

principles, the masculine and the feminine, and balances one against the other. Every exclusively masculine figure is lacking in grace, every exclusively feminine one is lacking in strength." The women in Péladan's novels are generally of the androgynous type; he asserted that "the number of women who feel themselves to be men grows by the day, and the masculine instinct leads them to violent actions." Péladan never wearied of androgynous and lesbian themes in his monumental "éthopée," and in *Typhonia* (1892), the *Journal d'une vierge protestante* is a tale of lesbian love. His own marriage, in 1895, was a failure, and he gained the homophobic nickname of "La Sâr pédalant," but there is no evidence that he ever had an active sexual life.

In 1885 Péladan had declared himself Grand-Master of the Rose+Croix on the death of his brother Adrien, who had been initiated into a branch of freemasonry, by that time moribund, that claimed succession from the legendary Rosicrucians. In 1888 he and Stanislas de Guaita revived the *Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose+Croix*, in whose occult carryings-on there was a great deal of foolishness and self-importance. Péladan himself fused a real sense of mission with an exhibitionism and a flair for the dramatic—with transvestite overtones—worthy of an Oscar Wilde. His dress ranged from the medieval to oriental robes with a nuance of the androgynous and from ecclesiastical vestments to the traditional raffish garb of bohemia. His hair and beard were luxuriant and remarkable. Péladan's work is a veritable encyclopedia of Decadent taste permeated by his obsession with the Androgyne. The novel of this name he resumed as "a restitution of Grecian ephobic impressions by way of Catholic mysticism," and wrote: "Intangible Eros, uranian Eros, for the coarse men of moral epochs you are but an infamous sin, you are named Sodom, the celestial despiser of all beauty. This is the need of hypocritical

ages to accuse Beauty, that living light, of the darkness contained in vile hearts."

The work of Péladan, blending the occult and the homoerotic, is a curious reaction to the prevailing naturalism of the late nineteenth century. Péladan himself is a striking example of the flamboyant, eccentric leader of a cult strongly tinged with evocations of a legendary past and claiming to possess a unique mystical tradition, in contrast with the mundane religion of the conventional believer. He is the prototype of later homosexual figures in the religious life of the twentieth century, and even of certain leaders on the mystical fringe of the gay churches of today.

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PENITENTIALS

The penitentials are Western Christian confessional manuals whose origins can be traced as far back as the sixth century, and which were used until the twelfth century. The purpose of the penitentials was to aid the priest or spiritual guide of the lay Christian by providing descriptions of various sins and prescribing appropriate penances. Many of the manuals go far beyond mere lists of sins and penances, containing introductions and conclusions for the instruction of the confessor that remind him of his role as spiritual healer and urge him to appreciate the subjective mentality of the patient. Modern scholars do not know exactly how these manuals were used in practice, but in all likelihood they served as works of reference, informing the priest of the different kinds of sin, of aggravating and mitigating circumstances, and of the ap-

appropriate penance to impose. Most of the penitentials are brief enough to be committed to memory, so that the material amounted to a questionnaire for interrogating the penitent—an important aspect of early medieval penance. Such interrogation was designed to ensure that penitents knew what grave sins were and would confess all of them. In fact, a ninth-century theologian had to warn priests not to corrupt the minds of penitents by suggesting sins which their simplicity had never imagined.

Sexual Aspects. The penitentials have long been recognized as valuable sources for the study of the social, legal, and moral institutions of the early Middle Ages. They mediated between the formulations of Christian theology and concrete practice in the everyday life of the lay Christian. One of the most striking features of these documents is the breadth and detail of their treatment of human sexual behavior. Recent works make some use of these manuals for the study of homosexuality in the medieval period.

