to the masculinity of the *Incognito* reader: "Così visse, e morì Ferrante Pallavicino, mà viverà, e per merito d'ingegno, e per qualità di fortune perpetuamente nella memoria degli huomini, frà le incertezze del biasimo, e

³¹⁷ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 29-30.

della lode, come degne in parte di lode, e in parte di biasimo l'opere sue."³¹⁸ It is his own quality, and the efforts of the men of the *Incogniti*, that will keep Pallavicino alive.

Pallavicino's friends recognized that it was his critique of individuals that would eventually lead to his demise, and tried to protect him from this fate by warning him through letter writing. The grim reality showed that, while the *Accademia degli Incogniti* was a powerful cultural institution with some members, notably its patriarch, holding actual political power, being a member of this fraternity could not protect from every sort of masculine authority. While Loredan wrote to Pallavicino that writing satires could provide some emotional relief, he also warned his friend that the Academy as an emotional refuge had its limits. Pallavicino's death is proof that the *Incogniti* were still caught up in masculine power relations, and that in the end, an emotional refuge is not a permanent escape of patriarchy's repressive hierarchy. At the same time, the reaction to his untimely fate cements the two main pillars of *Incognito* masculinity: intellectually informed writing that hinges on radicality, and homosocial bonding. Apparently, the hegemonial *Incognito* was able to walk the thin line between radicality and conformity, and in order to walk that line, he needed other men to hold his hand.

³¹⁸ "Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 30.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This thesis has explored the connection between masculinity and writing within the libertine milieu of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*. It presented the contemporary developments on political, economic, and socio-cultural spheres as elements constitutive of a crisis, whose effects were felt by the intellectual men of the Republic on the level of the experience of their gender. Women taking up the pen and employing the presses in order to defend their sex and criticize that of their male adversaries, alongside the fact that economic stagnation led to a blockade on the marriage market, forcing many aristocratic men into a position of forced bachelorhood, led men to focalize gender related issues in their literary creation. To this is added the influence of Cremonini's unconventional thought, as young men of the area have either been taught by him directly, or come into contact with it indirectly via their peers. Resulting from this inflammatory mix of circumstances were the typical topics of libertinism that have been identified for seventeenth century France as *libertinage de mœurs* and *libertinage érudit*. The *Incogniti* authors indeed devoted themselves to writing emancipatory critiques of the yoke exerted by church and state, as well as from propagated sexual morality. Despite Giorgio Spini characterizing the *Incogniti* as being little revolutionary as they did not seek to transform their preferred literary critique into political action, I have taken the instead *reactionary* nature of their writing as an important sign. Indeed, Paolo Sarpi already noted that powerful men turn to letters when they cannot act, which is cheekily yet significantly extrapolated to the *Incogniti* by Daria Perocco: "And the worthy men of the seventeenth century wrote – they wrote a lot."³¹⁹ This thesis has then understood the *Accademia degli Incogniti* as a so-called emotional refuge, where it is possible for the members to let go of some built up tension. This is effectuated through the practice of writing, and thus ties in well with both contemporary observations, as well as modern, critical views on the matter.³²⁰ Writing for these men, then, granted some form of freedom. And as the topics they wrote about stemmed from the same preoccupations, which have at once a gendered aspect to it, and become a gendered affair in itself as the literary creation and circulation occurred in a masculine microcosm, this libertine freedom can be identified as the common ground between masculinity and writing for the *Incogniti*.

Both analytical chapters in this thesis have taken a different route of exploring the freedom concomitant with *Incogniti* writing. The analysis of Rocco's *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* has set out the extremes an author could take his expression of ideas to. In *L'Alcibiade*, male-male sexuality in the form of a pederastic relationship is being centered, which not only confirms libertinism's inherent fascination with the figure of the male "homosexual", but which also offers an interesting window onto masculinity. Through *L'Alcibiade*, Rocco was able to explode libertinism's critique of man-made and divine laws and strictures in order to shatter every last moral inhibition in the field of sexuality. In a Socratic dialogue, the protagonist, the teacher Filotimo, presents arguments with which he aims at submitting his pupil Alcibiades to him sexually. In typical libertine fashion, these arguments consist of either appropriations of common discourses on sodomy or rearticulations of misogynistic topoi. A careful analysis of both of these characters' relation to their gender revealed the importance as a central element to masculinity of letters and learning on the one hand, and intra-masculine social reproduction through inter-masculine teaching and support on the other. However, at the end of the book none of the characters succeed in embodying the masculine ideal that is being constructed, as

³¹⁹ Daria Perocco, "Prose Production in Venice in the Early Seicento", 2006, p. 73.

