Gay Erasmus[1]

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This article provides a new framework for understanding sexuality in Erasmus. It examines his correspondence with the monk Servaas Rogerszoon and with other familiars, making a critique of the use of letters for life writing before and after P. S. Allen's edition. It discusses monastic contexts, especially within the Augustinian order, and humanist knowledge of same-sex values in Greek and Latin philology. Moving beyond biography, it recreates discourses of same-sex practice in the "Adagia." In placing the letters and adages within a domain of queer studies, it demonstrates for the first time the existence in Erasmus of a private coterie language of sex.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Paulus Merula (1558–1607), in his groundbreaking *Vita Erasmi* of 1607, published ten letters addressed to Servaas Rogerszoon, a young monk at the Augustinian priory at Steyn, Erasmian scholarship has not known what to do with them.[2] At the turn of the seventeenth century, Merula, librarian and professor of history at Leiden University, with associates including Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538–1614) and Petrus Scriverius (1576–1660), combed Dutch archives for Erasmian autographs or scraps of biography. The bounty included the so-called *Compendium vitae*.[3] Merula proudly published the manuscript,

[1] I would like to acknowledge the wise and affectionate readings of my learned friends, Hugh Haughton and Diarmaid MacCulloch, in revising earlier drafts of this article; and also the careful comments and suggestions of the *RQ* assessors.

The title is adopted with an element of playfulness, with due acknowledgement of the problems of the historical use of the word "gay," perhaps best rendered in Latin as *Blandus Erasmus*, or "Gay Erasmus."

[2] Merula.

[3] *Compendium vitae Erasmi Roterodami*, in P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:47–52. This apparently first-person autobiographical fragment is attached to a letter of 2 April 1524 addressed to the Louvain scholar Conradus Goclenius.

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owned by Otho Werckman, as a model for a new form of life writing, thanking Otho in a preface addressed to him.[4] After publication, the physical manuscript dropped out of sight, its authenticity sometimes disputed.[5] As well as the *Compendium*, Merula printed eighty-four mostly early letters, all but one never published in Erasmus's lifetime. Scriverius printed four further new letters in a reprint of Merula in 1615.[6]

In one of the letters to Servaas, Erasmus asks: "Ah, half my soul, what are you doing at this moment? Does all go well with you? Does any vision of your most loving friend ever cross your mind?"[7] This is epistle 4 to Servaas, dated by P. S. Allen to 1487, in which Erasmus is quoting from Horace, *Odes* 1.3.8.[8] He earlier described Servaas glowingly in a letter to his brother Pieter Gerard as "a youth of beautiful disposition and very agreeable personality."[9] Pieter would soon prefer Servaas to Erasmus: "Indeed, his nature makes everyone love him." Erasmus in epistle 5 declares his love for the young monk: "my very special love for you, sweetest Servatius."[10] Love brings pain, but he forgets his hurt to heal his friend's, imitating Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "The more they covered the fire, the more it burned."[11] What more can Erasmus do to please Servaas, his very soul? Don't hide your feelings, he pleads (citing Horace's

[4] "Accepi, mi Werckmane . . . Magni Erasmi vitam [Receive, my Werckman, this life of the great Erasmus]": Le Clerc, 1703–06, vol. 3.1, fol. **2^{r}. See appendix 1 in P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:575. Otho was possibly a descendant of the Antwerp bookseller Franciscus Berckman/Werckman, a notorious collector of Erasmiana first mentioned in a letter from John Colet in March 1512; see P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:509.

[5] Copies of the *Compendium*, including an early one, had already been found by Scriverius and others, and the original (now belonging to Jeroen de Backere) was certified by Antonius Thysius the Younger (1613–65); see Thysius, *Praefatio ad lectorem*, sigs. *8^{r}–*10^{v}. Authorship is affirmed in P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:575–78, and disputed by Langereis.

[6] Scriverius.

[7] "Quid igitur rerum agitas, o animae dimidium meae? Rectene omnia? Num interdum animo tuo amantissimi tui subit imago?": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:77; translated in Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:6–7. Translations from Erasmus are from the *Collected Works* when available; other translations are my own when not indicated in a footnote. Servaas is referred to by his given name throughout. His Latin name Servatius (used always by Erasmus) occurs in context in quotations.

[8] "Et serves animae dimidium meae": Horace, 1985, 5 (*Carmina* 1.3.8).

[9] "Adolescente me hercule indole pulcherrima ingenioque suauissimo": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:5 (epistle 3); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:76.

[10] "In te meus amor, mi Seruati suauissime": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:78; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:7.

[11] "Quoque magis tegitur, tectus magis aestuat ignis": Ovid, 1977, 79 (*Metamorphoses* 4.64).

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Odes again).[12] In epistle 6, Erasmus wonders what Servaas is up to. Perhaps he is at leisure, thinking about love. By epistle 7, Erasmus is desperate for a sign:

> More than my very eyes and life and, in a word, myself, what is it that makes you so hard-hearted that you not only refuse to love him who loves you so well but do not even regard him with esteem? Are you of so inhuman a disposition as to love those who hate you and hate those who love you?[13]

Now his feelings are expressed in the idiom of Catullus, "I hate and I love."[14] By epistle 8 Erasmus is calling his indifferent lover Servaas "crueller than any tigress":

> In a word, the gloomy look on my face, the paleness of my complexion, the somewhat depressed and downcast look—these things could easily have betrayed to you the inward struggles of my heart had you but observed them. But you, crueller than any tigress, can as easily dissemble all this as if you had no care for your friend's well-being at all. Ah, heartless spirit! Alas, unnatural man![15]

In epistle 9, things improve with a letter that, although wretched, gives him hope of love returned.

This correspondence provides evidence for what has most commonly been understood to be the anachronistic argument that Erasmus was gay. The aim of this article is not to force Erasmus out of the closet, but to show how he developed a coterie language in which it was possible to suggest, sometimes openly, sometimes in carefully evasive language, his own and his friends' sympathy for passions and practices that Renaissance texts ascribed to Socrates and Plato, and which were widespread in the late medieval religious communities in which he grew up (that he sometimes subjected to scathing

[12] "Quidquid habes, age / depone tutis auribus, a miser! [Whatever's wrong, whisper it in my ear, it's safe there—oh you poor thing!]": Horace, 1985, 30 (*Carmina* 1.22.17–18).

[13] "Vt hisce te oculis, hac anima, denique etiam me ipso chariorem habeam, quid te vsque adeo reddit inexorabilem vt tui amantissimum non solum non ames, verum ne diligas quidem. Vsque adeone inhumano ingenio es vt odientes te ames, amantes te odias?": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:79; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:9.

[14] "Odi et amo": Catullus, 1983, 88 (*Carmina* 85).

[15] "Denique ipsa frontis meae moestitia, vultus pallor, oculorum subtristis deiectio facile tibi, si attendisses, internos animi luctus indicare potuerunt. At tu tygride crudelior tam facile dissimulas omnia ac si de Erasmi tui salute nihil ad te attineret. Heu crudeles animos, heus hominem insanum!": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:81; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:12.

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criticism). The argument is in two stages: the first, a historical reading of the letters to Servaas and others within the context of queer studies, Renaissance humanism, and monasticism; the second, a reading of often cryptic but sometimes teasingly explicit adages in terms of same-sex love and friendship. Romantic intimacy with younger men in biographical terms is thus set in the context of Erasmus's interest in the homoerotic culture of the ancient world and of contemporary monasticism. This includes detailed awareness of homosexual acts and innuendos about them. What is not in doubt in this wider reading is the importance of the language of homosexual *discours amoureux*, sometimes philological, sometimes poetic, sometimes mythological, which justifies a queer reading as much as do the details of life writing.

Erasmian biography has not found the subject comfortable. To avoid the mortal sin of anachronism, Sandra Langereis in a recent life ignores any inference of sexual feeling in the letters to Servaas.[16] Allen, in his monumental edition of the letters, is less shockable: "This developed at first into an ardent affection, which was irksome to Servatius, but subsequently Erasmus was content with a more normal friendship, in which he assumed the part of a mentor, encouraging Servatius to study."[17] Allen, who in later life was president of Corpus Christi College, may be drawing here on firsthand knowledge of Oxford male-male friendship and scholarship.[18]

Of course, fear of anachronism attaches relentlessly to contemporary words in common use like *gay* or *queer*. Scholars sometimes betray prudishness, and sometimes commit category errors. Prominent among them is what David M. Halperin has called a misreading of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976): that "before the modern era, sexual deviance could be predicated only of acts, not of persons or identities."[19] In a famous passage, Foucault appeared to endorse a view that the "homosexual" was a nineteenth-century invention.[20] Before homosexuality, Foucault declared, there existed "that utterly confused category" of sodomy, subject to near universal reticence.[21] Halperin argues that Foucault's complex arguments have been misunderstood, although he also strenuously resists reviving some kind of universalist category. Rather, Halperin carefully discriminates between Foucault's primary objective—the understanding of

[16] Langereis, 177.

[17] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:77; see also appendix 3.

[18] Trapp comments on "embarrassing disciplinary problems"; see Symonds; and, more sympathetically, Rutherford.

[19] Halperin, 1998, 95–96.

[20] "The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form": Foucault, 1:43.

[21] Foucault, 1:101.

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discursive and institutional practices—as against the history of private emotions. Foucault uncovered a paradox of discourses of homosexuality: it involved a panoply of symptoms of perversion but also the formation of a "reverse" discourse by which "homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf."[22]

In Erasmian studies, meanwhile, the problem is not so much confusion as euphemism. Albert Hyma, the first biographer since Merula to show interest in *The Youth of Erasmus* (1930), declared that he "indulged in a form of literature which cannot have failed to repulse the person to whom it was dedicated."[23] Circumspection or circumlocution has prevailed since. Among experts, everyone knows the letters (and the insinuations made about them), but few directly confront the issues they raise. Léon Halkin ascribed to Erasmus "entirely platonic friendship."[24] R. J. Schoeck in 1990 suspected stronger passions but digressed into a discussion of the art of letter-writing.[25] James D. Tracy in 1996 rejected "latent homosexuality."[26] These arguments are perhaps more indicative of twentieth-century attitudes to same-sex relations than anything specific to Erasmus. Bruce Mansfield, in a survey of Erasmian scholarship, places the heyday of "latent homosexuality" in psychoanalytic studies of the 1950s such as V. W. D. Shenk, who identified a dualism of aggressive and passive traits, and a tendency to narcissism.[27] Yvonne Charlier's *Érasme et l'amitié* (1977) probed Erasmus's hypersensitivity and emotionalism but steered clear of sex.[28]

Even after the epoch of queer studies, coyness holds the field. Cornelis Augustijn in 1986 described Erasmus and Servaas as "kindred spirits."[29] In 2021, William Barker claimed that "we cannot conclude from these letters to Servatius anything regarding the physical desires of the young Erasmus."[30] The most forthright judgments on the Erasmus-Servaas letters, however, have come from general historians. Turning to Erasmus after *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Johan Huizinga found in the letters "a young man of more than

[22] Foucault, 1:101.

[23] "Erasmus conceived for Servatius a curious fancy which is very puzzling, for if one takes the letters seriously which Erasmus addressed to Servatius, one must conclude that Erasmus was extremely neurotic at the time": Hyma, 160.

[24] "Of the kind that develops in resident communities, at the very time when the need to love was being awakened": Halkin, 8.

[25] "A motivating force in these poems and letters is the imitation of a well-understood tradition of monastic rhetoric in the writing of letters": Schoeck, 104.

[26] Tracy, 22.

[27] Mansfield, 192.

[28] Charlier, 184.

[29] Augustijn, 22.

[30] Barker, 39. He prefers, no doubt sensibly, the word *homosocial*.

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feminine sensitiveness," a "languishing need for sentimental friendship," even an "ardent lover."[31] In *Reformation*, Diarmaid MacCulloch goes further, arguing against "modern embarrassment and obfuscation" about Erasmus's homosexuality. Yet even he agrees with Huizinga that "Erasmus never again expresses himself so passionately," and resigned himself to being "more guarded in expressing his feelings."[32] In all this, it is not always clear who is the more "guarded," Erasmus or his commentators.

A whole range of questions about Erasmus's sexuality—or what he felt about sexuality in general—tend to be left *hors de discours*. It is ever Erasmus the moralist who predominates. In moving beyond this, it is first necessary to acknowledge a problem of sources. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* famously proceeds "from the point of view of a history of discourses."[33] Whatever the private feelings of any historical person such as Erasmus, Foucault eschews the term *sexuality* as such, examining instead the power structures and institutional discourses (such as "sodomy") constructed around it. As for the sexual acts Erasmus may or may not imply knowledge of, historical understanding relies for the most part on legal proceedings, which had their own inhibitions and anxieties. As for Erasmus's writing, it is (even in letters and whatever the subject) always literary, allusive, and figurative. Scholars inclined to deny the sexual resonances in his writing appeal to this indirection or silence as a kind of negative evidence. Yet the art of what is not said has a more troubled place in sexual history than in any other, as censorship shows us. "There is not one but many silences," says Foucault; "they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses."[34]

This kind of censorship applies especially to the borderline between sex and friendship. Friendship, Kathy Eden makes clear, is central to Erasmus's idea of literary tradition, which draws frequently and deeply from Plato's *Symposium*. The speeches of Phaedrus and Pausanias define male homoerotic relationships as philosophical, in that the male lover hands down knowledge to the beloved (an idea disputed by Socrates later in the dialogue).[35] In the very first of the adages, in all editions after 1508, Erasmus quotes Plato's Socrates to the effect that "among friends all possessions are in common."[36] This may be a reference

[31] "A young man of more than feminine sensitiveness; of a languishing need for sentimental friendship. In writing to Servatius, Erasmus runs the whole gamut of an ardent lover": Huizinga, 11.

[32] MacCulloch, 723.

[33] Foucault, 1:69.

[34] Foucault, 1:27.

[35] Eden, 2001, 41–42.

[36] Plato, 1980, 39 (*Symposium* 192d–e), cited in Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:29 (*Adagia* I.i.1); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.1:84.

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to the speech of Aristophanes in Plato in which he declares that lovers share an idea of knowledge held in common.[37] In doing so, Eden argues, Erasmus advocates a "community rooted in likemindedness."[38] In another adage Erasmus quotes Agathon, again from the *Symposium*: "For the old saying is right, that like always cleaves to like."[39] Erasmus in the process travels freely between different parts of the *Symposium*, yet in doing so he elides between a philosophy of friendship (based on like-mindedness) and sexual love (where opposites often attract).