The general principles of the Christian sexual ethic had been established long before the sixth century, indeed they were adopted in their totality from the Hellenistic Judaism of the first century. The testimony of such different personalities as Philo Judaeus and Flavius Josephus confirms that the prohibition of male homosexual activity was absolute and uncompromising. Sexual intercourse was morally permissible only between a man and a woman who were married and for the purpose of procreation. At the beginning of the fifth century St. Augustine reiterated this principle and made it normative for Latin Christendom. All forms of sexual expression falling outside these limits were to be deemed immoral and grievously sinful. The debates over sexuality within the early Church, moreover, led to a standard of sexual morality that set virginity above marriage and idealized an asexual way of life as embodied in monastic orders and in priestly celibacy. For five hundred

years the penitential literature was the principal agent in the formation and diffusion of the Christian code of sexual morality. Hence these texts are crucial to the history of the social attitude toward homosexual behavior in that period. They supplement the law codes of Theodosius and Justinian as well as the tribal legislation of Western Europe that dealt with sexual offenses, since these did not cover many areas of individual conduct and were far removed from the interpersonal sphere of confession and penance and the private realm of everyday life.

It cannot be denied that the treatment of sexual behavior in general in the penitentials tends to be authoritarian, apodictic, legalistic, and sex-negative. This ascetic approach to sexuality left its imprint upon Western attitudes in the course of time—and that is what the penitentials were meant to do, to shape the collective consciousness of sexual morality along the lines formulated by the church. They failed to provide a parallel reflective and critical discussion of human sexuality: this they were not meant to do. The penitentials and those who consulted them were engaged in a strenuous—and ultimately futile—combat with urges and drives in the human personality that were regarded as evil and demonic in origin. The peoples of Western Europe, many of them brought into the fold by the missionary campaign initiated by Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century, remained attached to a more diverse, overt, and freely expressed pagan norm of sexuality than Christian ethics could ever countenance. This archaic morality underlay and undercut the superstratum of ascetic teaching which the clergy sought to inculcate. By comparison with earlier rigoristic practice, the introduction of penitentials constituted an injection of pastoral realism—what almost might be called plea bargaining in modern terms. By bringing forgiveness for even grave sins within reach of the believer, the system was relieved of its most dire aspect, that of automatic eternal

damnation, but only in order to make the underlying morality more effective.

Homosexuality. Modern apologists for Christianity have dealt with the attitude of the penitential literature toward homosexuality and with the specific contributions of Regino of Prüm, the *Penitential of Silos*, and Burchard of Worms, claiming that the penitentials are not "an index of medieval morality" and that their treatment of the homoerotic implies "a relatively indulgent attitude adopted by prominent churchmen of the early Middle Ages toward homosexual behavior." The penitentials are an index of what the medieval church—if not the entire laity—thought morally reprehensible on the basis of the Christian revelation.

All the penitentials have at least one canon condemning what later came to be designated *sodomy*, and many offer a relatively extensive treatment of the subject. Two factors influence their analysis: the specific character of the offense and the participants. The types of homosexual behavior distinguished in these manuals may be grouped as follows: (1) general references to males copulating with other males, (2) specific mention of *sodomites* or of a sin or practice labeled *sodomitic*, (3) references to relations *in terga*, mainly with reference to adolescent behavior, (4) references to specific practices other than anal penetration, (5) references to simulations of sexual intercourse by very young boys, (6) references to cases in which an older boy violates a younger one, (7) sexual relations between natural brothers.

The range of persons addressed or implicated shifts the focus of the canons: (1) those addressed to unspecified persons censure all of the specific forms of homosexual intercourse, (2) those addressed to church dignitaries and religious speak only of "acting as did the Sodomites" and grade the penance according to the ecclesiastical rank of the offender, the higher position meriting the higher penance, (3) canons addressed to adolescents censure all forms

of homosexual activity but vary the allusions to the Sodomites.

There is a striking consistency in the weighting of the different offenses. In canons whose subjects are unspecified male persons, the general, not further specified practice of sexual relations between males usually carries a penance of ten to fifteen years; censures using a variant of *sodomite* usually carry a penance of ten years but may range from seven to twenty; relations *in terga* (involving the posterior) invariably carry a penance of three years; intercrural relations are censured with one to three years' penance; mutual masturbation, mentioned only three times, carries a penance from 30 days to two years; oral-genital relations carry a penance ranging from three to seven years, most often the former.