³²⁰ It is furthermore significant that Breitenberg, in his characterization of masculinity as anxious, asks: "How can such potent internal pressure be released? By writing about it, externalizing it, and especially by assigning it to someone other than oneself." *Anxious Masculinity*, 1996, p. 68.

the schoolmaster has no other intention than to fulfill his own excessive sexual desires, and the boy is coerced into a rapport in which he is not being taught, but perpetually being abused. It is important to emphasize that Filotimo's desire for sex with boys specifically is but one of the many shades of non-normative male-male sexuality that are discussed, and that careful analysis of *l'Alcibiade* both shows that these cannot uncritically be collapsed into one category, and also that queer masculinity is not presented as a problem in the text per se. Though the later added paratextual material denounces sodomy, I have argued that the fact that queer masculinity and queer male sexuality take the center stage in the book is not the main element that made the work transgressive enough to spark some form of unease – or anxiety – in the *Incogniti* involved in its publishing. The work was problematic insofar as it shows how easily masculinity can be corrupted, through Filotimo being able to successfully hide behind his previously established reputation as a moderate and just man and teacher, all the while being far from embodying the masculine ideal.

L'Alcibiade was an exceptionally transgressive text, even in *Incogniti* circles. However, the importance in that text of letters and learning, and of bonds between men that were co-constructive, are key topics that return in other texts of the Academy as well. The second analytical chapter looked primarily at prefatory material in work that was collectively published by the *Incogniti*, i.e. their *Discorsi*, *Novelle amoroze* and *Glorie*. Via the concept literary fraternity, I have argued that it was important to the Academy members to entertain bonds through gifting and dedicating their work to one another. By doing so in collectively published work, these affective ties would not only be visible to a larger audience, it also cemented the *Incogniti* as a close brotherhood on the printed page. These collective works were part of a strategy of coming out together, as evidenced by the printer's note in the *Discorsi* (1635), in which the other titles were announced as works in progress. Different parts in the *Discorsi*'s paratextual work commented upon the libertine *esprit fort* of the *Incogniti*, which further confirms this as part of their masculinity, especially when taking into account that this should be deliberate in the first publication with which they were going public. However, the *Novelle amoroze* and the *Glorie* no longer contained any explicit references to the *Incogniti*'s *esprit fort*. This discrepancy can be accounted for when taking into account the events of Pallavicino's execution in 1644 and the trial of *Incogniti* printer Valvasense in 1648, that were both due to the men getting in trouble with the Church. Pallavicino was put to death for lèse majesté, while Valvasense was accused of printing and selling prohibited books. Whereas these traumatic events for the *Incogniti* made impact on their printing, and likely on the contents of what they collectively put to the presses, the adhesion to libertine ideals that constituted their core value did not necessarily diminish. After Pallavicino's death, two texts titled *l'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino* became popular, in which the author was praised for his critical tongue. The somewhat more official *Incogniti* biography of Pallavicino, printed by means of preface to a collection of *Opere scelte* by Pallavicino, seems to present a more nuanced picture than the author's literary afterlife as a libertine martyr allows for. Indeed, Brusoni paints a picture of Pallavicino as a highly talented and smart author beloved by his fellow *Incogniti*, but who unfortunately was also prone to writing unworthy things. A closer look at Brusoni's text, though, indicates that the issue was not necessarily the topics Pallavicino discussed, but the individuals he attacked. Implicitly, then, this *Vita* constitutes an epitaph to Pallavicino, praising his *esprit fort*, rather than nuancing it out of existence.

Pallavicino's fate proves at once the limits of the protection the *Accademia degli Incogniti* offered its members, as well as the need for there to be such a place where men could somewhat more freely express themselves. Even though the Academy might appear as an extension of patriarchal structures for being a uniquely masculine apex of cultural influence in the years they were active in Venice, the men that made up its members were not free from the exigencies patriarchy made on them. Indeed, the patriarchal hierarchy of gender crystallizes into hierarchical differences between men as well, and the *Incogniti* were therefore caught up in a web of power relations, in which they had to heed to

hegemonial ideals of masculinity on spatial levels beyond the Academy and Venice. On a practical level this translates to the *Incogniti* having to be wary of posing too much a challenge to the powerful men of church, as the latter could pose a threat. Whereas the *Incogniti* could go to great lengths, and reach excessively transgressive heights in their literary creation, as evidenced by Rocco's *l'Alcibiade*, the libertine-inspired writing of the Academy still had its limits. In a sense, then, the two analytical chapters of this thesis reflect the two different phases of the *Incogniti*'s activity: Rocco's text is exemplary for the early phase of "libertinismo trionfante", while the second phase is signaled by increasing anxieties induced by the meddling of authorities from outside the Academy and Venice, resulting in the restriction of the press and even the execution of one of their members. Even though, at large, men benefit from being men within patriarchy, the most powerful ones do not hesitate to strike back when the hegemonial hierarchy is challenged too much. It seems that the Frenchman Gabriel Naudé already saw through this functioning of patriarchal hierarchy, when he commented upon Pallavicino's death: "On pardonne à Rome aux Athées, aux Sodomites, aux Libertins et à plusieurs autres fripons ; mais on ne pardonne jamais à ceux qui mesdisent du Pape et de la Cour Romaine, ou qui semblent révoquer en doute cette toute-puissance papale de la quelle les Canonistes d'Italie ont tant brouillé de papier."³²¹