R. R. Bolgar demonstrates that adjudicating unruly pagan desires (of the kind dramatized in Plato's text) within Christian morality was a major aim of both medieval and Renaissance humanism.[40] Erasmus's *De ratione studii* recognizes the problem in the first line of Virgil's Second Eclogue: "Corydon, the shepherd, was on fire for fair Alexis."[41] What was a teacher of rhetoric supposed to say? Erasmus turns the shepherd's ardent feelings for the good-looking boy into an obscure crux of method. A good teacher discerns that "friendship can exist only among likeminded people," since similarity is associated with good will, dissimilarity with hatred.[42] "God always brings like to like," he says, before digressing into an essay on how dissimilar Corydon and Alexis are: one is from the country, the other from the city, one's a shepherd, the other a courtier, one is unlearned and the other well read. Above all, Corydon is older and ugly, and Alexis young and handsome. If the teacher follows his advice, "I believe the minds of his audience will suffer no ill effects, unless someone comes to the work who is already corrupted."[43] Raising the question of possible Socratic corruption, Erasmus elegantly sidesteps it.

Anthony Grafton comments that "students, buried under a flood of adages and examples, would never suspect that Virgil had described a passion Christians could not acknowledge."[44] Yet Erasmus (*iam corruptus*) acknowledges the scruple he has allowed into open view. Moreover, teachers who read *De ratione studii* in the sixteenth century knew it, and no doubt students

[37] Plato, 1980, 39 (*Symposium* 192d–e). The commentaries in both *Opera omnia* and *Collected Works* assume that Erasmus is mistaken and attribute the saying to Diogenes Laertius, but *Symposium* 192e uses the crucial word κοινῇ (in common).

[38] Eden, 2001, 29.

[39] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:168 (*Adagia* I.ii.21; Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.1:240, citing Plato, *Symposium* 195b.

[40] Bolgar, 340.

[41] "Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexin": Virgil, 2013, 42 (*Eclogues* 2.1).

[42] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 24:685.

[43] "Nihil opinor turpe veniet in mentem auditoribus, nisi si quam iam corruptus accesserrit": Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 1.2:142; *Collected Works*, 24:687).

[44] Grafton, 38.

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smirked too. In drawing attention to an old and ugly pursuer of a passive, good-looking youth, Erasmus exposes one of the dark secrets of humanism. Reading Plato's *Symposium* involved negotiating homosexuality.[45] As Alan Stewart explains in *Close Readers* (1997), same-sex feeling is commonplace in humanist pedagogy, which for many centuries comprised "essentially relations between men."[46] If modern Erasmian scholarship generally makes homosexuality irrelevant to humanism, Stewart argues the opposite, particularly in relation to ancient literature, whether Plato, Virgil, Ovid, or Athenian and Roman comedy. After all, humanism, particularly in Italy, was commonly associated with Attic love.[47] Indeed, Florence (and sometimes Venice) became a byword among Northern Europeans for sexual perversion.[48] Angelo Poliziano was denounced for sodomy by the Florentine authorities.[49] Yet he persisted in writing homoerotic verse, such as in his expansion of the dangerous line in Virgil's Eclogue: "I am a boy, you exclaim, Corydon, and you compel me to agree. / But your beard tells against you: you are a man."[50] Gillian Adams speculates that the Florentine humanist's homoerotic inclinations infiltrated his educational material as well as his verse.[51]

Like humanist sexuality, monastic sexuality is rarely invoked in describing the relationship between Erasmus and the young monk. Before seeking to understand Erasmus's relationship to Servaas, it is necessary to explain the monastic culture framing it. The construction of the category of sodomy was institutionally founded in monasticism. The reforming Benedictine and rhetorician Peter Damian in his *Liber Gomorrhianus* (ca. 1050) codified sexual impurity as *scelus sodomiticum* (the sodomite crime).[52] On this basis he set out to purge ecclesiastical institutions, especially monasteries.[53] R. I. Moore brilliantly dubbed this "the formation of a persecuting society," embracing heresy alongside sodomy.[54] Indeed, Lyndal Roper calls sodomy a "catch-all" for illicit acts, from witchcraft to blasphemy, treason, ethnicity, and even leprosy.[55]

[45] Hankins, 1:80–81.

[46] Stewart, 1997, xx.

[47] Rocke, 42.

[48] MacCulloch, 625.

[49] Rocke, 198.

[50] "'Sum puer,' exclamas, Corydon, subigisque fateri. / In te reclamat sed tua barba: vir es": Poliziano, 182–83.

[51] The Medici Aesop, New York Public Library, Spencer MS 50, perhaps for the eight-year-old Lorenzo Medici. See Adams, 313.

[52] Damian, 1:319.

[53] Brundage, 313; Mills, 251.

[54] Moore, 10.

[55] Roper, 25.

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Yet more than shapeshifting terms of obloquy, heresy and same-sex acts shared meanings. If it is a cliché that English *buggery* derives from the gnostic Bogomils, it is less well known that German *Ketzer* (heretic) derives from Cathari—also dualists, associated with the para-heresy of Manicheism. As Helmut Puff shows in a brilliant study of *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland* (2003), *ketzerei* and cognate terms became cant words for anal sex.[56] Sodomy and heresy are thus unavoidable twins when it comes to monastic sex.

In his *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas offered a systematic account of male sexual behavior, placing *vitia contra naturam* (vices against nature) between masturbation, incest, and adultery in order of sinfulness. Bestiality is the worst, with *vitium sodomiticum* (the sodomite vice) next in line.[57] Increasingly, social control of sexuality in monastic institutions spread into secular government. In 1432, Florence created an official magistrate for sodomy, paying special attention to students and convents.[58] In Lucca, an Office of Decency policed cases of men being attracted to other men.[59] Further north, as towns and cities in the German empire and the Duchy of Burgundy grew in population and wealth, so did social discipline. Secular powers took increasingly violent interest in sodomy, which, like heresy, carried a maximum penalty of death by fire. The first trial in Regensburg for *keczerey* between men or involving men and boys (*man und knaben*) took place in 1456; four men were executed in 1471.[60] In 1464 in Constance, a friar and a burgher were prosecuted for *vnchristenlich* acts.[61] In the Low Countries the term for heretic was *ketter*, and a verb for sexual acts was *ketsen*.[62] In Brussels, twenty-six sodomites were executed across the fifteenth century, while in Bruges, one of Europe's largest cities, sodomy was condemned more frequently between 1490 and 1515 than homicide.[63]

Theology provided the context for bans on specific same-sex acts. This centered on Paul's phrase *passiones ignominiae* (dishonorable passions).[64] The church provided expertise and terminology, yet prudishness and fear of vice led to a curious mixture of rigor and generality. The law required detail for

[56] Puff, 23.
[57] Aquinas, 1968, 248 (*Summa theologiae* 154.12.4, 1ª–2ªe).
[58] Brundage, 533.
[59] Grassi.
[60] Puff, 24.
[61] Puff, 24.
[62] Noordam, 26.
[63] Boone.
[64] Romans 1:26–27 (Vulgate).

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depositions, so that accounts of mutual masturbation and anal penetration feature in legal records (oral sex not so often). The key to prosecution was ejaculation. If the technical language was vague, Helmut Puff argues against assuming that the idea of the "unnameable" be taken literally.[65] On the contrary, it has a meaning of its own, as in the deposition *nominandum* (to be named), implying it could be filled in later. Likewise Aquinas, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, argued that *Luxuria* is unnameable, so that "it will be set aside."[66] This is an example of the rhetorical code of *praeteritio*: calling attention to something by seeming to disregard it. Sodomy is the "mute sin," with William of Auvergne glossing Saint Paul's *ignominia* as *non dignum nomine* (not worthy of a name).[67] In doing so, he gave it a name, cited again and again in the records.

"Simply knowing the protocols does not tell us how people behaved," John J. Winkler notes when discussing sexual prescriptions in ancient Athens; the same applies to late medieval monasticism.[68] Same-sex acts seem to have been far more common than anyone cared to acknowledge, still less prosecute.[69] Not naming could become a policy of "don't ask, don't tell," especially among clergy and in monasteries.[70] Indeed, Dyan Elliott argues that silence on the topic in monastic records is more likely to be a sign that it is taken for granted than nonexistent. Unlike priestly marriage or concubinage (to be policed with care or ostentatious piety), she explains, it is a "licit scandal."[71] Sex between monks, or priests and choirboys, is by contrast unnameable: it is "a sin not fit to be named" ("scelus quod nec nominari decet").[72] One paradoxical consequence is that confession became practically difficult, prone to protocols of silence. The Rule of Saint Augustine (as, later, the Rule of Saint Benedict) provided for the sin to be confessed only by participants and punished privately by abbot or prior. In this way it remained a secret sin even within the community. Another paradoxical consequence was that sex between men (as opposed to between a priest and a woman) was comparatively tolerated as the lesser sin.[73]

Returning to Erasmus, it is notable that he was not only a priest but the son of a priestly concubinage. Before becoming a monk, he was a choirboy in Utrecht and a pupil in schools run by the Brothers of the Common Life in

[65] Puff, 62.

[66] "Sed quia luxuria contra naturam innominabilis est, relinquatur": Aquinas, 1929–47, vol. 1 (*In IV Sententiarum* d. 41, 1.4.2).

[67] William of Auvergne, 2:222.

[68] Winkler, 45.

[69] Mills, 241.

[70] Puff, 66.

[71] Elliott, 2021, 84.

[72] Elliott, 2021, 115.

[73] Elliott, 2020, 49–50.

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Deventer and Den Bosch. Schoolmasters (not necessarily Brothers) oversaw education in Latin, while the boys lived in *bursae*, hostels supervised by a tonsured *procurator*.[74] Erasmus recalled sharing a room at Deventer with Cornelis of Woerden.[75] Regulation emphasized piety and humility, while also always specifying actions to avoid: these included anger and envy, intimate touching, telling lies, sharing beds.[76] Having made his vows as an Augustinian canon regular, Erasmus spent the second half of his life denying their validity. In the celebrated letter to the pseudonymous Grunnius, he dismissed the Brothers as recruiters for the Franciscans and Dominicans, using the threat of corporal punishments to *cicurare* (tame or groom) boys for the religious life.[77] In the letter, Erasmus calls himself Florentius, which has literary associations but also sexual ones, given that, as noted earlier, Florence was a byword for sexual irregularities. When Erasmus later refers to Dominicans as *paedicatores*, Allen calls what might be a good joke a mere typographical slip.[78] Whether a joke or Freudian slip, it suggests humorous awareness of the pervasive presence of same-sex desire in the religious institutions of the time.

Erasmus lived in institutions where a language of sexual prohibition was pervasive, and yet scandal was prone to inhibition and suppression. Schools and monasteries warned males constantly of the dangers of contact yet hesitated to prosecute for fear of disgracing the institution, leading to innuendo and insinuation. "We must live in charity with all men, but familiarity with them is not desirable," wrote Thomas of Kempen of the Brethren in his devotional classic, the *Imitatio Christi*.[79] Indeed, Jacob de Voecht in his advice to the Brothers of Zwolle warned against close friendships within the community, since such familiarity led observers to infer carnal relationships.[80] Thus in place

[74] Engen, 145–46.

[75] Schoeck, 48.

[76] Engen, 152–53.

[77] Epistle 447 to Lambertus Grunnius; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 2:295. The addressee as well as the dramatis personae of the letter are pseudonymous.

[78] Epistle 1033 to Albert of Brandenburg, a letter printed several times. The reading varies between *praedicatores* (preachers), and *paedicatores* (buggers). In P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 4:106, the reference is buried in the apparatus, but the slip is much more likely the other way round. For good measure, the reference comes in a passage on heresy and name-calling.

[79] "Caritas habenda est omnes: sed familiaritas non expedit": Thomas of Kempen, 2:15–16 (*De imitatione Christi* 1.8).

[80] "Expedit etiam vitare singulares continuas familiaritates vel personarum acceptationes, quae interdum suspicione carnalis affectionis non carent [It is also advisable to avoid certain kinds of sustained friendships or favors towards individuals, which are open to the suspicion of carnal affection]": de Voecht, 1908, 265. See Bainton, 18.

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of violent—and scandalous—intervention by secular courts, the Brothers operated a *forum internum* of confession and anxiety. A teacher should always be present to prevent boys becoming close; lurking behind this lay the fear of unspeakable contact between teacher and pupil. "Whenever a man desires anything inordinately, at once he becomes restless," wrote Thomas of Kempen. "Yet, if he obtains what he desires, his conscience is at once stricken by remorse, because he has yielded to his passion, which in no way helps him in his search for peace."[81] Later, he states that it is impossible to live happily without a friend. The only solution is to love Jesus in the friend: "The love of a friend must be placed in me; and for my sake you must love anyone who seems good to you." In this way, "you must be dead to these feelings towards the beloved man."[82]

Erasmus lived his life in a culture alternating between censorship and euphemism. This went beyond the personal. Precisely because the sin was secret, expertise in its practice (both humanist and theological) was fetishized, exposing the experts to risk of condemnation. As a theologian, Erasmus took part in the professional regulation of human passion. As a humanist philologist committed to Greek scholarship, he negotiated between Christian and pagan ethical and erotic values. Humanists were called upon to provide specialist knowledge in trials or on other occasions. When in 1579 a minister in Bern was unsure of the physical details in a same-sex case, he wrote to a humanist for assistance in philology.[83] However, humanist educators were not immune to danger when arbitrating on sexual propriety. A humanist confederate of Erasmus, Jacob Wimpfeling, found himself accused in 1506 of degrading male pupils.[84] Theology and humanism were linguistic bedfellows in this enumeration of sexual acts: *bübenketzer* was cant for sex with boys.[85] The German verb *florenzen*, another synonym-cum-euphemism for anal sex, reminded Germans of the dangers of humanist Italian cities.[86] In this way, Erasmus is doubly implicated, since philological expertise was surrounded by the innuendo that grammarians were sodomites.

[81] "Quandocumque homo aliquid inordinate appetit: statim in se inquietus fit . . . . Si autem prosecutus fuerit quod concupiscit; statim ex reatu conscientiae gravatur, quia secutus est passionem suam: quae nihil iuvat ad pacem quam quaesivit": Thomas of Kempen, 2:13–14 (*De imitatione Christi* 1.6).

[82] "In me debet amici dilectio stare; et propter me diligendus est quisquis tibi bonus visus est . . . . Ita mortuus debes esse talibus affectionibus dilectorum homino": Thomas of Kempen, 2:219 (*De imitatione Christi* 3.42).

[83] Puff, 75.

[84] Puff, 130.

[85] Puff, 69.

[86] Puff, 116–17, among many citations.

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Ancient Greek was a treasury of forbidden knowledge about relations between male lovers, one older, active, or dominant (*erastēs*); and one younger, passive, or subordinate (*erōmenos*).[87] Physical love is taken for granted, within a philosophical and literary framework based on metaphors of domination and concession, pursuit and flight, courtship and copulation.[88] Yet for the Greeks, subordination through being anally penetrated was problematic alongside the concept of male citizenry.[89] Greek homosexuality was complex: though Socrates was charged with promoting same-sex relations, he is made by Plato to argue for suppression of physical eros in favor of a "heavenly love."[90] Roman society, while explicitly promoting a culture of virile manliness and a sacred cult of marriage, thrived on a half-hidden subculture of male same-sex activity expressed in the polyamorous poetry of Catullus and Ovid.[91] Orpheus in *Metamorphoses* forswears love for women: "He was the inventor of love for boys" ("fuit auctor amorem") in the first flower of youth.[92] *Praeteritio*—calling attention to a subject by not naming it—featured in Latin treatment of the question long before Aquinas. Cicero in the *Second Philippic*, for example, employed it to delineate Mark Antony's corruption.[93] "Sed iam stupra et flagitia omittamus," he says: "let us now pass over both offence and disgrace."[94] He does not identify Antony's vices explicitly, because everyone knows what they are. His language both hides them and draws attention to them by inference, with *stuprum* used to imply pederasty or oral sex, which Antony and Curio were notorious for enjoying. Here, too, speech cannot name what is left unsaid: "I cannot decently speak of them" ("honeste non possum dicere"). Cicero implies that these offenses of the mouth are particularly grave because the mouth is both the organ of the oath of office and the guardian of the truthfulness of oratory.

