

Uranisme et Unisexualité :

A Late Victorian View of Homosexuality

P.W.J. Healy

Between November 1927 and January 1929 there appeared in the pages of the then *Blackfriars* a series of articles under the name of Alexander Michaelson. They were mostly biographical vignettes in which the author recalled famous friends and acquaintances of the 'eighties and 'nineties: Browning, Burne-Jones, Swinburne, Pater, Leslie Stephen, Wilde, Beardsley. Alexander Michaelson was the pseudonym of Mark André Raffalovich, a wealthy man of letters and benefactor of the Church and, in particular, of the Dominican Order. Five years after the appearance of the last *Blackfriars* essay, he died at the age of seventy-four. His family were Russian emigré Jews who had settled in Paris the year before his birth in 1864. There he had been brought up in the world of the *salon*; Claude Bernard, Henri Bergson, Ernest Renan, Sarah Bernhardt were among the visitors to the Raffalovich's house.

In 1882 he was despatched to England, with his former governess as housekeeper, to complete his education. Instead of going up to university, the young man sought introductions to the literary and artistic men of the day. He would write articles on authors he admired, publish them in the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, and send copies to their unsuspecting subjects. Thus he met R. L. Stevenson, Swinburne and Meredith. Others he met more conventionally; but almost always his friendships were marked by precociousness on his part.

His acquaintance with Wilde turned sour. Wilde reviewed a book of Raffalovich's verse; it was not so much a bad review as a mocking one, and in the published correspondence which ensued Raffalovich was made to look more of a fool. And, of course, there was Wilde's stinging wit which so aptly showed up pretension. The story went about of how Wilde and some friends, having been invited to lunch, arrived at Raffalovich's front door and asked the butler for a table for six. That Raffalovich's record of the trials of Oscar Wilde was the first of what has become a long line of such accounts to be published has invariably drawn adverse comment: it would have been better to have kept silence.

His relations with his contemporaries and younger friends were much happier. He kept Beardsley from penury in the latter's last months and was largely responsible for his conversion to Roman

Catholicism: an act for which he has suffered at the hands of Beardsley's biographers.

It was, however, John Gray who became Raffalovich's close friend. Gray moved in Wilde's circle, wrote exquisite *fin de siècle* verse, and finally entered the Church. He was sent to Edinburgh where he became Rector of St. Peter's, Morningside, which had been built in large part at Raffalovich's expense. Raffalovich took a house nearby. The story of their long friendship has been recounted with sensitivity by Brocard Sewell in *Two Friends* (1963) and *Footnote to the Nineties* (1968).

Had his life been marked only by the writing of indifferent verse and the membership of a literary cénacle in the 'nineties there would be little to recommend Raffalovich to our notice today, save, perhaps, morbid antiquarianism. His claim to attention, however, rests on his work as psychologist. The year after Wilde's imprisonment, 1896, saw two major events in the life of Raffalovich: his conversion to Catholicism and the publication of his book, *Uranisme et Unisexualité*,¹ a study of homosexuality in its historical, psychological and moral aspects. It is significant that both events took place in the same year; he came to terms with his sexuality and his religious nature together. In fact, the one resolution could not have been made in isolation from the other. His sexuality required the context of his faith for it to have any meaning. *Uranisme et Unisexualité* is, then, the formulation of one Catholic layman's views on homosexuality. Given the time of its publication, it shows considerable honesty in its author. Admittedly the conventions had to be observed and, although intended primarily for an English audience of opinion-makers in the professions, it was written in French.

Today it is difficult to come by a copy of the book; even the British Museum is without one.² This is unfortunate, for in recent years there has been some debate on the Church's attitude to homosexuality and perhaps it is timely to look again at Raffalovich's views.