6.2 Coda

Although the members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti* ceased to meet by 1661, this does not mean that they have made no lasting impact. When considering artistic form, one need only turn to the grand success of Venetian opera, or the developments in prose writing to see the *Incogniti*'s hand in that. In these literary and musical forms an abundance of queerness in terms of gender and erotic attractions can be found, which is easily traceable to the efforts of the *Incogniti* a few decades earlier as well. Moreover, the *esprit fort* that the *Incogniti* valued so much on paper might not have been a unique strand of heterodox thought that originated within the walls of the Academy, nor has it ever informed a radical political praxis, but it deserves a place in any genealogy of freethinking; the same intellects that inspired the *Incogniti* have also played a role in the French articulations of *libertinage érudit* and *libertinage de mœurs*.³²² Some historians even imagine the *Incogniti* strand of libertinism as having foreshadowed later (radical) Enlightenment thought.³²³ If we pause for a moment on *l'Alcibiade*, and bracket the intentions of Filotimo, his arguments in favor of the naturalness of practicing certain sex acts because they feel pleasurable to the human senses together with his arguments against any moral prohibitions that stigmatize these acts, do indeed give reason to locate within the *Incogniti* milieu some proto form of eighteenth century naturalist and materialist views on the body.

When concentrating merely on the various articulations of gender and sexuality, and the *Incogniti*'s practice of employing those categories in order to deliver literary cultural criticism, connections with other literary currents and ways of thinking across time can be made. In terms of the *Incogniti* engagement with the masculinity of their characters, which previous research has noted often led to an effeminization and excessive sexualization of characters, and to which my discussion of male-male sexuality in *l'Alcibiade* adds a queer dimension in terms of sexual desire and acts, connects seamlessly

³²¹ Cited in René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle*, 1983, pp. 261-2.

³²² Cavaillé, "Libertinage, irreligion, incroyance," 2008.

³²³ Throughout his work, Muir keeps stressing connection: *The Culture Wars*, 2007. Cavaillé suggests that *Incogniti* Venice should be included in the libertine genealogy of the (European) radical Enlightenment as argued for by Jonathan Israel: "La Sérenissime surtout offre un laboratoire de réflexion et de propagande bien avant la naissance putative des Lumières radicales, et propose à travers les productions clandestines de l'académie des *Incogniti* des vues extrêmement audacieuses sur la tolérance et la libre expression, qui connaîtront une circulation européenne ...". See: "Libertinage, irreligion, incroyance," 2008, paragraph 118. For Israel's thought, see: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, 2001.

to Mathew Rickard's investigation of the "poetics of non-normative masculinity" in Decadent French literature.³²⁴ Whereas the *Incogniti* are both spatially and temporally far removed from Rickard's objects of inquiry, there is an interesting similarity between the two groups and their male characters: both groups seem to write from a position of unease and unhappiness with common discourse, which is expressed through an exploration of masculinity's relation to gender and sexuality. If *Incogniti* unease led to textual moments where queer ways of embodying gender and sexuality could be imagined, and Decadent unease "paved the way for representations of queer identities throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries", there is reason to be optimistic for the future. Would a reactionary group of authors today be able to herald a new form of masculinity, one that is finally able to dismantle patriarchy and take queer liberation towards queer liberty?³²⁵

On the more philosophical side of the question, the *Incogniti*'s careful picking apart and reconstructing their characters' gender and sexuality, both in desires and acts, is uncannily receptive to postmodern gender and queer theory. Almost to the end of foreshadowing it. But as the *Incogniti* have been critiqued for lacking any will to imagine alternative futures and political praxis, the identification with these postmodern ways of thinking that are inherently political and anti-establishment cannot be tied into a genealogical rapport. All the more so since the *Incogniti* seem overall to have been using queerness as a tool in order to reestablish heteronormativity. Yet, the queer textual moments they produced do resonate with today's societal debates. Reading these texts from the perspective of gender and queer studies, equals queering these texts; and this strategy is not far removed from the way the *Incogniti* themselves appropriated pre-existing discourses as well. If the benefit of our project today lies in the addition of the emancipatory potential that this way of engagement lacked in the seventeenth century, then the men of the Academy cannot really fault us for that.

³²⁴ Mathew Rickard, *Against the Grain. The Poetics of Non-Normative Masculinity in Decadent French Literature*, 2021.

³²⁵ An optimistic wish for the future that lies in line with Ivan Jablonka's *Des hommes justes*, 2019.

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Appendix I – Translations from Italian into English

Introduction

p. 7

Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, p. 61.

the only, real concern of the Academicians was to give heed to the wildness of ingenuity, to leave it free to express itself according to nature.

p. 8

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 140.

someone who identifies God with Nature, who disavows transcendence and miracle, immortality of the soul and the transcendental destiny of man, who nullifies individual will and responsibility in a naturalistic determinism, who upholds the "political" theory of religions, sneers at the imposture of priests, embraces the ethics of instinct and draws the most shameless practical consequences from it.

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 141.

a literary quirk, a fact of custom

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, pp. 140, 145.