The unsaid looms large in historical studies of queer sexuality. Queer studies has moved a long way since Alan Bray's groundbreaking *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982).[95] Since the 2000s, it favors what Halperin calls

[87] Dover, 16.

[88] Dover, 101–09.

[89] Dover, 193.

[90] The term is first used in *Symposium* in the speech of Pausanias (181c), and then several times afterwards: "ὁ καλός, ὁ οὐράνιος, ὁ τῆς Οὐρανίας μούσης Ἔρως [the beautiful love, the heavenly one, the love which comes from the heavenly muse]": Plato, 1980, 27 (*Symposium* 187e).

[91] Williams, 8.

[92] Ovid, 1977, 232 (*Metamorphoses* 10.83).

[93] Gildenhard, 168.

[94] Cicero, 1894–98, 3:390 (*Philippics* 2.47.19). *Stuprum* refers to "the violation of the sexual integrity of freeborn Romans": Williams, 99.

[95] Bray, 1982, 10–11.

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"a heterogeneity of queer identities, past and present."[96] Yet in this discussion Erasmus has strangely been left behind. Queer historians such as Jonathan Goldberg cite him only as an authority for reading Virgil's Second Eclogue.[97] Sexuality appears as a phase, something that happens in cloisters and universities before people grow up.[98] Against this silent orthodoxy—or orthodox silencing—this essay addresses a number of related questions. It broaches the use of letters as life writing yet rejects the isolated treatment of the letters to Servaas. Following Stewart's argument, I suggest embracing the concept of Renaissance *amicitia* not to efface sexuality but to codify it.[99] Beyond biography, this study looks at evidence in the adages and elsewhere for Erasmus's interest in sex and sexual pleasure, especially of a same-sex kind. Yet it cannot be expected that this interest is out in the open. Indirection is inevitably in play within Erasmus's discussion of sex within monasteries or education, just as it is in theology of the period. The major effort in this essay, then, is to take the story of sexuality in Erasmus beyond the limits of the early encounter with Servaas, and into a more varied and fine-textured textual world. Most elusively, it proposes the existence in Erasmus of a private coterie language of sex.

SERVAAS AND LIFE WRITING IN THE *VITA ERASMI*: YOUNG DESIDERIUS

Whatever scruples Erasmian scholarship has shown over the letters to Servaas, any doubts about their authenticity were dismissed by Allen in his survey of principal editions of the letters of Erasmus in 1906. Along with other letters attributed by Merula to the period at Steyn, Allen surmises they belonged to an early autograph letter-book.[100] In a first flirtation with collecting his own letters, Erasmus asked Franciscus Theodericus to look for letters in Gouda, of which there survived *multas* (many) to Cornelis Gerard, *plurimas* (more) to Willem Hermans, and *nonnullas* (a few) to Servaas.[101] From these, Erasmus says, "I have a plan to publish a single volume of letters."[102] This letter, also in Merula's *Vita Erasmi*, confirms that these are his principal early correspondents. All three were

[96] Halperin, 2002, 16.

[97] Goldberg, 1992, 66–67.

[98] Halkin, 8.

[99] Stewart, 1997, 153–54.

[100] Perhaps one Erasmus requested from London in 1505; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:597. This Gouda letter-book, if it ever existed, is long since lost.

[101] Epistle 186; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:415. The letter appears in Merula, 201.

[102] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:100.

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Augustinian canons.[103] The publication in 1607 in a *vita* is therefore significant for a second reason, marking the gradual transformation of the letters of Erasmus from an authorial literary collection to a sourcebook for a life. As for chronology, this had to await Le Clerc in his collected works of Erasmus begun in 1703. The extent to which Allen directed all subsequent uses of the *Opus epistolarum* to see them as quasi-biographical documents cannot be overestimated.[104] As for Erasmus, his first experiment in publishing letters was apologetic, as a way of justifying the *Praise of Folly*.[105] Only in *Farrago* (1519) is all pretense dropped, as Erasmus begins the lifelong task of presenting collections on the classical model of the *Epistolae familiares* of Cicero.[106]

Erasmus, therefore, was establishing a genre of letter-writing, rather than seeking to recreate his life. He included very few letters from his earliest friends, whether in the Netherlands, or in his Paris period, or during his first visits to England. *Farrago* nonetheless contains almost all the letters before 1514 printed in his lifetime. To these Erasmus often assigned a date, a majority of which prove wrong. Allen puts this down to faulty memory.[107] Perhaps, although Erasmus is good at remembering things when he wants to. Since the order of letters even when dated is not chronological, it appears he wanted to present not a narrative life but an example of *elegantia*, or literature. Even in the *Opus epistolarum* of 1529, when friends urged him to arrange letters in order of time, or by subject, he refused. It would ruin the impression he wanted to convey of life's variety. Nonetheless, Erasmus seems positively indifferent to his youth. Only two letters dated by Allen to the monastic period—epistles 26 and 29, both to Cornelis Gerard—appeared in print during his lifetime.[108]

When scholars classify the letters to Servaas as essentially literary they create a double bluff, because all letters by Erasmus are literary in some sense. Treating letters as "life writing" in this context is inherently problematic. Of course, they

[103] Merula found half a dozen letters to Gerard but only two to Hermans; of these, the second is the only letter Merula uncovered from Erasmus's Paris period. See P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:216.

[104] Jardine, 153–56.

[105] Erasmus, 1515.

[106] See Eden, 2012. The "Catalogus" in *Farrago* (presented on the title page verso) delineates a list of *familiares*, beginning with Erasmus and Guillaume Budé, down through William Blount, Willibald Pirckheimer, John Colet, Fausto Andrelini, Philipp Melanchthon, Thomas More, Andrea Ammonio, William Warham, Pieter Gillis, Jacob Batt, and others: Erasmus, 1519, sig. p1^{v}.

[107] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:595.

[108] They first occurred in *Farrago* in 1519, and again in *Epistolae ad diversos* in 1521, this time with the unusual epigraph "scripsit puer [written as a boy]." From here, they became epistles 1 and 2 in Le Clerc as the earliest he felt secure in dating; Le Clerc, 1703–06, 3.1–2.

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are invaluable in reconstructing the biography of Erasmus. Allen's indefatigable detective work confirms that much of what they contain indeed happened, in some order, although once or twice Allen puts Erasmus in two places at once as a result. More beguiling, though, is the sense conveyed by Allen that the letters record verbatim what Erasmus originally wrote at the date Allen provides. Allen largely leaves unsaid what must be a reasonable inference—that Erasmus revised or embellished for publication, or even, in some cases, made a letter up. This question awaits a different context for full consideration, but it is important to remember that it is Merula in 1607, not Erasmus in his lifetime, who desires a *vita Erasmi*.

In the most recent biography, *Erasmus: Dwarsdenker* (2021), Sandra Langereis takes Allen's chronology of the early letters at face value. However, Merula's *Vita* scatters the letters to Servaas through his second volume, in quite a different order from Allen's. This order is repeated in the 1642 London *Opus epistolarum*, which includes the new letters, where they are placed in book 31 (the last).[109] Le Clerc in 1703–06 placed them in the same order, but for the first time grouped them together, along with three new letters to Servaas, never published before. Presented with a plethora of new sources, Le Clerc found them impossible to date. In spring 1705 (the edition already in press), the enterprising publisher Pieter van der Aa obtained two other manuscripts: one now in the Athenaeum Library in Deventer, and a second derived (Allen speculates) from a letter-book "belonging originally" to Hermans.[110] This hodgepodge of *epistolae ineditae* hid the Servaas letters in plain view as a scattered corpus within the corpus.

Everything hinges on language. When Erasmus calls Servaas "my one hope, the half of my soul, the consolation of my life," the question is about language as much as who did what.[111] He addresses Franciscus, another Augustinian monk at Sion, also as "half my soul" ("animae dimidium meae").[112] To Gerard he writes that he has mistaken a poem by his boyhood friend Willem Hermans as one of his own, but this is said to be hardly surprising since Willem is his own

[109] Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, 1642, beginning at 1970 (epistle 15 in P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod). Allen's epistle 4, the first of the Servaas letters in his edition, appears ten pages later in *Opus epistolarum*, 1642, 1980.

[110] Le Clerc, 1705, 238. Jean de la Faye edited the Deventer letter-book for Le Clerc, including letters to More, Colet, Ammonio, and many others; see P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, appendix 8, 1:603–09. Allen's speculation on the origin of the second letter-book is based on the inclusion among them of two letters from Hermans to Servaas (1:608).

[111] "Tu vna spes, tu animae dimidium, tu vitae solatium": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:9 (epistle 728); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:80.

[112] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:19 (epistle 14.16); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:88.

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alter ego.[113] Writing a little later to Jan Mombaer, another Augustinian canon at Windesheim, Erasmus wonders if Jan might become another Willem for him, since, like Hermans, he is "the other part/half of my soul" ("altera pars animae meae").[114] If the phrase is an Augustinian commonplace, it is employed in a professional circumstance thirty years later. When Simon Grynaeus visited England just after Erasmus wrote a preface for Grynaeus's edition of Aristotle, Erasmus called him "half of my soul" ("dimidium animae meae").[115] What is striking about the Servaas letters is not so much their individual love phrases as their artlessness, which may be the reason he did not publish them. Biographers like Langereis analyze the letters against an assumed life-content; Erasmus ignores life for literary liveliness.

The question is not, as Stewart argues so skillfully, that individual words denote proof of a sexual relationship, but that the language of friendship and of sex are on the same spectrum. In epistle 7, Erasmus asks Servaas if he alone will not be moved by a lover's remonstrances "or softened by a lover's tears."[116] The phrase echoes Dido's tears in the Aeneid, thus subliminally raising the question of effeminacy.[117] However, the Latin word *molles* was also habitually used in monasteries to designate a passive role in same-sex relations; or else masturbation, as in the vision of fornication described by the Augustinian canon Peter of Cornwall.[118] Effeminacy is a social code that can switch between opprobrium and fantasy; indeed, the same sentence can describe attraction and self-mortification. "Can your nature be like that of a young girl so that my torments yield you pleasure?" Erasmus goes on.[119] Servaas is always forgetting Erasmus—"for I will speak more softly" ("loquar enim mollius"), he complains in epistle 13.[120] The language of *mollis* crosses readily into contexts that could be nonsexual, where it remains ambiguous what is being referred to. In the letter to Gerard where his own poetry is mistaken for Willem's "Ode to Saint Bavo," Erasmus writes that Cornelis might think he and Willem are one soul in two

[113] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:51 (epistle 28.5); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:118.

[114] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:108 (epistle 52.26); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:167.

[115] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 18:155 (epistle 2535); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 9:341.

[116] "Vel amantis emolliunt lachrimae?": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:8 (epistle 7.19); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:79.

[117] "Nec lachrimas victus dedit, aut miseratus amantem est [Did he yield and shed tears or take pity on her who loved him?]": Virgil, 1920, 182 (*Aeneid* 4:370).

[118] Elliott, 2020, 114.

[119] "An forte eo ingenio es, quo pertinaces esse puellae solent, vt voluptati tibi sit cruciatus meus": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:9 (epistle 7.17); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:80.

[120] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:17 (epistle 13.26); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:86.

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bodies ("vnum animum duobus inesse corporibus").[121] Deflecting the sexual connotation, well known from Plato's *Symposium* as well as the Christian marriage service, he avows that in the future he will "write nothing which does not breathe the atmosphere either of praise of holy men or of holiness itself."[122] Yet at the same time he hopes Gerard will enjoy hearing in his songs something softer ("the song will seem to sound softer at the same time")—poems that (the Toronto translation euphemistically renders) might seem "more self-indulgent than is proper."[123]

Erasmus and his fellow monks exchange poems, and sweet nothings, and perhaps other things. Cornelis is apparently older than Erasmus, perhaps an uncle of Willem, who is almost exactly Erasmus's age and was confessedly his companion from youth before they joined the monastery together. Servaas is younger, someone to whom Erasmus plays tutor, as Cornelis played tutor to him. In a later letter to Willem from Paris in 1498, Erasmus addresses him with "Salve mea vnica voluptas," which the Toronto translation gives prudishly as "my only joy."[124] Erasmus says he has a letter from a friend who has opened his heart to him; he does not praise literary pursuits, saying many disapprove of them. "He complains a great deal," Erasmus goes on, although "it does seem that he is fond of me." This is the language of young male friends—gossipy, flirty, bitchy, jealous, warm and cool by turns. Erasmus is staying, he confides, in the company of two gentlemen, at the house of "a very civilized English nobleman." This may be William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, then in the process of becoming Erasmus's lifelong patron. "Give him an account," Erasmus encourages Willem, "of the pleasure that literature affords." Again the word is *voluptas*—a term that, like Roland Barthes's *jouissance* in *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), slides easily between the sexual and the textual. In their schools, monks learned from Ovid's *Heroides* from an early age, even as choirboys. From there, they graduated to the poems Erasmus tells Servaas to read in his role as quasi-tutor, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to *Ars amatoria*, or from Horace's to Catullus's *Carmina*. "Extol the combination of scholarship and morality," Erasmus continues, in an enigmatic tone that may be mock seriousness, or a serious in-joke.

While biographers regularly return to the singular case of Servaas, there are two other times, explicitly if still covertly, where a dangerous crossover between friendship and "sodomy" leaves its trace. Both letters appear in *Farrago*: perhaps

[121] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:51 (epistle 28.7); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:118.

[122] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:51 (epistle 28); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:118.

[123] "Carminum aequo mollius sonare videbitur": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:51 (epistle 28.11); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:118.

[124] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:163 (epistle 81.1); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:212.

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by 1519 Erasmus trusted himself to kick over his own traces, although Allen at least is alert to the letters' connotations, even if others choose to set them aside.[125] The first is a letter to a young English pupil, Thomas Grey (epistle 58). Erasmus addresses Grey as *adolescens generosissime* (a very generous youth), saying "fortune has never deprived me, nor ever shall, of my love for you."[126] He represents Grey's guardian as mixing circumspect obscurantism with outright hatred. He is a *senex fucatissimus*, a satyr who nonetheless deprives others of pleasure. His only motive is envy, Erasmus adds. He is a braggart soldier, a Cerberus, who uses religion to hide his filthy desires. Yet he won't succeed in parting the pair, who live together in literature if now in separate houses. Erasmus ends with a eulogy of his beautiful friend, "very dear Pirithous" ("Pirithoum charissimum") to his Theseus, for whom he feels *desyderium* (longing/desire).[127] Within a few years this curious Latin word, meaning something between desire and longing, became an invented praenomen for Erasmus himself: Desiderius.