Lesbian relations are almost as neglected in the penitentials as they are in the Judeo-Christian tradition generally. However, they are mentioned, and provide an interesting confirmation of a text from Hincmar of Reims who says: "They are reputed to use certain instruments of diabolical function to excite desire," presumably single or double dildoes. Several penitential reproaches directed at lesbian relations mention such devices.

It should be borne in mind that the penitentials are cumulative works, each compiler incorporating into his own work previous texts, often excerpted without change. The rather explicit descriptions of homosexual acts in Burchard of Worms seem to reflect a personal view of such behavior. Another significant point is that "sodomitical" acts had in Christian thinking come to include bestiality, for obvious reasons a common enough practice among rural populations constantly exposed to the sight of animals copulating or preparing to do so. If homosexuality was to a certain degree tolerated in the early Middle Ages, it was not because of the church but in spite of it. Fundamental moral attitudes are not altered overnight, and a substra-

tum of pagan belief and practice undercut the new religion imported from the Mediterranean world. A situation prevailed that in Russian historiography is termed *dvoeverie*, "dual belief"—the Christian doctrines and practices coexisted with the older heathen ones for several centuries, until the teachings reiterated generation after generation became the folk ethos of Western Christendom.

The penitentials, and the canonical collections into which they were incorporated, enjoyed wide circulation for some four centuries or more, and in the course of time shifted moral judgment in the direction of Christian asceticism. The evangelization of Western Europe involved the inculcation of the moral teachings of Christianity as well as the preaching of its myths and dogmas, and sexual morality from the outset was a significant part of its theology, if not the very cornerstone of its ethical system. The creative elaboration of the material found in decisions of the church councils and in papal letters was accomplished by the middle of the eighth century; after that time the penitentials simply copy previous manuals. This tradition in its Irish, Frankish, and Anglo-Saxon variants is comparatively unanimous both in range of content and manner of treatment. Even original contributions such as those of Burchard of Worms are simply added to an existing penitential tradition, the end result of which was the moral outlawry of homosexual behavior and the marginalization of those engaging in it as criminals and outcasts with no rights that a Christian society needed to respect.

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PENNA, SANDRO (1906–1977)

Italian lyric poet and prose writer. Born in Perugia, where he took a degree in accounting, Penna moved at the age of twenty-three to Rome, where he lived until his death. Shy and diffident, he led a highly private existence for most of his life, refusing invitations to elegant gatherings to be with his *fanciulli* ("lads"), and making a living in various ways, including the gray market during the war and art dealing afterwards. Yet he did show some affinity for the company of such homosexual writers as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Elio Pecora, and Dario Bellezza.

Penna was "discovered" by another great twentieth-century Italian poet, Umberto Saba (1883–1957). Thanks to Saba's help he was able to publish even during the fascist period (the first book is from 1939), despite the homoerotic and pedophilic content of his work.

Alongside his exiguous poetic production—the compositions up to 1970 are collected in *Tutte le poesie* (Milan: Garzanti, 1970)—he also wrote fiction, some of which appears in *Un po' di febbre* (Milan: Garzanti, 1973). Love for boys is omnipresent in the delicate lyrics of Penna. To critics who, while acknowledging his high artistic quality, found his insistence on homosexual themes "inappropriate," Penna replied with scorn: "The sexual problem/ engages my whole life./ Is it good, is it bad?/ That's what I keep asking myself." Provocatively, he styled himself a "love poet." He was so proud of his *eros paidikos* that in one interview he made his own the saying attributed to Camille Saint-Saëns, "I am not a homosexual, but a pederast."

In his poems—which are usually brief, four lines or a few more—Penna used only a few strokes to sketch a situation, a thought, or a portrait. The source of inspiration was his "lads," adolescents or young boys; his desires (which had a physical dimension) were stated with extraordi-