An individual extravagance of a few bizarre brains

pp. 8-9

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 147.

were a tangible manifestation of a whole spiritual climate, which drew its inspiration from a precise philosophical doctrine of unquestionably heterodox intonation. Indeed, they were those who transported to the terrain of literature and custom those ideal figures, which had already been created in the course of a centuries-old irreligious speculation

p. 9

Bianchi, "Il libertinismo in Italia nel XVII secolo," 1984, pp. 667-8.

it remains valid, however, that ... one can speak of libertine 'tendencies' or 'themes', in the seventeenth century, outside France as well, with the understanding that these are characterized, in terms of content and attitudes, in a less compact and homogeneous way than is the case with *libertinage érudit*.

p. 9n23

Onelli, "La Matrona di Efeso", 2018, paragraph 48.

While the heterodoxy of Cremonini's teaching seems to me frankly unquestionable, as does the latter's influence on the Incogniti's literary production, what remains to be explored instead is precisely the support at the political level that Cremonini and Loredano's circle seem to have enjoyed.

p. 10

Rebaudengo, "Intorno alla librettistica secentesca," 2000, p. 1131.

Model of 'effeminate' hero and thus 'softened' by erotic passion

Melis, “‘Sei troppo effeminato. / Di femmina son nato’.” 2020, p. 105.

unscrupulous use of transvestism and sexual misunderstanding as a method of comically (but no less significantly) attacking gender polarization and the related male-female hierarchy

Chapter 3

pp. 22-3

The nobility and excellence of women with the defects and failings of men

The merit of women ... wherein is clearly discovered how worthy and more perfect they are than men

p. 25

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 149.

In order to set out on a different path, the Incogniti of Venice would need a revolutionary spirit, which they completely lack. However much they rebel against the dogmatics of the church, they do not start from this rebellion to look further ahead and anticipate the future. On the contrary, they always remain fixed on a fundamentally conservative, misoneist attitude, turned toward the past, just as insensitive to the stimuli of renewal in their own time, as that of their philosophical progenitor

Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 1950, p. 149.

merely ‘piétiner sur place’, around the old problems of the soul and the eternity of the world, dusting off the most worn-out and trivial ethical naturalism, and making wordy literature and mediocre-quality mouthpieces

p. 28

Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 1961, pp. 208-9.

When worthy men write, it is a manifest indication that they cannot act.

Chapter 4

p. 29

L’Alcibiade, p. 98.

And so saying, the enamored master, with the most sweet thrusts, continued to enjoy the beautiful boy, reduced to point of not knowing what sweetness was, when not having his master's cock in his ass; nor did he believe by any other way could he become perfect as his teacher.

p. 31

Neri, “Il vero autore”, 1888, pp. 221-2.

I promise Your Lordship a carnival libretto entitled Alcibiade in School is about to come soon.

You will receive a carnival libretto, not worthy, I think, of disturbing the tranquility of your soul. It is attributed to D. Antonio Rocco. It may be that in his younger years he might have composed it, and it has been for 20 years that I have had it in manuscript.

p. 32n136

Cavaillé, "Antonio Rocco", 2003, p. 29-30.

my other living pen

p. 33n147

L'Alcibiade, p. 69.

Where, therefore, consent is mutual and uniform, violence is banished and love, peace, naturalness and incentive of praise enter. A violent man is a tyrant; this violence is abhorred by nature and by God, consent is pleasing to both.

p. 35

L'Alcibiade, p. 43.

this one, of virile age, venerable in appearance and manners, with such measure adjusted the workings of the mind and the senses, that with incomparable caution and forethought he made himself creditable; he knew how to transform himself with everybody, and in infusing wise and thorough doctrine into the hearts of others, he showed that he had true intelligence of their working

L'Alcibiade, p. 47.

Already the punch he had received in his heart from Cupid's incomparable impetus, with incomprehensible influences imbued, was sprouting and growing so disproportionately, that if he did not plant himself in the cherished boy's pleasant garden it would become his death.

L'Alcibiade, p. 49.

soul trapped by the charms of the laughing and lovely boy is fury stirred in hell, if the ardor is not moderated by hope, if it is not finally chilled and made healthy through the deed

pp. 35-6

L'Alcibiade, p. 50.

Nor did he ever find a boy in his school so reluctant that, overcome by his human and courteous manners, did not surrender himself in his arms and grant him what he yearned for

p. 36

L'Alcibiade, p. 49.

Now over this the master pined, towards this his every effort was turned, occupied with this important business, he languished in every other action. Of this he spoke figuratively by day, and dreamed of continually by night; the undertaking seemed arduous to him, the attempt dangerous, of scandal and shame the execution: and all was nothing compared with his martyrdom, with his torments

L'Alcibiade, p. 48

Repulsed somewhat by this new assault, the boy turned pale and started to tremble.

L'Alcibiade, p. 52.

Male slave/slaver [the suffix -one indicates excessiveness], that had already pulled over the cannon to pound and enter the fort.

L'Alcibiade, p. 52.

I will not agree to it

L'Alcibiade, p. 52.

He turned to other familiar discourse so that he revived the almost extinguished hope of the master, and he found himself to have become so confident, that he took the risk of talking to him this way

p. 36n162

Pallavicino, *Il Principe Ermafrodito*, edited by Roberta Colombi, p. 125.