The method of the book was to collect a number of relevant passages from works of literature and literary and historical memoirs. The standard works of medicine contained clinical case-histories, but Raffalovich believed that historical and literary cases gave a better picture of the complete homosexual personality and made for easier classification. He did not ignore clinical evidence; for each of his historical cases he would have been able to provide at least one clinical case in the event of further historical material

¹ *Uranisme*: from the German, *Uranismus*, a term first used by Ulrichs in 1860. It derived from the surname of Aphrodite, *Urania*, 'the heavenly', and signified male homosexuality. The epithet was applied to Aphrodite in her role of goddess of pure and spiritual love.

² There is, however, a copy in the John Rylands University of Manchester Library.

coming to light and challenging his classification; but he preferred wherever possible to use literary and historical sources.

He quotes from the memoirs of Victor Alfiéri, the Emperor Baber, J. J. Rousseau and Casanova; he discusses the friendships of Molière and Baron, Montaigne and Eugène de la Boetie, Michélet and Poinsoy, Frederic the Great and M. de Suhm; and he studies the prevalence of inversion in England, in the course of which he discusses William Rufus, Edward II, James I, Lord Audley, the Edward Walpole affair, Hamann's experiences in England, the Duke of Cumberland, the Bishop of Clogher, Oscar Wilde, and Lord Alfred Douglas' letters to the French press after Wilde's trials. There is a chapter on Monsieur, frère de Louis XIV, and a section examining Dante's attitude to homosexuality. He also considers Walt Whitman, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Byron, Goethe, Michael Angelo, K. P. Moritz, Grillparzer and A. von Platen; and he includes extracts from the *Satyricon*, from A. C. Benson's novel, *The Memoirs of Arthur Hamilton* (1886), written under the pseudonym of Christopher Carr, from Georges Darien's novel *Biribi* and from Huysman's *A Rebours*.

As this rehearsal of the book's contents shows, it lacks the scientific rigour which we would expect of such a study today. Yet it would be rash to dismiss it out of hand as Rupert Croft-Cooke does:

It is in fact little more than an anthology of case histories culled from literature, from Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing and such stale self-righteous stuff presented as a serious study. Its opening words give the measure of its sheer silliness, "On peut diviser les uranistes en ultra-virils, virils, efféminés, passifs" and its quotations from Sainte-Beuve, Goethe, St. John of the Cross and Plato of its pretensions.³

The style of the armchair psychologist afforded Raffalovich the opportunity to discuss his subject on a more philosophical level than the collecting of clinical case-histories would have allowed. As Havelock Ellis noted in a reference to *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, Raffalovich was able to put forward 'many just and sagacious reflections on the nature and treatment of inversion, and the attitude of society towards perverted sexuality.'⁴

I I

The book makes two assertions, one physiological, the other moral. According to Raffalovich, homosexuality and heterosexuality are of equal significance, being but the two faces of human

³ *Feasting with Panthers* (1967), p. 219

⁴ 'Sexual Inversion' in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 3rd edition, New York, (1942) pp. 72-3.

sexuality: *'there is no dividing line between heterosexuals and homosexuals.'* (p. 89)⁵ Homosexuality and heterosexuality are two equally legitimate manifestations of sexuality. From this position he rejects the view that the homosexual orientation is necessarily a pathological or a criminal condition:

The normal sexual invert is neither necessarily a sick man nor a criminal; he is no more at the mercy of his sexual instinct than any other civilised man with principles, duties and conventions to observe. (p. 25)

He criticises those who, in their attempt to have the laws against homosexuals repealed, argue that homosexuality is an illness. He takes Krafft-Ebing to task for advocating this theory which takes everything 'from the point of view of heterosexuality, and in [his] opinion this point of view is as false as the homosexual point of view.' (p.205)

Homosexuality is not a disease; it is as natural as heterosexuality. Thus it is that he also objects to the charge of criminality. This restricts the individual's right to express his personality where it does not interfere with others:

Every man, as Goethe has said, has the right to a philosophy which does not destroy his individuality, without on that count harming the individuality of others. This is the psychological origin of philosophies. And my study of certain manifestations of the sexual instinct rests on this indestructible and, in my opinion, incontrovertible axiom. (p.13)

He admits that there is deviation and crime to be found in this area of experience; he condemns both sodomy and pederasty; but he insists that the 'superior uranian' practises neither:

As I have already said, anal intercourse (active or passive) is not the end of their sexuality and the satisfaction of their sexual instinct; rather this is a deviation, just as anal intercourse is a deviation for heterosexuals.