A year later in Paris, Erasmus seems to be worried about a similar inference about his relationship with Jacob Batt: "I will not allow that you are more ardently affectionate to me than I to you, but I am firmly of the opinion that the warmth of our affection should not become too heated."[128] Is this a note of caution or self-censorship? *Flagres* and *caleat* mingle with a language of sodomy, while *desyderio* marks the Erasmian limits of friendship.[129] They need to be careful what they say to each other. This is, to paraphrase Foucault, one of the many forms of Erasmian silence, which permeate his ways of formulating emotional or passionate discourse. In another letter, he writes that they must watch out in case people take the wrong meaning from how close they are. Despite this, the florid exchange of letters still blossoms. As ever when he is deflecting the question of sex, Erasmus accuses his friends of not attending enough to literature: "Indeed, I am not sure whether you even take pleasure in literature anymore. You take my meaning," Erasmus assures his confidant

[125] "In the early part of 1497 he was engaged in teaching two Englishmen, Thomas Grey and Robert Fisher (epistle 62), who were living in the same house with him under the care of a Scotch guardian. After a time the guardian seems to have grown suspicious of Erasmus's feelings towards Grey (there is some resemblance in tone [with] the letters to Servatius)": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:174.

[126] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:116 (epistle 58.1–4); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:175.

[127] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:179.

[128] "Non tibi concedam vt tu magis nostriquam ego tui desyderio flagres. Sed etiam atque etiam videndum censeo ne nimium hoc caleat modo": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:161 (epistle 80); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:210.

[129] For sexual associations of these words with *mollis*, see Horace, 1985 (*Epodes* 5.81) and Martial, 2:225 (*Epigrams* 8.77).

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Batt.[130] The Toronto editor laments that the meaning is still not clear, although surely it is easy enough to take the hint.

ERASMUS, SERVAAS, AND SAINT AUGUSTINE: SODOMY AND *AMICITIA*

There is another letter from Erasmus to Servaas that, unlike all the others, was published in his lifetime. However, it is not in *Farrago* or any other letter collection by Erasmus, but appears on its own in four quarto leaves with the title *Erasmi Roterodami Epistola qua se excusat cur mutarit monasticam vitam, item habitum* (A letter of Erasmus of Rotterdam in which he excuses himself for abandoning the monastic life, as also the habit). There are at least two printings (with no mark of printer or date) of this defense of the renunciation of his vows and habit, as well as a posthumous one, in the year of Erasmus's death in Ghent.[131] This last version contains some passages and words in Greek, in an effort to stave off offense. Augustinus Steuchius read the letter and called it a scandal on account of its calumnies against the Augustinian vows.[132] Erasmus denied the slur in a letter to the Mejía brothers in 1533.[133] Erasmus, while disowning the publication, clearly recognizes this letter as his own. Petrus Scriverius sensitively described its style as *nervosa* (nervous) and captures Erasmus's later embarrassment at it.[134] Merula in 1607, the London edition of 1642, and Le Clerc in 1703–06 all print the version with the Greek additions. A Dutch translation was also printed in 1628 and reprinted three times up to 1651.[135] Yet there exist also two manuscripts, neither with the Greek: one from a miscellaneous selection of Erasmian speeches and letters in a sixteenth-century hand now in Deventer; the other in a large composite manuscript now in Brussels Royal Library in the hand of Maarten Lips (Lypsius), a notable fellow Augustinian and long-term collaborator.[136]

[130] "Et haud scio an etiam delectent iam te literae; quandoquidem in nouum amoris genus incidisti, in quo blandimenta desyderium foueant, nec copia tamen vt in caeteris fastidium adducat. Scis quid dicam": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 1:270 (epistle 129); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:299.

[131] "Rationem fere totius vitae eius continens [Containing an account of almost his whole life]": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:564.

[132] Epistle 2513; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 9:199.

[133] Epistle 2892; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 10:336.

[134] Erasmus, 1642, fol. A4^{v}.

[135] Erasmus, 1628.

[136] Athenaeumbibliotheek, MS 101 F 20 KL, fols. 9^{r}-12^{r}; Bibliothèque Royale (BR), MSS 4850–57, fols. 143^{r}–146^{v}. Allen makes the former the copy-text, but the latter surely takes scholarly priority.

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Fragmentary and equivocal though it is, the letter could be called an embryonic *Confessions of Erasmus*. Lypsius describes it as communicated mysteriously under oath by Erasmus to the bishop's chaplain and transcribed *ex noctu*.[137] Towards the end, Erasmus declares, "I have now told you the whole story of how I live and the principles on which I act."[138] For long years after his departure from the monastery at Steyn in 1493, there were no letters from Erasmus to Servaas until 1505–06, when Servaas, who was by now prior of their old convent, received news in letters posted by Erasmus from London, Florence, and Bologna. These, too, first appeared in *Vita Erasmi*.[139] Eight more years passed before a final, crucial letter arrived posted to Servaas by Erasmus from Hammes Castle near Calais.[140] Servaas had suggested (in a letter now lost) that it was time to return home and settle down.[141] Erasmus replies that he is a traveler like Solon, Pythagoras, and Plato; or like Saint Paul or Jerome, who would turn up now in Rome, now in Syria, now in Antioch. Erasmus acknowledges that he does not deserve to be compared with them, but boasts in any case of having friends like the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Dean of St. Paul's.

Unasked, Erasmus then regales Servaas with a list of publications: *Enchiridion*, *Adagiorum opus*, *Copia*, and editions of Jerome and the New Testament. He reminds Servaas of his erudition in the Greek language and in manuscripts. Then he returns, as if to an itch that cannot be scratched, to the question of his choice of garb: the black gown with white scapular. What began as a habit has ended as an extra skin.[142] Nonetheless, he concludes, he does not long for home. What would he do in Holland, where he has not lived for decades? At present he is heading for Basel; afterwards he might go to Rome. Perhaps on the way back he could see Servaas, as it is better to confide in person. Details in letters, he warns his prior, can get into the wrong hands. He laments

[137] BR, MSS 4850–57, fol. 143^{r}.

[138] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:302 (epistle 296); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:572.

[139] Epistles 185 and 189, from London, dated by Allen to 1505 and April 1506 respectively; epistle 200 from Florence and epistle 203 from Bologna, both dated by Allen to November 1506. They appear in a quite different order in the *Vita Erasmi*: 204, 202, 206, 207. See Merula, 1607.

[140] The letter is dated confidently by Allen to July 1514, the date given in Lypsius. The latter's transcription is undated, but seems likely to have been written in 1518.

[141] No letters survive under Servaas's authorship in the Erasmian corpus. One letter from Willem Hermans to Servaas is printed in *Vita Erasmi* and another in the appendix in Le Clerc, 1703–06, vol. 3.2 (epistles 92 and 142).

[142] De Molen, 439–40, discusses Erasmus's continued use of the white scapular until 1506. Even after this, while abandoning the scapular, he kept the gown, the distinctive habit in surviving portraits.

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the passing of old friends from the monastery—Willem and Franciscus and Andrew—and greets the few that remain. He concludes: "Farewell, once my sweetest companion and now my reverend Father."[143]

It is a letter that says too much and too little, brimming with intimacy yet holding much in reserve. It digresses into a summary of his life, and ends with a premonition of death, yet the weight of the letter lies at the beginning. Here, confession feels already belated. By the time he comes to the point, he has avoided it. Your letter only arrived after I left England, Erasmus confides: "it gave me extraordinary pleasure [*voluptatem incredibilem*]" (again relying on that voluptuous word *voluptas*). It is a word he soon repeats in another context. His reply is brief since he is traveling, yet this is by far the longest letter he has ever written to Servaas. Erasmus by now is approaching fifty years of age. His "youthful passions" ("iuveniliter sensi") are long gone, "checked by advancing age and experience."[144] Now begins an *apologia pro vita monastica*. For, despite leaving the cloister twenty years since, he says he has given up neither its lifestyle nor mode of dress. This is not because they suit him, but so as not to give offense. This genre of self-censorship dominates the letter.[145] It should not escape notice that *scandalum* is a word used inside monasteries for offenses, including sexual, that a monk might need to report; and that Servaas, as prior, is still the proper confessor to whom Erasmus technically owes obedience. The letter is thus a confession within a confession.

His narration of his early life and profession of vows consistently turns him into a victim of circumstance, his parents dying or guardians interfering. The monastery acted against nature, in the coercion of habit, celibacy, fasting. He was constantly awakened by the divine offices of prayer; then, when allowed, could not sleep. In this he was deprived of the one freedom he craved: "My mind was attracted solely to literature, which is not practised in your community." Liberty and necessity are his big themes, enforced by a sense of the voluntary servitude and compulsive fetishism of life within a monastery. This triggers an astonishing analysis of happiness (*foelicitas*) in relation to custom (*consuetudinis*). The profession, he claims, "was utterly repugnant to my mind and body alike."[146] He could bear neither the regulation prescribed by ritual

[143] "Bene vale, quondam sodalis suauissime, nunc pater obseruande": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:303 (epistle 296); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:573. As De Molen, 437, pointed out, Erasmus continued to be an Augustinian canon even though he was not resident; in this sense, by no means technical, Servaas is still his formal religious superior.

[144] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:294 (epistle 296.9); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:565.

[145] "Sed ne cui scandalo essem [yet indeed that I should not offend anyone]": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:294 (epistle 296.9); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:565.

[146] "Itaque cum intelligerem me nequaquam esse idoneum isti generi vitae, et coactum non sponte suscepisse, tamen quia receptum est publica nostri seculi opinione piaculum esse a semel

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order nor the hardships forced upon his body. It was a bodily regimen for which no amount of training or probation could prepare him, with his sensitive nature and bookish temperament. Indeed, literature both provoked pleasure and incited inhibition. It is this aspect his editor Lypsius emphasizes in the arguments he places at the head of the letters in his manuscript, creating a dialogue between Erasmus and himself about vows of prohibition.[147]

Now Erasmus reaches the part of his narrative most personal to himself and Servaas:

> As for my books, I do not boast of them. Possibly you despise them. But there are many who will testify that reading them has made them not only better educated, but better men. A craving for money I have never felt, nor am I in the least moved by the glitter of fame. I have never been a slave to pleasures, though I was once inclined to them. Drunkenness and debauchery have always revolted me, and I have avoided them.[148]

What is he confessing, repressing, or displacing, in these vexed phrases, forced from him yet potentially concealing scandal? The passage is bolted together by negatives (*Nihil . . . non . . . nunquam . . . nec . . . nunquam*), in a bravura display of *praeteritio* or *apophasis*—drawing attention to something by denying it. This is truest when Erasmus asks whether he has been slave to

suscepto vitae genere desciscere, decreueram et hanc infoelicitatis meae partem fortiter perpeti. Scis enim me multis in rebus infortunatum esse [Thus when I fully grasped that I was totally unsuited to your way of living and had been obliged to embrace it against my will, yet because nowadays it is by popular convention regarded as disgraceful to abandon a profession once one has adopted it, I decided to bear with courage this part of my unhappiness also]": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:565; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:295.

[147] BR, MSS 4850–57, fols. 146^{v}–150^{v}, immediately after Erasmus's letter to Servaas. These letters are presented in sequence by Lypsius but separated rather arbitrarily in Allen's chronology. Erasmus disowns the Augustinian vows with prickly defensiveness, while Maarten sensitively fears at one point that he has overstepped the line of friendship in questioning him: "Verebar en*im* ne *con*temni se a me arbitraretur, si me mihimet ipsi in hisce votis *com*placere deprehendisset [For I was afraid that he might think himself slighted by me, if he found me indulging myself in these wishes]": BR, MSS 4850–57, fol. 150^{r}. The tone is that of embarrassment between friends amid false assumptions of slights and quarrels.

[148] "Nihil enim iam iacto de libris meis, quos fortasse vos contemnitis. At multi fatentur se redditos eorum lectione non solum eruditiores verumetiam meliores. Pecuniae studium nunquam me attigit. Famae gloria nec tantillum tangor. Voluptatibus, etsi quondam fui inclinatus, nunquam seruiui. Crapulam et ebrietatem semper horrui fugique": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 2:296 (epistle 296); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:566.

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passion or pleasure and answers no: "Voluptatibus, etsi quondam fui inclinatus, nunquam seruiui."

Inclinatus (inclined) is the reading preferred by Allen, and as translated in Toronto and used by William Barker to justify skepticism about Erasmus's same-sex "physical desires."[149] Allen plucks the reading from a single manuscript, against four readings with *inquinatus* (defiled, polluted), including Lips, a version also accepted in the London edition of 1642 and Leiden of 1703, and by the modern French edition.[150] It is also the sense followed in the Dutch translation of 1628.[151] Allen's note is defensive, recognizing open rejection of a *lectio difficilior*: "In spite of the authority of Augustine, *Confessions* 3.1, I do not think that Erasmus would ever have described himself as *inquinatus,* even in a confidential letter."[152] He doubles down by using the Deventer manuscript as copy-text on the grounds of this variant, despite describing variants from this same manuscript in another letter "mere degenerations."[153] Allen gives his game away by citing a scandalous yet obscure passage in Augustine. Arriving in Carthage, Augustine is confronted by "a melting pot of illicit passions" ("sartago flagitiosorum amorum").[154] He was not in love so much as in love with the idea of being in love, "itching to be scratched with the sensual touch of physical things."[155] Carolyn Hammond draws attention to an astonishing "impression of reflective openness" as well as explicitness in the Augustine passage, which is also oddly obfuscatory: "So I used to defile the stream of friendship with the filth of sensual desire, and to overshadow its brightness with my fiendish lust."[156]

[149] Barker, 39.

[150] Deventer, Athenaeum, MS 99, fol. 9^{v}; see P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:567. *Inquinatus* is the indisputable reading in Lypsius (the earlier MS, with better provenance): "Famae gloria nec tantillum [margin: al*iter* tantulu*m*] tangor. Voluptatibus etsi quonda*m* fu*i* inquinatus, nunq*uam* seruiui. Crapula*m* et ebrietate*m* semper horrui fugiq*ue* [I am not the tiniest bit [*margin*: alternatively, in the least] touched by the glory of fame. Although I was at one time corrupted by sexual pleasures, I was never a slave to them. I was always appalled by and avoided intoxication and drunkenness]": BR, MSS 4850–57, fol. 193^{v}. *Inquinatus* is also the reading in all the early printed texts. For the correction of Allen in the French *Correspondance*, Delcourt, 538.

[151] Erasmus, 1628, sig. Z5^{r}: "Al hoe wel ic eertijts met wellusten besmet ben geweest / nochtans heb ickse noyt gedient [Although I was at one time infected with lust, yet I have never been its slave]."

[152] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 1:567n54.