Can ties of love ensnare two men or can the forces of Cupid align subjects of the same sex who, warring with the same weapons, only have that with which to oppose each other?

p. 37

L'Alcibiade, pp. 54-55.

I do not oppose your desires because I do not know your merits, because I long for your torment ... but because honesty is ashamed of it, laws and nature prohibit it, [...] what I hear from most learned men, who in my house converse with my parents, is that this vice that cannot be named is abominated by nature, and against nature they call it.

L'Alcibiade, p. 51.

if anyone thought of any other zeal, any other desire, the teacher's good reputation opposed him, nor did it let approval be given to the imagination

p. 38

L'Alcibiade, p. 54.

in similar situations, he usually gave the alternative to switching his attention to objects, without turning to that manual act [...] pulling himself aside, he made a voluntary sacrifice with his own hand

L'Alcibiade, p. 55.

reduce the boy to his ultimate desires.

L'Alcibiade, p. 54.

take what lawfully and with most willingness I grant you: kisses, embraces, light touches and other affections I will always most kindly give them; but do not think of other actions that go further.

L'Alcibiade, p. 55.

greatly consoled with unquestionable hope that with harder assaults, with more mature guidance, he would eventually have the fortress conquered, and in the wars of love he would have triumphed with sweetness and erected trophies of glory.

p. 38n173

L'Alcibiade, pp. 81, 85.

makes each one of you thereafter of ill reputation, vile and effeminate, foolish and imprudent. [...] abandon serious business and lose themselves

Why do you use this word “temperate”, dear master? [...] Because excess, as I told you, offends – replied the master – not by defect of the object that is enjoyed, but by the use of it.

p. 39

L'Alcibiade, p. 43.

The boy Alcibiades was precisely of that age, in which industrious nature, with pleasant jests, under divine semblances, confounds with amorous marvels the female sex. And like such a girl was perhaps Ganymede, when he had the power to pull Jupiter from heaven to earth, to abduct him from earth to heaven.

L'Alcibiade, p. 45.

But the priceless delight of this treasure was his angellike speech: with a voice so suave he readily pronounced the letters of words, with pauses so orderly he finished the periods of his reasoning, that like a siren he enchanted souls with sweetness, not to deprive them of life, but to torment them, alive, with love.

p. 40

L'Alcibiade, p. 58.

disfigures himself, and becomes a rebel to her

L'Alcibiade, p. 57.

Has not the same nature inserted love between those more alike? Now does not a man have a greater likeness to a male child than a man does to a woman? Having given to boys semblance to a girl in appearance, has nature not insinuated that one use is converted into another use?

p. 41

L'Alcibiade, p. 57.

Has not the same nature inserted love between those more alike?

L'Alcibiade, p. 85.

Could not a man with a man, without a distinction in puerile age – said Alcibiades – take those pleasures? If in each of them there is as much as there is in boys, and more?

L'Alcibiade, p. 85.

Age changes species and nature in amorous amusements – said the master –, one delicately eats bucklings, which is most disgusting when become bucks; but those who wait for that goat are rebels to love, they are beasts of feral and corrupt sense. Male love is for boys.

L'Alcibiade, p. 53.

Love, setting hearts ablaze, does not discern neither condition, nor age, nor sex.

L'Alcibiade, p. 76.

the immoderate softness initiates that bucklings have become bucks: ... so wretched and stinking are these; though there are some who, rather changing course than to be in the proper position, take greater pleasure from these. But I do not intend to turn the world topsy-turvy.

p. 42n197

L'Alcibiade, p. 77.

And I, in these love affairs, when being the insertive partner, I would not esteem it too highly in others.

p. 43

L'Alcibiade, pp. 55-6.

Our laws forbid it; Pallas our chief deity in Athens abhors it, and they tell that the gods punished with fire, sulfur and bitumen some cities stained by this offense, so that they were extinguished and devastated; and as a reminder of the fact sulfurous places are believed to still be there, with trees and fruits fresh in appearance, but from the inside full with horrid sparks and ashes, testimonies to the vengeance of God that followed. Nor that temporary punishments are the end of the chastisement, but that in the separated soul eternal and incomprehensible punishments are exerted.

L'Alcibiade, p. 56.

Don't you want me to abhor? That I'm frightened and flee from it?

L'Alcibiade, p. 56.

And how do you not fear these menaces? How do you hazard such perils? Liberate me from these doubts, or abandon the endeavor and the thought.

L'Alcibiade, p. 73.

I receive ample satisfaction from your words ... but please explain to me

L'Alcibiade, p. 90.

I don't want ... that when the occasion of persuading has passed, you will be more languid and perhaps even reluctant in speaking. Continue therefore, and don't be afraid of the rest.

p. 43n202

L'Alcibiade, p. 92

And if anyone shows himself unwilling, it is not because his nature does not incline him that way, but because of the habit of fear imbued in him by those who by law or otherwise persuade him that it is a shame and a sin.

p. 44

L'Alcibiade, p. 95.

Tell me, dear master ... how one becomes ingenious and knowledgeable this way, as you now say.

