

**The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy**, by Lorenzo Benadusi, translated by Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012, 424 pp., US\$55.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0299283902

Italian academic institutions have been resistant to the study of homosexuality and the influence of postmodern cultural studies more generally. Pieropaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug have argued that much of the Italian resistance to the postmodern approach derives from a fear that its 'pluralism and discursive openness' undermine historical truth and resist attempts to define cultural production on ethical terms (2009, 2–3), but Benadusi's postmodern project clearly refutes this concern.

Benadusi's book, originally published by Feltrinelli in 2005, is a pioneering contribution to the expanding discourse on Italian sexual politics, which bridges a gap between the 'extremely rigorous methodological approach' (p. 8) taken in Italy and the impact of critical gender studies more widely. It is the first structured investigation of its kind and, as Emilio Gentile says in his foreword, the study points to a new approach that lends concrete experience to the study of abstract logical models (p. xvii). Benadusi documents the clash between abstract ideals and individual realities that occurred under the would-be totalitarian regime. His study is an ambitious examination of Fascist attitudes to homosexuality from cultural, social, medical, juridical and penal perspectives on a macro and micro level that introduces a wealth of archival material. The only attempt at a comprehensive history of masculinity in Italy is Sandro Bellasai and Maria Malatesta's *Genere e mascolinità: uno sguardo storico* (2000), which has not been translated into English. Massimo Consoli's *Homocaust* (1991) provides a parallel account of repression in Nazi Germany and Giovanni dall'Orto has addressed some of the themes highlighted in Benadusi's account.

In his introduction, Benadusi acknowledges the vastness of his interdisciplinary undertaking and highlights the wider implications of this research for understanding the repression of homosexuality across the entire political spectrum. The author begins with an examination of the ways in which Fascism constructed a link between the body and the nation, accentuating oppositional types to turn social intolerance into a question of national survival. The 'energetic, courageous, and fervently agonistic' ideal of Italy's *new man* was set in opposition to the decadent and effeminate member of the bourgeoisie whose interests were 'humanitarianism and pacifism' (p. 20). In the following chapter, Benadusi looks at the role of science and medicine in pathologising homosexuality and the regime's attempt to control emerging scientific debates concerning the definition of normal or abnormal sexuality. Benadusi does an admirable job of situating Fascism's repressive policies firmly within the historical context of pre-Fascist Italy, demonstrating that the Fascist drive toward greater totalitarian control was often achieved by degrees. In the third chapter, he looks at the development of the Zanardelli and Rocco legal codes and at the influence of the church in various regions of Italy and on Fascist definitions of public and private morality. The following two chapters are dedicated to the author's examination of the use of *confino*, jails and insane asylums. Benadusi's detailed study of police files, public records and period publications demonstrates how Fascism often operated to demonise and persecute homosexuality by subtle means and measures. He highlights the consequences of slippery legal parameters, which allowed for broad prosecutions of homosexuality within a Fascist system that sought to isolate, or make invisible, the non-normative members of society. Benadusi then outlines a series of scandals in which accusations of homosexuality, whether documented or undocumented, were utilised to gain political advantage within the bureaucratic hierarchy of Fascism. He concludes with a chapter devoted to

highlighting the irreconcilable tensions between bourgeois individualism and Fascism's demand for totalitarian control over the private and public lives of its citizens.

Given the scope of this volume there are necessarily many avenues that are touched on only briefly, such as the very different reception that male and female homosexuality received under Fascism. In a tantalising aside, it is mentioned that the Rocco commission regarded lesbianism as 'the most despicable' sort of same-sex offence given the difficulty of proving a homosexual relationship between women. In later footnotes, however, we are told that men and women suspected of homosexual activity were equally subjected to invasive physical examinations. Ultimately, Benadusi suggests that Fascism's 'almost non-existent interest in female sexuality, except as being there for the pleasure of men or for reproduction', helps explain its attitude towards lesbianism, which it regarded as 'mental illness, a syndrome of hysteria, or at most a sign of the devil' (p. 272).

Benadusi's book is well translated and written in refreshingly readable prose. Although there are moments in the account when the reader feels themselves occupying the discomfiting place of a voyeuristic Fascist bureaucrat monitoring private lives, this element of the author's analysis also sets it apart from any generalised account that might marginalise the issue of homosexuality by maintaining abstract and impersonal constructs. Beyond its importance as a specific study of the Italian case, this work shows that bodies cannot be seen as 'ahistorical, pre-cultural or natural objects' (Grosz 1994, p. x). Here the author's intimate accounts serve to reveal how the human body inevitably features at the heart of any totalitarian project: bodies that must be examined, measured, judged, isolated, punished, and circumscribed so as to be controlled and managed by a pre-determined social order.

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**Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe**, edited by Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri, London-New York, Routledge, 2010, 257 pp., £28.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-56160-0

*Italy Today* opens with an extract from a 2006 edition of the popular TV programme *Le Iene*, showed a number of Italian MPs unable to answer correctly even basic questions on current affairs. Recently, *Le Iene* subjected a newly elected MP of the Movimento 5 Stelle to a similar examination, resulting in an equally embarrassing situation where the latter failed to answer simple questions about the European economy. Leaving aside the changed political context and different background of the *Grillini*, this incident inevitably revives memories of the Berlusconi