[153] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 3:387.

[154] Augustine, 1990, 27 (*Confessiones* 3.1.1). See Jordan, 34.

[155] "Miserabiliter scalpi avida contactu sensibilium": Augustine, 1990, 27.

[156] "Venam igitur amicitiae coinquinabam sordibus concupiscentiae candoremque eius obnubilabam": Hammond, 2014, xxiii; Augustine, 1990, 27.

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The word *coinquinabam* is translated by Hammond as "defile." The metaphor is of bodily fluids, connoting extreme corruption and moral turpitude. Hammond suggests an inference of homosexual affairs in the early books of the *Confessions*, and John Boswell in *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) made this passage a proof-text.[157] Alan Soble has written a lengthy refutation, arguing the passage cannot be made specific to same-sex acts.[158] Augustine, Soble reminds us, contemplated marriage, and beforehand had a baby with a long-term concubine. However, the pertinent point here is not about acts but *amicitia*, a key word in Roman society.[159] Nowhere in Cicero's voluminous writing on the topic, well known to Augustine, is the term used in relation to women.[160] The question is not how Soble or Boswell reads the passage but how a late antique Roman might take it: the unquestionable inference is that Augustine strayed over a boundary in male-male relations from mental to physical.

Soble follows a thousand years of Christian historiography in preferring the licit scandal of Augustine contemplating betrothal to a ten-year-old girl or fathering a son with a concubine to the illicit scandal of what was commonplace in ancient Roman as well as Greek society—having a male lover. The tradition dates back to Augustine's condemning *stupra in masculos* (male same-sex acts) in Sodom in *The City of God*.[161] Indeed he censures "unnatural acts" in *Confessions*, although there, as in Jerome, he may mean sodomy between men and women as well as men and men. It is possible the Carthage passage refers to sodomy as well, although the worry in late antique Rome would be more about whether he was the passive partner.[162] Perhaps the crucial question is whether he is still an adolescent, since the prohibition at risk is the idea of an adult male being the receiver rather than the giver. In book 2, where Augustine also discusses the "boundary of friendship" ("limes amicitiae"), he still suffers the "spurts of adolescence" ("scatebra pubertatis").[163] The first three books of *Confessions*

[157] Boswell, 151.

[158] Soble, 555.

[159] Strozynski.

[160] As in the definition of *amicitia* in relation to *virtus*: "nec sine virtute amicitia esse nullo pacto potest": Cicero, 1941, 130 (*De amicitia* 6.21).

[161] Augustine, 1993, 2:535 (*De civitate Dei* 16.30). Eva Sanford and William Green in this edition translate "homosexual practices among males." *Stuprum* is a derogatory word for a wide variety of sexual acts which can include masturbation or oral sex according to context.

[162] "Ut caederer virgis ferreis ardentibus zeli [with the result that I was being beaten with glowing iron rods of jealousy]": Augustine, 2014, 3.1.1. Hammond translates "being beaten with glowing iron rods"; the metaphor (which is agricultural in origin) could be interpreted in a number of ways.

[163] Augustine, 2014, 2.1.1.

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articulate different concepts of sexuality according to age (infancy, adolescence, adulthood). In Carthage, where maybe he considered himself a fully-grown man, to be seen as the passive partner would represent a different order of defilement.

Discussion of the place of Augustine in the thought of Erasmus has mainly concerned theology.[164] Yet within the Augustinian order the *Confessions* held a special place, as a *vita* of the titular saint, for regular consumption during readings at refectory. What the intensely literary friends of Erasmus's circle made of these passages can only be guessed, but it is surely certain that he and Servaas knew what *inquinatus* meant, as Allen himself confesses by denial. The licit scandal of the word conceals a scandal of memory that Erasmus prefers to keep private, insisting that Prior Servaas do the same. It will never be known what they did, but it is possible to know how Erasmus read. He uses the word *inquinatus* again in relation to the *Confessiones*, in the preface to the Froben edition of 1529.[165] What kind of a man was Augustine, he asks Alonso de Fonseca—who was himself not only a nobleman and politician in the service of Charles V but also an archbishop and the son of a concubine with another archbishop. There is an element of teasing in one son of a priest telling another there is no shame in Augustine having taken concubines. With both these women Augustine observed conjugal fidelity, Erasmus reassures wittily, which is something modern priests and abbots do not seek to emulate, he continues in the same vein. Worse than sexual misdemeanor, he suggests, is Augustine's flirtation with heresy. "He was lured into the sect of the Manichaeans, the most pernicious group of men that the world has seen," Erasmus recounts. How could the saint have been taken in by this notorious group, he adds with feigned indignation, who went in for "false claims, prodigious fasts, feigned poverty, a sham continence, and other monstrous and draconian regulations"? This is a dig at modern monks, especially those under the *regula* of Augustine.[166] Recalling the sham diet and sexual habits of his order, he praises Augustine, but rather halfheartedly: "his desires were holy, his error human and naïve [*simplex*]." But he is hardly being *simplex* himself in the next clause: "He was not tainted, however, by the vices of the Manichaeans, nor did he cling long to their impious doctrine" ("Nec tamen illorum viciis inquinatus est, nec diutius haesit impio

[164] Visser.

[165] Lypsius once again worked as editor and scribe on this project.

[166] "Inductus est in sectam Manichaeorum, quo quidem hominum genere vix aliud habuit orbis pestilentius; adeo confictis titulis, prodigiosa ciborum abstinentia, simulatione paupertatis, falsa continentiae specie, aliisque praescriptis immanibus ac supra modum rigidis": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 15:222 (epistle 2157); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 8:148.

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dogmati").[167] That fatal *nec*, again: for why bring up a word associated with sexual impropriety (*inquinatus* again) in relation to doctrine? It is yet another case of a licit scandal, since everyone knows Augustine did more than flirt with Manicheism. Manicheism, especially in the late Middle Ages, was associated strongly with sodomy.[168] The sentence means, "at least Augustine was not a heretic"—that is, in Erasmus's or Servaas's vernacular, a *ketter*: they both know what that meant, a synonym for anal sex between men from Rotterdam to Basel. The two instances of Erasmus using *inquinatus*, both referring to Augustine's *Confessions*, are the proof that Erasmian scholarship has always denied, that he admits knowledge of same-sex physical acts and comes as close as possible to confessing them himself.

SILENI ALCIBIADIS AND THE SHADOW OF PLATO: SEXUAL PLEASURE IN THE *ADAGIA*

Whether or not Erasmus and Servaas shared a bed, they shared a culture and a language. Augustine's *Confessions* provided a private code for Augustinian monks, one in which the trials of adolescence and sexuality could be covertly negotiated. Augustine himself declares that he was seduced at a young age by the pleasures of literature, which he needed to throw off as much as the pleasures of sex. In doing so, he established a seductive analogy between the two, offering readers fertile ground for potentially amorous ambiguity. All the Augustinians in Erasmus's entourage—who include the scribe Maarten (who happily accepted the reading *inquinatus*), as well as Willem, Cornelis, Frans, and Servaas, know the words, insinuations, and denials that surrounded same-sex desire. This grouping is also represented in his fiction. In *Antibarbari*, printed in 1520, Erasmus is joined by Willem, a friendship he compares with those in ancient mythology between Orestes and Pylades, Pirithous and Theseus, Patroclus and Achilles, and Damon and Pythias: a more handsome homoerotic pantheon it is hard to imagine.[169] They are joined in *Antibarbari* by his close confidant Jacob Batt, of whom it is said at one point (jokingly or sarcastically) that he used to be keen on girls but has now turned to literature. To be a lover of literature is to be one of the initiated few, the sacred band. The implied vow of celibacy assuredly includes keeping male company only.

[167] "Nec tamen illorum viciis inquinatus est, nec diutius haesit impio dogmati": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 15:222 (epistle 2157); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 8:148.

[168] Brundage, 399.

[169] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 1.1:39. The work was mostly composed around 1500.

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In adage 3551, *Sacer manipulus* ("A sacred band"), which Erasmus added to the 1528 edition of the *Adagia*, the meaning of the title is explained in explicitly homoerotic terms: "Athenaeus says in book 13 that at Thebes a part of the army was called the sacred band and was made up of men who were lovers. The Thebans' greatest strength in war rested on these men because love gives men the greatest courage, emboldening them even to the point of thinking nothing of death."[170] In Latin the reference to classical social codes of homosexuality is clearer: "eam constitisse ex amantibus et amatis." His source is Athenaeus, where an active and older partner (ἐραστής, *erastēs*) is distinguished from the passive and younger one (ἐρώμενος, *erōmenos*), usually defined as pubescent.[171] In a digressive aside relating to the classical term, Erasmus adds ironically that "an example of its use will be if anyone were to say that today Christendom depends on a sacred band, meaning monks." Mischievously comparing the male lovers in the Theban army to Christian monks, Erasmus, in a way typical of the *Adagia*, uses anachronism to play it both ways. In an obvious satirical barb against the vow of continence in monasteries, Erasmus undermines the holy reputation of monks and perhaps espouses reform. He is clearly alluding to the commonplace satirical association of monasteries with sodomy.[172] Yet he also has his cake as he eats it, expressing a yearning for a code that cannot tell its own name: "The Thebans' greatest strength in war rested on these men because love gives men the greatest courage, emboldening them even to the point of thinking nothing of death." Tragic elegy meets eros in the death drive. Not every reader will catch the implications of the references he makes here, which require context and interpretation to make sense. Nonetheless, Erasmus was nothing if not a subtle reader, and his adages require equally subtle readers who are sensitive to the implications of his celebration of the Theban warrior lovers.[173]

The remainder of this essay explores the wider context of a language of same-sex love in the *Adagia*. The adage, Erasmus declares in his 1508 preface, is a literary form which combines concealment with discovery. The Greeks displayed the "conduct of life" within "the outer covering of metaphor."[174] Explaining this to a reader is an art of discovery that does not always work in the

[170] "Athenaeus libro decimotertio declarat apud Thebanos exercitus partem fuisse quam illi ἱερὸν λόχον nominabant; eam constitisse ex amantibus et amatis et ob id praecipuum belli robur in his fuisse situm quod amor reddat fortissimos, ad mortis etiam contemptum animans": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:248 (adage 3551); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.8:50.

[171] Dover, 16.

[172] Sexual satire against monks is discussed in Betteridge, 15.

[173] See Hindley, 80.

[174] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:4.

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same way. For Erasmus, this combines erudition, playfulness, and revelation, but also sometimes hermeneutic obfuscation. *Sacer manipulus* is an exemplary case. If monastic sexuality is articulated via euphemism, classical sexuality can be expressed by franker or even flagrant discourse. Erasmian negotiations between repression and explicitness may be compared with Michel Jeanneret's concept of "rebel Eros."[175] Plato is always an uneasy presence in love's economy.[176] *Sileni Alcibiadis*, expanded in the 1515 *Adagia*, is a classic of the Erasmian canon, a set-piece adage frequently reprinted as a standalone, then translated into other languages. It is a metaphor for metaphor and for spirituality, hinging on an outward meaning (the ugly surface) which contains the beautiful, ineffable, or immortal. The image comes from the speech of Alcibiades in Plato's *Symposium*, which is applied as widely as Erasmus dares, either to scripture as the literary container of the mystery of Christianity, or to Christ himself in an uncanny parody of the eucharist, the corporeal carrier of the divine. In addition to taking these theological risks, early in the adage Erasmus includes a daring reference to the treatment of Socrates and forbidden love in the text of the *Symposium*: "He was thought to admire good looks in young men, he was thought to know the meaning of love and jealousy, though Alcibiades of all people found him a whole gamut removed from such emotions."[177] There is no hint of admonition or disapproval.

The speech in the *Symposium* most redolent of homosexuality is of course the pansexual genesis myth in the voice of Aristophanes, in which a perfect originary body is split, and heterosexual partners are joined in loss by two different kinds of same-sex partner, male and female. This passage was explicated in the Renaissance in Marsilio Ficino's *Commentary*.[178] Erasmus, who owned a copy of Ficino's translation, used it in *Adagia*. He also used Ficino's Platonic commentaries, which sidestepped a reference to pederasty in Plato by translating the Greek παιδεραστοῦσι (lovers of boys) as *et in etate virili constituti, ipsos adulescentes diligunt* (having reached manhood, they love those adolescents).[179] In this way, what Plato expresses forthrightly as sex between ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος is sublimated so that the adult male succeeds in love by devoting himself to friends, rejoicing in what is similar to himself: "he devotes himself to his friends, taking joy always in what is kindred" ("amicorumque

[175] Jeanneret.

[176] Hankins, 1:240.

[177] "Videbatur mirari formas adulescentulorum, videbatur amare et zelotypia tangi, cum eum ab his affectibus δὶς διὰ πασῶν abesse compererit etiam Alcibiades": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 34:262 (adage 1493); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.5:162.

[178] Ficino, 2002, 4.1.

[179] Plato, 1980, 39 (*Symposium* 192b). Translated in Ficino, 1491, sig. 153^{r}.

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studiosus efficit, cognato semper congratulatus").[180] Ficino, in other words, not unlike modern commentators, deflects same-sex desire into generalized all-male friendship.

Todd Reeser argues that Erasmus, too, in *Sileni Alcibiadis* "evokes same-sex eros in order that it might be written away."[181] Erasmus does so, Reeser insists, by suppressing adolescence as soon as he refers to it, applying to the adage a hermeneutic principle in which an intelligible and visible world is rejected in favor of a spiritual one. Reeser's reading is sophisticated but runs into the problem that Erasmus habitually mentions things in passing without being overly explicit, and habitually uses one hermeneutic principle to counter another. Reeser notes that François Rabelais in the prologue to *Gargantua* also slips in a reference to sodomy via *Sileni Alciabiadis*.[182] Yet Rabelais is the first to admit that he learned how to do so from Erasmus. The crucial point is that Erasmus engages a second homoerotic frame from *Symposium*, when (in Rabelaisian fashion) Alcibiades gate-crashes the feast, drunkenly molesting Socrates and his argument. Reeser contrasts Rabelaisian dialogism with "the normativity of Erasmian hermeneutics." Yet Rabelais himself discovers alternative forms of sexuality by reading widely in the *Adagia*. Here, it is far from clear that Erasmus is writing normatively.[183]

Reeser makes it seem as if Socrates's predilection for adolescent boys were a secret, whereas in Xenophon as well as Plato it is glaringly obvious.[184] While the culmination of the Platonic argument is Socrates's speech of Diotima, which erases the homoerotic framework to express love at its most abstract and ethical, Plato has Alcibiades ignore this as sanctimonious waffle. Socrates is believed not because he is more rational but because men fall in love with him, despite his being old and ugly. Indeed, that is how he resembles the Sileni, because beneath an unattractive surface he is lovable and beautiful. In that way he tricks Alcibiades (and other young men) into thinking he is the ἐραστής while making himself more like the ἐρώμενος. Everyone in the dialogue laughs because it seemed Alcibiades "was still in love with Socrates."[185] The joke continues when Agathon joins Socrates and Alcibiades at the dining table. Is Socrates flirting with Agathon, Alcibiades asks, or is he jealously trying to keep the two younger men apart in case they hook up? "There we go again as usual," says Alcibiades. "When Socrates is around it's impossible for anyone else

[180] Ficino, 1491, sig. 153[r].