L'Alcibiade, p. 96.

Nor is it permitted to any boy to become equal to his master, if not by this way; I will not deny, however, that from all seed there is not some profit received in the brain, when [the seed] comes from whom is rightly tepid and temperate, but more so when he has more of the qualified and noble.

L'Alcibiade, p. 96.

Behold – he said –, most loving master, that the desire for true knowledge, all other things postponed, bends me to your pleasures. Here I am prepared to make you content with whatever you lust for.

L'Alcibiade, p. 98.

This [ass] therefore shall be the center of my thoughts, from it shall they be put in motion, it shall be the infallible ruler of my actions, the aim and goal of all my wellbeing and happiness. And so, as to my deity and godhead, I will consecrate my heart to you.

L'Alcibiade, p. 98.

reduced to point of not knowing what sweetness was, when not having his master's cock in his ass; nor did he believe by any other way could he become perfect as his teacher.

p. 45

L'Alcibiade, p. 98.

Fortunate master, that by making yourself the servant of such beauty you were also master of enjoying it, conform to your desire.

p. 45n212

L'Alcibiade, pp. 42, 98.

I promise you shortly the second part, entitled the Triumph of Alcibiades, which will be all the more curious, as it has been birthed by the most erudite pen of this country.

But how then their pleasure and amorous intercourse continued, in the second part more lasciviously will you learn of it.

pp. 45-6

L'Alcibiade, p. 87.

Yet fathers do not want – added Alcibiades – that their little boys are reduced to this use by tutors, as also the tutors receive little good fame from it: a sign that it is esteemed an illicit and unworthy deed.

p. 46

L'Alcibiade, p. 90

I don't deny – replied Alcibiades – that by numerous hosts of lovers I have not been coveted and followed; but the secure custody of my elders have thwarted their taste.

p. 47

L'Alcibiade, p. 78.

A woman does not willingly give her apples, she does not willingly open up the garden in her lap, because her longings are elsewhere: her pleasure awaits her from her nature, that is to say, from her cunt, such that it is of a bitter taste; and even when they would want it, the

sweetness is so different from that than from this, as the meat of a cow is from that of a calf. In the way thus that taste accurately differs in food, some is delightful, some is abominable: every part, every morsel of cow is of cow, and that of calf is calf. So are the senses in amorous pleasures.

L'Alcibiade, p. 82.

Ever the same food without variation makes nauseous, so that it causes you to die of hunger and desire. And then to lose yourself for delight so easy, for pleasures so common, for sweets given even to flies? To deprive oneself of the best part of the soul, of freedom, which are incomparable?

p. 47n222

L'Alcibiade, p. 81.

There are men of high intellect who have written volumes about it

p. 48

L'Alcibiade, p. 76.

so wretched and stinking are these; though there are some who ... take greater pleasure from these

L'Alcibiade, p. 92.

depends on discipline and dexterity.

L'Alcibiade, p. 93.

These are not lovers, but wolves; not enjoyers of supreme goods, but deadly and enemies of nature and the world

L'Alcibiade, p. 79.

The discreet lover of boys should not be indiscriminate with all, he should not seek out anyone who is a pretty boy for his enjoyment. ... Therefore the loveable child must be noble, civil, adorned, laughing and without blemish: nor will he be valued, if he is not such.

p. 49

L'Alcibiade, p. 72.

Never is a man so rich nor so powerful that at a certain time he does not need another, and he who performs benefits still waits for it.

L'Alcibiade, p. 72.

something else are markets, and something else are courtesies.

p. 49n234

L'Alcibiade, p. 80.

But given that any of these defects are found in some new pretty boy, reduced through poverty to some term of filth, or through inexperience, on the whole it is nothing, in comparison with the intrigues, menstruation, and pestiferous aftermath of women.

p. 50

L'Alcibiade, p. 71.

why then are boys who condescend to the pleasures of men with the despicable name of "bardassa" [bardash, berdache] despised and esteemed infamous?

L'Alcibiade, pp. 71-2.

This name of bardassa – replied the master – is neither fitting nor should be given, and is actually not given, to boys that out of affection and courtesy graciously make copies of themselves for civil and deserving lovers. ... Bardassa really means a pretty boy that is meretricious and venal, who for mere profit, almost kind of per measure, sells himself, nor does anything else await than civil gain.

L'Alcibiade, p. 71.

Glorious and divine boy, who without goal of mercenary interest blesses men on earth; vile infamous mercenary, who at a price sells himself, who from being a gardener and treasurer of the joys of love becomes a vile butcher of his own flesh.

L'Alcibiade, p. 90.

I have, however, reciprocated these delights with fellow boys of my age, but I have not esteemed them much, nor have I equaled them to those pleasures which perhaps are received with men; rather, I have imagined them to myself as different as is an unripe fruit from a ripe one.

p. 54

Coci, "Introduzione," *L'Alcibiade*, 2003 [1998], p. 27.

Master Rocco often asked us how long it has been since we had carnal relations, either naturally or against nature, and we told him a few times that we had, and he would say, you have done well, because that instrument was made by nature, so that we have our tastes and delights from it.