[181] Reeser, 183.

[182] Rabelais, 5.

[183] Reeser, 206.

[184] Xenophon, 2:245 (*Symposium* 4.27).

[185] ὅτι ἐδόκει ἔτι ἐρωτικῶς ἔχειν τοῦ Σωκράτους: Plato, 1980, 314 (*Symposium* 222c1).

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to get a share of the handsome ones."[186] The implication, for a moment, is that Socrates is using philosophy as a pick-up line.

By referring, if only in passing, to *formas adulescentulorum* (good looks in young men), Erasmus recognizes the physical form of the adolescent male body as essential to Plato's philosophical argument. The phrase *videbatur amare et zelotypia tangi* (he was thought to know the meaning of love and jealousy) similarly imitates the structure of Athenian same-sex love triangles evident in the way Alcibiades negotiates between Socrates and Agathon.[187] Perhaps Reeser is right in one way, as the Silenus of physical love provides a container for the spiritual bounty beneath. Nonetheless, this is a two-way street, since the mystical content is also dependent, in turn, on eros. At the same time, Erasmus recognizes (as some modern readers of Plato do not) the comic irony of the *Symposium*, which is both a rhapsodic eulogy of philosophy and a mock manual for sex relations. As Alcibiades proposes, Socrates is a better philosopher because he is a better poet, and a better theorist on love because he is a better lover. At the same time, he deconstructs the dichotomy between active and passive lovers to play both roles. Thus, if the adage *Sacer manipulus* queers the monastery, *Sileni Alcibiadis*, by contrast, sanctifies sodomy. In any case, Erasmus is much more self-conscious about the roles of ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος than Reeser represents him. Plato haunts the cloister as well as the humanist study. Socrates and Phaedrus, in the dialogue of that name, meet at midday and flirt with each other, joking about hiding things under their cloaks.[188] In adage 1594, *Lydus in meridie* ("A Lydian at midday"), Erasmus tells us the men of Lydia are so addicted to the venereal arts that the nights are never enough, and they use their hands to provide midday relief.[189] *Manibus peragentes* (agitating/finishing off with the hands) is an obvious enough synonym for *manustupra* (masturbation), and Erasmus gives the rest of the game away by referring to the Lydians' "luxury

[186] Plato, 1980, 76 (*Symposium* 223a).

[187] "ὡς οὐ πάντα τούτου ἕνεκα εἰρηκώς, τοῦ ἐμὲ καὶ Ἀγάθωνα διαβάλλειν, οἰόμενος δεῖν ἐμὲ μὲν σοῦ ἐρᾶν καὶ μηδενὸς ἄλλου, Ἀγάθωνα δὲ ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐρᾶσθαι καὶ μηδ' ὑφ' ἑνὸς ἄλλου [as if it were not all said for this reason, to set me and Agathon against each other, thinking that I must love you and none other, and that Agathon must be loved by you and no one else at all]": Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.5:162 (*Adagia* III.iii.1), referring to Plato, 1980, 314 (*Symposium* 222d).

[188] Plato, 2011, 36 (*Phaedrus* 228d).

[189] "Narrant Lydos adeo libidine perditos fuisse, ut non tantum noctu vacarent voluptati Venereae, verum etiam ipso meridie lascivirent, manibus foedum opus peragentes [They say that the Lydians were so riddled with lust that, not content with spending the night in the pleasures of sex, they indulged in it even at high noon, using their hands to complete their filthy undertaking]": Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.3:82; Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 33:336.

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and effeminacy" in Athenaeus.[190] To calm themselves down, Socrates and Phaedrus sit under a "chaste tree"—the flowering *vitex*.[191] Abbey cloisters cultivated this species as an antaphrodisiac, commonly known as monk's pepper.

In *Phaedrus*, the lovers exchange positions to quell their libido, and as the dialogue ends, declare themselves equals, so that friendship overcomes servitude to sexual pleasure. In *Testulae transmutatio* (The turning of a potsherd, with the meaning "changing places"—admittedly a very obscure adage), Erasmus interprets "the turning of a potsherd" as indicating "of things changed suddenly into their opposites."[192] With considerable ingenuity, Erasmus speculates that the proverb refers to an ancient children's game, ὀστρακίνδα (a game played with potsherds on black-and-white surfaces, analogous to heads and tails), in which two sets of boys play with potsherds painted white on one side (representing day) and black on the other (night). When the reverse side comes up, places are exchanged, day turns to night, and fugitives and pursuers change roles. Innocent so far, until Erasmus introduces an example of the game from "Plato's amatory dialogues" (he means here *Phaedrus*), in which the game (now merged with something like tag) takes on a sexual meaning: "It is uncertain whether the image is taken from a kind of game which in Greek is called *ostrakinda*. This is hinted at by Plato in his amatory dialogues, in fact in the *Phaedrus*: 'At length,' he says, 'he makes his escape from this, and becoming of necessity a defaulter, he who was formerly a lover changes in the turning of the potsherd and runs away; while the other one is obliged to follow him, indignant and protesting.'"[193] The reference is better explained in a concealed citation from Aristophanes's *Knights*, not picked up in the Toronto edition, where a sausage-seller vies with Cleon for the favors of a politician, for all the world as a potential ἐρώμενος, toying (so the sausage-seller says) like children over a game of ὀστρακίνδα.[194] Exchanging potsherds turns out to mean changing sexual positions, day for night, on top for underneath, fugitive for pursuer. Erasmus

[190] Athenaeus, 1882–90, 4.342 (*Deipnosophistae* 12 [515d]).

[191] The chaste tree is described as in full bloom with aromatic violet flowers; Yunis calls it a classic feature of *locus amoenus*, preparing the way for eros: see Plato, 2011, 96 (*Phaedrus* 230b).

[192] "Ὀστράκου περιστροφή, id est Testulae conversio, de rebus repente in diversum commutatis": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 33:46–47 (*Adagia* II.i.51, *Testulae transmutatio*); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.3:72.

[193] "Incertum, utrum sumpta sit metaphora a ludi genere quodam, quem ostracinda Graeci vocant ("hunc innuit Plato in amatoriis, nempe in Phaedro: φυγὰς δή, inquit, γίγνεται ἐκ τούτων, καὶ ἀποστερηκὼς ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης ὁ πρὶν ἐραστής, ὀστράκου μεταπεσόντος, ἴεται φυγῇ μεταβαλών"): Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 33:46 (adage 1051); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.3:72–73.

[194] Aristophanes, 1897, 1:84 (*Knights* 855).

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implies that ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος can change places like tossing a coin. *Testulae transmutatio* is a highly troubling metaphor for fortune, taking the sex drive as a Freudian game of *fort-da*, which not only disturbs the norms of ancient Greek sexuality, but also makes sense in the cloistered world of a late medieval monastery, in which boys turn into young men and then older men all the time.

Adagia may be famous for its sententious set pieces like adage 3001, *Dulce bellum inexpertis* ("War is sweet to those who have not tried it"), or scholarly and autobiographical digressions as in adage 2001, *Herculei labores* ("The labours of Hercules"), but elsewhere Erasmus constantly pulls his readers up short with brief comic games in unexpected areas. A vivid example of this is in adage 3699, *Orphica vita* ("The Orphic life"), when he writes that Orpheus demands a life that is *innoxia*, "free from sin" and "untouched by luxury": secretive, innocent, vegan, and all-male, as Ovid teaches.[195] The key clue here is that Orpheus was a notorious lover of boys. Adage 301, *Non est cuiuslibet Corinthum appellere* ("It is not given to everyone to land in Corinth"), appears at first sight to be an exercise in geography, twisted metaphorically to refer to anything that is dangerous or difficult to approach. While elaborating on this, Erasmus forges a sexual undertow, playing on the fact that Corinth as a harbor faces both ways, with passages leading forwards and backwards. He then leapfrogs onto a story about the Corinthian temple to Aphrodite, where a thousand prostitutes worked: "Others prefer to relate this proverb to all the harlots of Corinth in general; their rapacity was also commented on in the Old Comedy, Aristophanes says in the *Plutus*."[196] Corinth is a place of unrivaled voluptuousness and extravagance, so it is "not for everyone" in another sense. For this mental leap, he brings in a Greek text from Aristophanes, *Plutus* ("Wealth"):

> Τὸν πρωκτὸν αὐτὰς εὐθὺς ὡς τοῦτον τρέπειν
>
> But if he's rich, they straightaway offer him their anus.

If a rich client passes by, the prostitutes turn their backs invitingly. "I would not hesitate to translate these lines into Latin if they were as decent as they are elegant," Erasmus winks knowingly at the reader, having already been happy to

[195] "A life free of sin, one that is untouched by luxury and undefiled by food with blood in it": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:350 (adage 3699); Erasmus, *Opera omnia* 2.8:126.

[196] "Alii malunt in genere ad omneis Corinthiorum meretrices referre, quarum rapacitatem etiam vetus comoedia taxavit Aristophanes in Pluto": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:318 (*Adagia* I.iv.1); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.1:408. On Corinth, see Dover, 135.

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quote the indecent Greek.[197] In a work extravagant in its use of translation, Erasmus refuses to translate the word πρωκτὸν (anus), while also drawing attention to it. Two lines later he does the same with a word from Strabo, where he gives *pertexui* (weaved, worked off) to translate καθεῖλον, without telling the reader that the Greek verb contains a double entendre comparable to "getting off" with or "going down" on someone.

The Toronto edition repeats such wordplay by likewise elaborately refusing to translate the words into plain English. This may be taking either inhibition or scholarly gamesmanship too far, building as it does on the idea that Greek and Latin are the repositories of the unmentionable, something that has been part of the classical tradition since the beginnings of Christianity. Scholars, monks, grammarians, and editors glory in failing or hesitating to translate rude words. Modern scholars cannot help themselves from giggling at their own erudition to this day.[198] Euphemism and exhibitionism are equally in evidence in adage 301, when Erasmus both alludes to and conceals a reference to anal intercourse. In other places he is less tentative. Adage 3615, *Callipygos* ("Beautiful butt"), refers to a story told in Athenaeus, book 7, about two sisters who vie for beauty, setting up a competition as to which is more "'well-buttocked' because of their outstanding beauty." A local temple is set up to Venus so that her Καλλίπυγον can also be worshipped. Then the adage takes a queer turn: "An expression with similar meaning is pale-bottomed men [πυγάργους], as we have related elsewhere."[199] Here he refers to adage 1043, *Ne in Melampygum incidas* ("Don't fall in with Blackbottom"). Blackbottom is slang for Hercules, whose arse is unshaven. This is contrasted by Erasmus with the Greek terms πυγάργους καὶ λευκοπύγους: "For effeminate and unwarlike men and those who lead a dissolute and luxurious life are called in Greek bright-rumped [πυγάργους] and white-bottomed [λευκοπύγους], and conversely they had a habit of calling strong and valiant men blackbottoms, as we learn from the scholiast on Lycophron."[200] Once again, the allusion is encrypted, but one later reader who recognized the homoerotic Hercules was Pierre Bayle, who referred to "the softness of Hercules" ("la molesse d'Ercule)" in his dictionary article on Hercules.[201] In fact, references to "Blackbottom" are a running joke in Erasmus,

[197] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:318.

[198] Burrow indulges himself *ad libitum*, and perhaps the present author is not blameless.

[199] "Eosdem appellant πυγάργους, ut alibi diximus in proverbio Λευκόπυγοι": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:288–89 (*Adagia* IV.vii.15, *Callipygos*); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.8:81.

[200] "Nam Graeci, quemadmodum molles et imbelles fractosque deliciis πυγάργους καὶ λευκοπύγους appellant, itidem e diverso fortes ac strenuos μαλαμπύγους vocare consueverunt, ut auctor est Lycophronis interpres": Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.3:64 (*Adagia* II.i.43).

[201] This uses the same euphemism as Latin *mollis*; see Bayle, 2:748. Bayle cites both of these adages from Erasmus.

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as in a series of adages in the second Chilia, where he makes fun of the Cercopes, an untrustworthy Greek tribe in Ephesus, "who behave in a dissolute fashion" and are said to look like animals that "wag their tails to attract favorable attention."[202] The word *Cercopissare* perhaps does not even need translating to be funny, but in any case the modern genus *Cercopithecidae* refers to old-world European monkeys and baboons who puff out their red arses to all comers.

The anal zone has not hitherto featured as a classic term in Erasmian scholarship, but in case of any doubt, he knows perfectly well that τὴν πυγήν is the standard phrase in ancient Greek for anal sex, which is used assiduously in Athenaeus, the source for *Callipygos* and one of Erasmus's favorite books cited within the *Adagia*.[203] Oral sex is no stranger to Erasmus, either. Here, as with sodomy, he employs an artful strategy of bringing in homosexual references through the backdoor, by beginning with women giving pleasure to men. Adage 1943, *Lesbiis Digna* ("Fit for Lesbians") performs this without explicitly revealing anything specific, something that eludes the Toronto translators.[204]

[202] "Κερκωπίζειν, id est Cercopissare, dicuntur vel qui lasciviunt aut qui adulantur, metaphora ducta ab animantibus, quae mota cauda adblandiuntur, ut Chrysippo placet Suida teste, vel qui molesti sunt obturbantque et obstrepunt, ut vox deflexa sit a Cercopibus illis Lydiis, quos Hercules, quod sibi cum Omphale cubanti petulantius obturbarent, amicae iussu vinctos de clava suspendit, quemadmodum retulimus in adagio Ne in Melampygum incidas [Cercopian tricks, describes the conduct of those who behave in a disorderly fashion, or who fawn upon other people. The image derives, either from animals which wag their tails to attract favorable attention, as Chrysippus thought according to Suidas, or from tiresome persons who create a disturbance and make a noise. This suggests that the word is derived from the Cercopes in Lydia, who interrupted Hercules in an offensive way when he was sleeping with Omphale, and at her request were bound by him and suspended from his club, as I have recorded in the adage Mind you don't fall in with Blackbottom]": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 34:19 (*Adagia* II.vii.37); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.4:111.

[203] See, e.g., Athenaeus, 2007, 6:348, 6:358, 6:368 (*Deipnosophistae* 13 [579a], 13 [580e], 13 [582f]).

[204] "Λεσβίων ἄξια, id est Lesbiis digna. De rebus irritis dicebatur ob id, ut coniicio, quod Lesbii ob vanitatem vulgo male audirent. Fortassis non male quadrarit et in sordidos atque impuros; nam haec etiam nota quondam illis inusta est. Unde λεσβιεῖν dictum pro eo, quod est polluere et conspurcare. Aristophanes: Μέλλουσαν ἤδη λεσβιεῖν τοὺς ξυμπότας, id est Spurcabit ac iam polluet convivium ["Fit for Lesbians," was applied to things vain and foolish, the reason being, I take it, that the people of Lesbos were commonly reputed very silly. Perhaps too it may not be unsuitable for sordid and indecent characters, for this is another stigma that in old days was inflicted on them, whence comes the word *lesbiein* for to corrupt and defile. Aristophanes: 'They're ready now to play a Lesbian trick on their fellow-drinkers']": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 34:140; Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.4:302.