Chapter 5

p. 55

L'Adamo, Venice: Sarzina, 1640, p. 134.

I recall that the Life of Adam is a sacred history, that is to say a subject in whose description one must moderate that fervor of intellect which elsewhere, like prosperous wind, leads to glory.

p. 55n256

Miato, *l'Accademia degli Incogniti*, 1998, p. 59.

In these by conformity in study are friendships established, and by means of emulation the most generous spirits are refined.

p. 56

L'Adamo, 1640, pp. 134-5.

And what practice is Your Lordship supposed to have with these books, while your status, and occupations both public and private have always obliged you to other studies? How, on the other hand, not versed in the Bible and in the intelligence of these scholars, will you be able either not to waver in concepts, or perhaps not to err in expositions?

Antonio Santacroce, *La segretaria d'Apollo*, 1653, p. 488.

So we warn you not to allow certain booklets to be dedicated to you for tis purpose; that not some sinister judgement be made of your character.

Loredan, *Lettere*, 1655, p. 245.

Satire moves to laughter the listeners, but it usually makes the authors weep. ... Those who speak badly of those who can do badly, if they don't deserve the title of madman, cannot escape that of imprudent. The satisfactions that harm can be compared to those medicines, that aggravate the sick instead of healing him.

p. 57

Spera, "Giovan Francesco Loredan e la fabbrica del consenso," 2015, p. 73.

In the dedication – or in the multiplicity of writings similar in function an purpose – the discourse moves along an axis that uses the text as a tool for the acquisition ... of benefits, of advantages that depart from and return to the sender.

p. 58

Discorsi, 1635, p. ar.

The Academy of the Unknown cannot remain unknown, and who could cover the Sun with clouds so, that it does not reveal itself? Their modesty is a cloud; but one that to the exceeding light of their Virtues easily dissipates.

Discorsi, 1635, p. av.

The Hercules of Gaul ... free me from importunate snares, in which the too rigid censors might ensnare me in punishment for having pretended too much.

Discorsi, 1635, p. b2r.

Who have only judgement in their eyes [...] these are mere strokes of the pen, not true feelings of the heart. The abuses in writing, do not compromise the dues of faith. The age be flattered, which cherishes such wanderings, not deceiving itself by departing from the dogmas of faith.

p. 59

Discorsi, 1635, p. br.

You must be aware in the first place that I was the Author of such a worthy collection, desirous of honoring my presses with the most learned discourses on so many subjects. The secretary who was set to this charge was distracted by other engagements, and unable to attend to it: the more so, that the Authors immortalized through their other glorious works did not care, that they saw this.

Discorsi, 1635, pp. b2r-b2v.

May the present Discourses be to you a testimonial of what these highest wits are machinating: I promise you soon, by the same Academicians, a collection of Poems. Two Volumes of

Amorous Novellas. The Illustrious Men of the Academy under the name of Glories of the Incogniti a volume of Enterprises with a thousand other labors, which are being prepared daily in that most virtuous assembly.

Discorsi, 1635, pp. 1-2.

These two Discourses ... I dedicate to your most illustrious lordship, because with the light of your virtue you discover the innate unhappiness of men, and with actions worthy of the admiration of the World, you happily lead your days, & also because recited in your Academy, to you they are rightfully owed: to this is added, that several times I have heard from the author, that he lives more in you, than in himself, so much can there be knowledge of the sublime, and now celebrated endowments of the soul of your most illustrious lordship. I, who revere your great merit, and esteem the virtue of Master Cavaliere, have taken it upon myself to honor myself with this gift, which I accompany with the gift of myself to your most illustrious lordship, whose hand I reverently kiss.

p. 59n274

Discorsi, 1635, pp. 215, 237.

As tribute I bring my Discourse on Ugliness, prompted by whom of debt commands me, that it cannot be so, that it should not come out in print.

The Discourse on Beauty is on its way to enter the scene with some others of the Incogniti Masters. I cannot deny it to those who ask me.

p. 60

Discorsi, 1635, p. 238.

Remain served in so much, that where the effect does not come across, affection does.

Discorsi, 1635, p. 94.

If by opening the gates of your kindness the affection of the giver pleases more than the gift, the gift will be admitted into the Temple of Immortality with your name, & the giver from your grace will receive the light, which he longs for.

Discorsi, 1635, p. 93.

Your Most Illustrious Lordship, who from the Genius learned to jest, (although your jests are the quirks of Alcides, & his Genius is true son of Jupiter) will also learn to appreciate the jests, or rather the sketches of mine produced by the sole Genius of pleasing Your Illustrious Lordship.

p. 60n277

Discorsi, 1635, p. 215.

The name of Your Excellence is celebrated, both by letters and by other valor, within and outside of the Fatherland, and with gentle violence ravishes the minds of others to render him homage of reverence and deference. I am one of those, who willingly submits to this enchantment.

p. 61

Discorsi, 1635, p. 149.