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Erasmus assumes that his readers will expect female same-sex relations here, since he knows perfectly well that Lesbian Sappho is a lesbian. Yet not all Lesbians are lesbians: indeed, some Lesbians in Greek literature are famous for *fellatio*.[205] In an aside, Erasmus calls them "dirty and impure" ("sordidos atque impuros"). But for readers to catch on, they must look up a reference in Aristophanes's *Wasps*, line 1346, with its flagrant allusions to oral sex with men.[206]

Erasmus in the *Adagia* does a lot of explaining, but part of his point is forcing the reader to encounter the original Greek. Not every reader would have the skill or inclination to follow. This becomes a game of educational hermeneutics as well as teasing and chafing. In the case of sex, the pleasure of reading goes hand in hand with forbidden knowledge, one form of excitement muddying the other. In *Lesbiis Digna*, he inserts *conspurcare* (to defile) to agitate the reader's interest, then half-translates the line from Aristophanes: *Spurcabit ac jam polluet convivium* (he will defile and pollute the feast). Toronto translates only the Greek—"They're ready now to play a Lesbian trick on their fellow-drinkers"—but the Latin contains an extra conceit: that feasters at the symposium have their mouths wide open to be polluted.[207] This reverses the direction of the sexual act, so that the men are fellating as well as being fellated.

[205] Dover, 182.

[206] "ἀνάβαινε δεῦρο, χρυσομηλολόνθιον, / τῇ χειρὶ τουδὶ λαβομένη τοῦ σχοινίου. / ἔχου· φυλάττου δ', ὡς σαπρὸν τὸ σχοινίον· / ὅμως γε μέντοι τριβόμενον οὐκ ἄχθεται. / ὁρᾷς ἐγώ σ' ὡς δεξιῶς ὑφειλόμην / μέλλουσαν ἤδη λεσβιεῖν τοὺς ξυμπότας· / ὧν εἵνεκ' ἀπόδος τῷ πέει τῳδὶ χάριν. [Come up this way, my little blonde cockchafer. [*offering his phallus*] Grab hold of this rope here with your hand. Hang on, but be careful, the rope's worn out; all the same, it doesn't mind being rubbed. Did you see how handily I sneaked you away just when you were supposed to start sucking the guests? For that you owe my cock here a favor]": Aristophanes, 1998, 390–91 (*Wasps* 1342–47).

[207] The lacuna lies between the Greek and the Latin. For another case of *fellatio* ascribed to Lesbians, and reapplied between men, see adage 2670, *Lesbiari* ("Be more Lesbian"): "Aiunt turpitudinem, quae per os peragitur, fellationis opinor aut irrumationis, primum a Lesbiis auctoribus fuisse profectam et apud illos primum omnium feminam tale quiddam passam esse [The infamous vice, which is performed with the mouth, called fellatio, I think, or irrumatio, is said to have originated with the people of Lesbos, and among them it was first of all something which women had to perform]": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 35:260; Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.4:463.

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In adage 3052, *Reddidit Harpocratem* ("He turned him into Harpocrates"), Erasmus quotes verbatim a whole poem by Catullus:

Gellius audierat patruum obiurgare solere,
Si quis delicias diceret aut faceret.
Hoc ne ipsi accideret, patrui perdespuit ipsam
Uxorem et patruum reddidit Harpocratem.
Quod voluit fecit: nam quamvis irrumet ipsum
Nunc patruum, verbum non faciet patruus.

Gellius had heard that his uncle used to reprove anyone who spoke of or indulged in sex. To avoid this himself, he seduced his uncle's own wife, and so made him dumbness on a monument. He did what he wanted; for even if he should stuff the uncle himself, uncle will not say a word.[208]

The English title given in Toronto ("He turned him into Harpocrates") does not quite capture the flavor of the Latin, which could equally be rendered as "He returned Harpocrates the favor." The uncle of Gellius is a prude and loudmouth reprover of other people's pleasures. Gellius gets his own back by having his way with his uncle's wife. (The Latin *perdespuit* [scorned] given by Erasmus is emended in modern editions by *perdepsuit*, a word for working dough, so that one translator gives "assault.") This shuts the uncle up, so Gellius is the winner. Even if he sucks the uncle's cock, the uncle stays silent. All of this is a way of Erasmus interpreting the proverb to mean "to impose silence"—a neat recall of the silent vice—which Erasmus backs up via illustrations of the Egyptian god Horus. Yet there need no pagan gods to swallow this point.

BLANDILOQUENTIA: RENAISSANCE LANGUAGE GAMES OF SEXUAL IDENTITY

It would be wrong to infer biography from the *Adagia* any more than the letters, and it cannot be known how far the sexual pleasures pleasurably described by Erasmus derive from experience. Philosophers enjoy displaying knowledge of many things. Rousseau refers knowingly to reading books with one hand only, titillating the reader with suggestions of masturbation and pornography, while Freud boasts to Viennese professors that he is not afraid to call a spade a spade. Rousseau is unabashed in telling the reader of his predilection for sadomasochism; Freud is better at describing the perversions of others than his own. As for Erasmus, he writes movingly against the beatings that went on in the schools of his own time, even though he must have been aware (as historians have noted today) of the sexual implications of such practices in schools and monasteries.[209] There is, perhaps, a moment when Erasmus lets his guard slip in a tiny revision in the 1536 edition, the last in his lifetime. *Crassiore musa* ("The more vulgar muse") appeared in the very first edition of 1500 as part of

[208] Trans. in Catullus, 1913, 155.

[209] Stewart, 2002, 132–33.

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Collectanea 402, paired with "a stupid Minerva," meaning to speak roughly and uneruditely, or else clearly and openly.[210] After 1508, it settled into position as adage 38, later bolstered by Cicero at his most robust, "I am not speaking the language of the prosecutor": "Latine loqui"—that is, "openly and simply," without sophistication.[211] It is like saying in modern English "to speak plain English": without censorship or beating about the bush, even though no one in England really speaks plainly about anything. For Erasmus it carries a connotation of frankness, unfussiness, but also lacking euphemism or embarrassment. Then in 1536 he adds a final example, from *Priapeia*:

> Simplicius multo est, da paedicare, Latine
>
> Dicere.[212]

"Simpler far to say, in plain Latin, let me fuck you in the arse." It is a triumphantly uncensorious instance of *Crassiore musa*.

R. A. B. Mynors, who knew a thing or two about speaking in Latin, adds an illuminating footnote: "The speaker Priapus is represented as issuing a general invitation to any boy who may enter the garden of which he is the tutelary deity."[213] So, the fascinating question, which Mynors does not answer, is why in the very last edition of the *Adagia* does Erasmus suddenly include a reference to anal sex with boys in gardens? Revisions in the 1536 edition, when Erasmus was ill and preoccupied, were few and far between; there are only four new adages. To make matters murkier, for four hundred years the reference to *paedicare* was bowdlerized as *praedicare*, meaning to preach. It is a euphemism first used by Paolo Manuzio in his emended edition to satisfy the Roman Inquisition.[214] From here it is transposed to Le Clerc.[215] By a wonderful irony, a joke Erasmus used to satirize Dominican buggery was reversed to censor the queerness of his own text.

All this strongly suggests that MacCulloch's conclusion needs to be revised—that after Erasmus's early experience with Servaas, "his passions were to remain as abstractions of the intellect."[216] Erasmus is well known for moralization on the question of temperance in general. For every adage

[210] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.9:166–67.
[211] Cicero, 1894–98 (*In Verrem* 4.1.2; *Philippics* 7.6.17; both added in 1536).
[212] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.1:154.
[213] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:87.
[214] Manuzio, 64.
[215] Le Clerc, 1703–06, 2:42.
[216] MacCulloch, 102.

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indulging in sexual secrets, another holds back. Margaret Mann Phillips dubbed the 1515 edition "Utopian" in honor of its exemplary sanctimonious tone.[217] If there is an air of confession about *da paedicare*, Erasmus is always careful about confession. To his textbook on the subject, entitled *Exomologesis* (1524), he prefaces an unusually personal apologia addressed to Jodocus Gaverius, professor of law at Louvain. In it, the phrase "I was never a slave to sexual love" ("Veneri nunquam seruitum est") recalls the careful wording of the final letter to Servaas a decade earlier ("Voluptatibus . . . nunquam seruivi").[218] It is another apophasis, an admission (by a priest) that, while never a slave to sex, he is no stranger to it either. The letter to Gaverius adds the familiar complaint that he is too old for that kind of stuff (he was in his late fifties). At the least, the sentence is a direct admission by Erasmus that he has not always been celibate; and nobody has ever suggested a viable female partner.

On sodomy, Erasmus is carefully orthodox in explicit statements. How could it be otherwise? The annotation to the notorious condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament, Romans 1:26–27, pauses on the correct understanding of what Jerome's Vulgate calls "passiones ignominiae." The Greek, Erasmus says, means "disturbances of the soul" or *motus* (emotions) or *morbus* (diseases)—or, as Quintilian prefers, *affectus* (affections). This is fitting, Erasmus adds, since Horace, too, calls effeminate lust a "disease."[219] *Disease* endorses theological commonplace about sodomy, or indeed heresy. Yet in the next annotation Erasmus lingers on the question in a different way:

> *In desideriis suis*] ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν, id est, in appetentia sua, sive, quod malim, sui: ut intelligas masculorum mutuam inter ipsos appetentiam
>
> In their desires—that is, in their longing, or, as I should prefer, longing for themselves. So you would understand a mutual longing of males for one another.[220]

[217] Phillips, 96.

[218] "Et iuuenis cibum ac potum semper ita sumpsi vt pharmacum; et saepenumero doluit non licere sine cibo potuque perpetuo degere. Veneri nunquam seruitum est: ne vacauit quidem in tantis studiorum laboribus. Et si quid fuit huius mali, iam olim ab eo tyranno me vindicauit aetas, quae mihi hoc nomine gratissima est [Even as a young man I never partook of food and drink except as a kind of medicine, and often regretted that it was not possible to live permanently without them. I was never a slave to venery, and indeed had no time for it under the load of my researches. If I ever had a touch of that trouble, I was set free from that tyrant long ago by advancing years, to which on this account I am most grateful]": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 9:425 (epistle 1347); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 5:249.

[219] Erasmus cites "morbo virorum [the perverted desires of men]" from Horace, 1985 (*Carmina* 1.37.10).

[220] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 56:57.

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Appetentia is a late antique word, used by Boethius to describe the proneness of bodily desire to human anxiety and penitential excess.[221] There is a hint of self-naming in his note translating *desideriis* as "longing for themselves," or in the phrase "mutual longing of males for one another." After all the recent arguments about whether it was possible in Renaissance Europe to have a sense of homosexual identity, here Erasmus provides virtually a dictionary definition. Yet he also knows how to blur the boundaries. In a letter to the Bishop of Metz in 1525, coming to the rescue of a young literary friend charged with Lutheranism, he joshes that in that case, "sum hereticus."[222] Call me heretic, he dares the bishop, going on to recall in the next paragraph how Alcibiades escaped similar charges in Athens. Monks and priests, he writes slyly, have only themselves to blame for the heretical reputation that sticks to them. To convert to the life of Christ, it is first necessary to become lovable. In a daring maneuver Erasmus left unpublished in this draft, he adapts Ovid's art of love to say it: *ut ameris, amabilis esto* (that you may be loved, be loveable).[223]

If that reference is asexual, others are brazenly not. In adage 3716, *Sterilem fundum ne colas* ("Don't cultivate barren land"—a clear reference to masturbation), Erasmus adds a needlessly pedantic note on Plato:

> This is found in Plato's *Laws.* If I recall aright, in its context in Plato, the precept is a cryptic way of discouraging active male homosexual love.[224]

Venere mascula, interestingly, is not only plain Latin but perfectly comprehensible Italian, which Erasmus might have heard on the streets in Bologna in 1507, Florence in 1508, or Naples in 1509.[225] What is certain is that Erasmus is aware of other kinds of Platonism than those required for

[221] "Quid autem de corporis voluptatibus loquar quarum appetentia quidem plena est anxietatis, satietas vero poenitentiae? Quantos illae morbos, quam intolerabiles dolores quasi quendam fructum nequitiae fruentium solent referre corporibus! [What shall I say about the pleasures of the body, the longing for which is full of anxiety, the satisfaction of which full of regret? What dreadful diseases, what unbearable pains they generally cause in the bodies of those enjoying them, as a kind of fruit of their wickedness!]": Boethius, 72 (*De consolatione philosophiae* 3.7).

[222] Epistle 1559; P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 6:54. The letter survives only in a manuscript draft: Kongelige Bibliotek, MS GKS 95, fol. 241.

[223] Ovid, 1961, 146 (*Ars amatoria* 2.107).

[224] "Hoc aenigmate lex apud Platonem verecunde deterret a venere mascula, si satis commemini": Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.8:138.

[225] Giannetti, 161.

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philosophia Christi. He knows in detail the social practice of *erastēs* and *erōmenos*. Indeed, Desiderius, which was not his given name, is a reasonable Latin translation of *erōmenos*, as Beatus Rhenanus noted when he commented on the names of Erasmus in his biographical letter to Charles V. In the same paragraph, he recalls Erasmus wishing he had chosen Erasmius as cognomen, for philological reasons; Erasmus does not need to add that this is as close as he can come to calling himself *erastēs* in adult life. It's conceivable that Erasmus played both *erōmenos* and *erastēs* at different times in his life, or in different relationships. A clearly autobiographical passage in his 1526 colloquy Ιχθυοφαγία ("Fish-diet") refers to himself as Eros.[226]

In establishing a "rhetoric of intimacy" in letter-writing, Kathy Eden remarks, Erasmus encourages his readers to adopt the style shared with close friends (*quos familiariter amamus*), to employ the jokes or fights shared with them.[227] In the *Adagia*, too, he not only writes about friendship but also encourages the reader to be like a friend in following his meaning. Yet if Erasmus is among the most self-referential of writers, almost everything he does in this regard is also oblique or deflecting. In relation to a subject so personal as sexuality, and so potentially dangerous as homosexuality, this is hardly surprising. Not even with friends can he afford transparency, however much he enjoins *parrhesia* or "frank speech." Some readers will get the joke, or (as it were) follow the Greek. Others Erasmus allows to remain in the dark. No doubt some secrets he took to the grave.

Yet long after the early encounters with Servaas, Hermans, Batt, and Grey, Erasmus occasionally drops his guard. Late in 1528, beset by what he was now calling Europe's religious tragedy, in the midst of accusations of bad faith from both sides, Erasmus made a new friend. Haio Cammyngha, a young Frisian nobleman, wrote to him asking to join his household as a paying famulus, acting as an amanuensis and courier. Even in the initial exchange of letters, Erasmus writes to him, there was some "secret affinity" ("arcana cognatio") as if they already knew each other. Instantly he fell in love: "I immediately fell strongly in love with you."[228] Some "secret force of nature" ("arcana vis naturae") joins them, like a magnet attracting metal. A year later, he wrote to another Frisian, Hermann Phrysius, saying that he did not need to tell his news since Haio is the bearer of the letter: "my very

[226] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 1.3:529–30.

[227] Eden, 2012, 80, referring to *De conscribendis epistolis* in Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 1.2:314.

[228] "Statim in amorem tui sum inflammatus": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 14:399 (epistle 2073); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 7:532).

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thoughts and intentions are known to him as intimately as to myself."[229] They are, he says (slipping into Greek), ἰσόψυχοι, identical souls. It is not a word Plato uses, but the idiom is inescapably Platonic: they share the same soul.

Epistle 2073 was published in *Epistolae Floridae* in September 1531 but excised from all subsequent editions in Erasmus's lifetime, along with other references to Haio by name. The explanation given in Allen and elsewhere is that Haio had proved an unreliable courier and owed him money. Yet while Erasmus can be casually vindictive, he is also highly practical and does not usually waste a perfectly good letter by excluding it in new editions. That something more intimate might be going on becomes clear in Haio's forlorn replies, which only survive in manuscripts discovered by Allen's zeal. One, now in the Archives Municipales in Strasbourg, is perhaps the clearest example of a love letter written to Erasmus, now in his sixties. After a long silence (it is now 1532 or 1533), Haio has heard secondhand of a letter to him from Erasmus. But alas, "flattered [*blanditus*] and charmed by this idea" it turns out to be a false hope; the letter is to someone else, and Erasmus (he hears) is hostile and alienated from him. "As I kept turning this over in my mind, with many a sigh, continually lamenting my fate and fortune, my mind was struck with such great sadness that I was very close to despair."[230] He admits his mistakes: he should never have turned back from Louvain to go to Italy when he was supposed to be delivering the letters. He was tricked into this by falling in with a group of men who seemed friendly but were really like kidnappers. If only Erasmus makes it up with him, he has a house and garden in Friesland where his old master can stay with him.

"For just as I have always wanted you to approve of me no less than you love me, so too (by Hercules!) I am plunged into deep grief."[231] Haio also includes intense jealousy for those who now possess the love of Erasmus. It is not that he envies their happiness so much as that "I am tormented by a pain which only you can relieve," which induces Haio into a spurt of memory.[232] He recalls the door of the room that Erasmus gave him in his house in Freiburg-im-

[229] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 16:159 (epistle 2261); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 8:399.

[230] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 19:255 (epistle 2766); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 10:155.

[231] "Nam vt nunquam minus probari quam diligi semper a te me volui, ita me hercule dolore quodam afficior non mediocri": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 10:157. The letter survives only in manuscript: Archives de la Ville, 1AST 158, fol. 33.

[232] "Nisi a te prorsus immedicabilis": P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 10:157.

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Breisgau, on which some spiteful person, envying their love, wrote a message:

Successore nouo tollitur omnis amans, etc.

It is a line from Ovid's *Remedia amoris*: "All love is vanquished by the succeeding lover." For almost the only time in Erasmus's life, it is possible to peek, if not inside the bedroom, then at least with the door ajar, where secret, insinuating lines from love poems are scrawled in mockery. To cap it all off, Haio signs the letter as "your friend and most dedicated slave" ("amicus addictissimumque mancipium") and adds that he is his whether he wants him or not ("velis nolis").[233]

Mancipium, a word Haio also uses in signing epistle 2866, is undeniably strong, and could be sexual slang (it is used for a male prostitute in Juvenal, and in a sodomy trial in Bologna).[234] One of the curious aspects of Erasmus's delineation of ancient same-sex practice is his sympathy for the κίναιδος, who subverts all the codes by enjoying the role of the passive partner in anal sex. In the 1500 *Collectanea*, he describes "Risus Ionicus. Olim iactatum in cinedos," which Toronto translates as "laughter directed at homosexuals."[235] In 1508, he expands his explanation to "said of the luxurious and pleasure-loving, as in the voluptuousness of the Ionians" ("In molles et voluptarios dicitur. Nam Ionum mollicies")—not only analyzing sex jokes but also parading them in luxurious, pleasure-loving, and voluptuous quotations from Athenaeus and Aristophanes.[236] More daringly, adage 638, *Spongia mollior* ("Softer than a sponge") expands from a brief reference in 1505 to a fulsome description of the allures of the κίναιδος, culminating in one of the filthiest lines in Catullus, *Carmina* 25:

Cinaede Thalli mollior cuniculi capillo

"Oh Thallus, you catamite, softer than rabbit's fur": a metaphor easier to understand with the Latin puns on *cunnus* and *culus* (female pudenda and male anus) in mind. Nothing in ancient society was considered more sexually deviant than the κίναιδος, Winkler reminds us, who "flagrantly violated or contravened the dominant social definition of masculinity"—and who denotes a person, not an action.[237] In 1528, Erasmus confided to Lypsius that a Dominican had asked

[233] P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 10:157.
[234] See Juvenal (*Satires* 11.173); Mills, 109.
[235] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.9:271.
[236] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 31:446 (adage 469); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.1:544.
[237] Winkler, 46.

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how Erasmus's books broke the bounds of decency: he replies that he turns bishops into *kinaedos*.[238]

It is often in playfulness that Erasmus and his friends are most indiscreet, since appearing to be outrageous is also pleasurable. Recognizable in this banter is MacCulloch's brilliant description of the emergent and yet etiolated world of Renaissance homosociality, which he describes as "strategies for concealment and disclosure":

> sometimes for appearing visible, distinctive, and available in some culturally recognizable way, sometimes being able to melt into the background of the dominant gender identity—for saying things obliquely or keeping significant silences.[239]

An extraordinary commentary on this kind of literary process is provided in a 1519 letter by Christophe de Longueil, sometimes called the French Pico. Asked why François I preferred Erasmus to his countryman Budé, Longueil replied that in terms of learning the two men could hardly be separated. The difference lies instead in style:

> In Budé I think I detect more muscle, more blood, more energy; in Erasmus rounded flesh, smooth skin, fresh colouring. One is more thorough, the other more ready; one fertile in epigram, the other in wit; one all intent on practical ends, the other above all on pleasing.[240]

It is an astonishing piece of literary criticism, yet also a contrast of two social cultures, in which gender plays a telling part. "Ducit alter blanditiis, alter viribus trahit," he goes on: the one leads by charm, the other by masculine force. Erasmus is sweet, smooth, witty, pleasing, beguiling; the only word missing here is effeminate. In case the point is not understood, Longueil puts the literary contrast into an explicitly libidinous context: "Erasmus to them is softer and more effeminate, Budé is harder and more austere" ("Hunc lasciuia molliorem, illum austeritate duriorem").[241] Effeminacy—gender's ultimate taboo—is reclaimed as seductive literary style.

In a letter responding to this set-piece *comparatio*, Erasmus is not in the least unflattered, even as he professes himself pleased that Longueil has taken Budé's

[238] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 14:325 (epistle 2045); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 7:481.

[239] MacCulloch, 621.

[240] "In Budaeo videor mihi agnoscere plus neruorum, sanguinis, spiritus; in Erasmo plus carnis, cutis, coloris. In illo plus diligentiae. in hoc plus facilitatis. Creber ille sententiis, hic facetiis. Ille omnia vtilitati, hic plurimum delectationi tribuit": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 6:228 (epistle 914, Christophe de Longueil to Jacques Lucas); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 3:474.

[241] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 6:229 (epistle 914); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 3:475.

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side (when it is not clear he ever did). Erasmus basks in the idea of his feminine side seducing the literary world, for all the world like a sixteenth-century Proust:

> You paint me a pretty picture of myself, although I doubt altogether in my true colours. And yet in front of this portrait I rather fancy myself; not that I believe it at all, but because it is a pleasure to be done by the hand of an Apelles. What is more, when you point out the shortcomings found in me by the critics I get no less profit than I do pleasure.[242]

In both sides of the exchange, literary terms commingle with sexual ones. To be *mollis*, it is understood, is to adopt an Ovidian mode of writing, or else a sexually passive role. *Lascivia* is a strange word, perhaps, for the characteristic style of an editor of the New Testament. In the midst of this is the virtually untranslatable term *blandus*. Beware a *blandus amicus*, says Cicero the severe, for whom *blanditiis* are always "flattering words."[243] But Horace's *Epistles* acknowledges that "bland" words win favors all the same.[244] Above all, there is the Ovidian allure, as in the imaginary letter of Helen to Paris in *Heroides*:

> et longae noctes, et iam sermone coimus,
>
> et tu, me miseram! blandus, et una domus.
>
> The nights, too, are long, and we already come together in speech, and you—wretched me!—are persuasive, and the same roof covers us.[245]

The interesting thing is the way that *blandus* avoids any air of the illicit even as it seduces everyone. It is not so much a word that suggests a language of love, as a loving dimension of language itself. Ah, says Quintilian, literature is *ille blandus puer*, the boy who leads everyone astray.[246] Literature makes friends, Erasmus is always saying; and sometimes it can make more than friends.

Historians and biographers sometimes behave as if a sleight of rhetoric can protect Erasmus from any inferences of real-life intimacy. It is an odd gesture, as if sexuality is not itself redolent of amicable language. Friendship is hardly a dialectical opposite to same-sex feeling, even if it is also not precisely the same thing.

[242] "Belle tu quidem me mihi depingis, sed haud scio an omnino meis coloribus. Et tamen ad hanc tabulam ipse mihi nonnihil blandior; non quod illi prorsus credam, sed quod iuuet Apellis manu depingi. Porro cum indicas quid in me desiderent critici, non minus cepi vtilitatis quam voluptatis": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 6:287 (epistle 935, Erasmus to Longueil, April 1519); P. S. Allen, H. M. Allen, and Garrod, 3:521.

[243] Cicero, 1941, 62 (*De amicitia* 25.95).

[244] Horace, 1912 (*Epistularum libros* 2.1.135).

[245] Ovid, 1989 (*Heroides* XVII.182–83).

[246] Quintilian (*Declamationes* 6.5.5).

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Monks and humanists alike knew these languages as complex codes. When Erasmus tells his students that Corydon and Alexis are *unlike* each other, he is letting slip an innuendo as well as teaching the virtue of disinterestedness. You and I are *unlike*, he tells Haio in his first letter; that is why we are metal and magnet. Similarly, the prohibitions on sodomy in ecclesiastical and secular sources bespeak real knowledge even as they disown it. Euphemism, scandal, and denial share the space in the sexual confessional at all stages. Erasmus can hardly be expected to have left behind clear historical evidence of his actions or relationships, like an epistemological used condom. If the *lucubrationes* of the bedchamber cannot be discovered, it is possible to learn to read his often playfully perverse writing with more sympathy, or perhaps less discrimination. MacCulloch's phrase about early modern same-sex codes is hardly foreign to Erasmus's literary mode: "a distinctive language and shared jokes which shaped a semi-public lifestyle shot through with parody and irony." MacCulloch believes that it was only in the eighteenth century—maybe first in Amsterdam—that a less coded language became available for a "third sexual identity."[247] In this, as in other ways, Erasmus of Rotterdam is a forerunner.

In 1533, Erasmus added an odd adage: *Verbis coquinariis* ("Cookery words"). He took it from Aristophanes's *Knights*, to mean "soft, flattering and sweet words" ("pro verbis mollibus, blandis ac dulcibus"). In the same play, Aristophanes amusingly uses the phrase Ἡήματα μαγειρικά (cookery words) to mean soft, sweet, enticing words. Cooks use flavorings to sweeten something that is naturally rather bitter. In the play, one of the characters is being encouraged to butter up the Athenian people by saying things that will please them. The line reads: "Cajoling them with little bits of cookery words." Aristophanes used the adjective *cookery* instead of *sugary*. A good use for this phrase will be to say that the philosophy of Epicurus seduces the minds of ignorant people "with cookery words," because he asserts that pleasure is the highest good."[248] He calls this *blandiloquentia*, which is as good an epigraph as any for the Erasmian self-image of cajoling the reader and the friend into smiling agreement. It is an axiom not without philosophy, for the Epicurean style, Erasmus suggests, is to seduce the reader by creating an aesthetic of pleasure. This is the meaning of saying that pleasure is the highest good: "quod voluptatem asserat esse summum bonum."[249]

[247] "A third sexual identity: a man who was wholly attracted to other men but who represented his 'unmasculine' preference by acting in a highly feminized way"; MacCulloch, 628–29.

[248] "Ἡήματα μαγειρικά, id est verba coquorum, venuste dixit in eadem fabula pro verbis mollibus, blandis ac dulcibus. Coquorum enim est condimentis edulcare cibum per se subausterum. Monetur illic quispiam ut populum Atheniensem blandiloquentia demulceat": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:411 (adage 3790); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.8:172.

[249] Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:412.

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In 1533 he contrasts the principle in adage 3700, *Candidus sermo* ("White speech,") using a Greek phrase which he has apparently made up:

> This was a Greek expression for speech that is clear and easily understood, from the colour that has the greatest light of all. Therefore those who express their thoughts quite clearly are said λευκότερον εἰπεῖν (to speak more brightly); that is, σαφέστερον (more clearly), and a voice that easily reaches the ears of an audience is called a λευκὴ φωνή (a bright voice). There are metaphors such as the one in this expression that draw from a closely related field, as when those who understand something are said "to feel" or "to see," those who remember something are said "to retain," those who are suspicious are said "to get a whiff," those who err are said "to be blind." The metaphors are drawn from a very closely related field when a function of the eyes is transferred to the ears, as in this one.[250]

Metaphorically, it means a form of language that removes the distinction between seeing and feeling. It implies a purity of diction that is honest to the point of being guileless, frankness to the elimination of anything but the transparently literal. If Erasmus often seems to appeal to such a thing as the height of virtue in both politics and literature, he admits at some level that it is not something that describes him. He is a poet of *blandiloquentia*; he reveals by concealing. He speaks so smoothly that the reader does not know what he is up to, as he blandishes, sweetens the dish, and shares in the reader's pleasure. If a single word were required to translate something of the powerful synergy of his use of the word *blandus*, it might even be "gay."

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[250] "Λευκὸς λόγος Graecis dicitur oratio dilucida perspicuaque, a colore qui inter caeteros plurimum habet lucis. Unde λευκότερον εἰπεῖν dicuntur qui clarius efferunt quod sentiunt, hoc est σαφέστερον, et λευκὴ φωνή dicitur quae facile penetrat aures auditorum. Hujusmodi metaphorae sunt quae sumuntur e propinquo, ut cum sentire dicuntur aut videre qui rem intelligunt, tenere qui meminerunt, odorari qui suspicantur, caecutire qui errant. E proximo ducuntur, cum quod oculorum est transfertur ad aures, velut hoc": Erasmus, *Collected Works*, 36:351 (adage 3700); Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, 2.8:127.

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