The modesty of Mr. Dr. Rocco did not want to agree, that his discourses recited in the Academy to obey his Masters should be seen in print under the censure of the learned. Not because he fears the liberty of judgement, but because, by straying from his profession he doubts that he deserves reprehension rather than praise. And although the pleas of many abstained him from publication, attesting to the variety of doctrines, the liveliness of spirits, the singularity of invention, which are found in those discourses, with all that tenacious in his opinion he always refuted the arguments, and begged many not to harass him. I, not wishing to take away this glory from the Academy, nor the ornament from the volume, which Your Lordship prepares, have decided to steal from him the two here attached: knowing that in things, which are beneficial to the public thefts are not less glorious, than gifts.

Discorsi, 1635, p. 253.

more admirable the jewel, which prepares for the glories of our Age

p. 62

Discorsi, 1635, p. 69.

illicit love be permitted in order to birth out of it another more perfect by drawing from the dishonesty of others the conservation of others' modesty.

Cento Novelle Amoroze, 1651, pp. a3r-a3v.

And to whom else, than to the Most Noble Academy of the Delfici, do the most gentle works of the Incogniti belong? a great part of our Illustrious lights are Stars of your Dauphine Heaven. Our Incogniti come to reveal themselves among your oracles.

p. 63

Le Glorie de gli Incogniti, 1647, p. a3r.

I present to you, ò Reader Friend, by commission of the Academy of the Incogniti Masters a part of its Glories.

Glorie, 1647, p. a4r.

From Latin: "At, caecis olim tenebris quae mersa latebant, / Nomina nostra iubet Sol tuus esse palàm"

And, once they hid in the blind shadows that engulfed, / our names does your Son order to be public

pp. 63-4

Glorie, 1647, p. a3r.

the other Academicians serve as an example, and if they wish to be in the second volume, which is already being prepared, they should hand in in time the information necessary to be served.

p. 65

Glorie, 1647, p. 138.

the ease of composing sometimes made him fall into Satires [...] the fatal point of his misfortunes.

L'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino, 1643, p. A2r.

that they would quickly be devoured

L'Anima, 1643, p. A2v.

Would it please God, that it were not so because not being done, it would not be written.

p. 66

Dell'Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino, s.d., p. A2r.

I protest, Reader Friend, what I told you in the first Vigilia. If you have scruples about the truth; if you hate it, because perhaps your conscience resents it; if you fear to hear reproached or your impiety, or your ignorance; do not spend money on this Book, because you will find yourself repentant.

Dell'Anima, s.d., p. A2v.

In the third Vigilia, which I promise you, and which is being prepared, nothing else will be discussed but the Jesuits.

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 4.

Written by the Aggrieved Incognito Academic

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 4.

But allowing himself afterwards to be carried away no less by his own genius than by the persuasions of others to touch upon matters, that are never touched upon without risk, either of life or of honor, he finally procured for himself with various compositions, and writings unworthy of his nobility, and of his profession, an end ill adjusted to his qualities, a perpetual stain of infamy to his reputation.

p. 67

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 19-20.

End unworthy of his birth and qualities; but always foretold to him by his closest Friends, and perhaps worthy of his contumacy of having carrying his pen onto places, and persons to lacerate them in life and honor, whom he should have revered with his tongue on the ground.

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 27.

A good and faithful Friend, and of a frank and ingenuous spirit

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 20.

He was nevertheless so strongly imbued with a natural eloquence augmented by the observations of good Authors tasted in the early years of his studies, and firmed up by his experience of the things of the World, that even his sketches succeeded in being as valuable as the more limited compositions of others.

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 24-5.

That even though he sometimes satirized, further than he should, the attitudes of Ecclesiastical persons, and faltered in the license of customs, yet he never admitted in his mind any feeling of contempt of the dignity, either of their Authority, nor of prejudice towards the sacrosanct dogmas of the Roman Catholic Religion.

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 25-6.

while between the style (to say nothing else about that abominated Divortio) or the works of Ferrante one sees that difference, which one would see between a young living Woman and a painted corpse. But the World, which lives by opinion rather than by judgement, having seen that the Author of *l'Anima di Ferrante*, which so much professes to be partial to him, has given him (and so behave modern Friends) a stain so enormous on the face of his reputation, so easily drunk this lie without making any further consideration on it. Indeed it has passed so far beyond negligence and impertinence of many ignorant people, that still of other most scandalous works, which some years after his death were composed and published, they want to believe and preach him to be the Author.

p. 68

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, pp. 29-30.

Hence it would not be possible to discern what part preponderated in his Person, vice or virtue; as that certainly the qualities of his wit, if he had nobly cultivated them, would have been incomparable. Likewise it is also true, that no thing is found in this mortal life wholly fulfilled, and it often happens, that those, who possess better wits than other men succeed in their own affairs, to the scandal of the simple, worse than other men; verifying likewise today the popular Proverb, that Great Wits also make great mistakes.

pp. 68-9

"Vita di Ferrante Pallavicino," 1660, p. 30.

So lived, and died Ferrante Pallavicino, but he will live on, and by merit of wit, and by quality of fortune perpetually in the memory of men, amid the uncertainties of blame, and praise, as are his works worthy in part of praise, and in part of blame.