The love of men for boys who have not yet reached puberty is just as much outside normal uranism as love of little girls is outside normal heterosexuality. There are depraved heterosexuals who seek out children; there are also depraved uranists who seek out children.

Sodomy, active or passive anal intercourse, and sexual love which is satisfied with young boys, no more belong to the realm of homosexuality than to that of heterosexuality. (p.42)

Homosexuals themselves, he argues, would be in favour of laws against sodomy and pederasty; they are only in favour of the abolition of the laws against them where 'there is neither breach of trust, nor the seduction of minors, nor violence, nor sodomy.' (p. 194)

⁵ Here and elsewhere my own translation.

He is particularly critical of the law passed in England in 1885 which had outlawed all homosexual relations, private as well as public. This had been a backward step and an encouragement to blackmailers.

There is a refreshing quality about Raffalovich's book which is lacking in the work of other late 19th century campaigners for reform. The reader detects a slight self-pitying tone in J. A. Symond's *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891) or Edward Carpenter's *Homogenic Love* (1894). Raffalovich always places his discussion of sex in a larger social context. He describes the plight of the working-class heterosexual youth who is too poor to marry, yet whose conscience forbids him to visit a prostitute or to form an adulterous relationship:

Sexually this man has as much to complain about as the invert. Their situations resemble each other very much. Their best course, and the sooner they follow it the better, is to put aside their vanity and tell themselves that the sexual act ought not to be the pivot of their existence. I say vanity, for vanity and envy on occasion madden a man sexually, and the idea that others are enjoying what he would like to enjoy is one of the strongest temptations. Krafft-Ebing is the representative of those who demand justice for the invert, and I ask for nothing better; but it is necessary to remember that this protest is based on the theory that each man has the right to be satisfied sexually. If one recognises this right for heterosexuals I do not see how it can be refused to inverts (especially since to refuse it to them alters nothing in the nature of things). But in my opinion each man does not have the right to claim the sexual satisfactions which he desires. The same moral law which forbids a heterosexual epileptic or consumptive or invalid suffering from any transmissible disease, to perpetuate his scourge while refashioning it, this same law forbids the invert from indulging his inclinations. (pp. 87-8)

III

Here we come to the second major assertion of *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, namely that 'each man does not have the right to claim the sexual satisfactions which he desires.' For Raffalovich there is a necessary distinction between the orientation and the practice. He accepted unconditionally the naturalness, the moral neutrality of the homosexual orientation; however, he acquiesced in the view that the moral law prohibited homosexual practices. This is, of course, a very orthodox Christian view. But there are unresolved tensions in Raffalovich's argument. The orthodox Christian view, based as it is on the Scholastic rehabilitation of Aristotelian thought, is almost exclusively concerned with the commis-

sion or omission of acts: by his deeds is a man judged. Admittedly, the useful distinction between formal and material allows for the introduction of intention: but little account is taken of personality. Raffalovich's whole argument, however, is based on personality. He has left behind him a world where the implications of an axiom are deduced and moved into one where nature is explored inductively. More accurately, he has half moved; he still has a foot in the old world.

This tension is apparent in his argument; his logic breaks down. In an attempt to support his assertion that homosexual acts are prohibited by the moral law, he draws an analogy with the moral prohibition against an epileptic having sexual intercourse. But the analogy is absurdly false; the reason that the moral law may condemn the latter is indeed that it is thought to be a transmissible disease;⁶ but by no stretch of the imagination can this be the case with homosexuality. We will come to another example of the false analogy later; for the moment let us examine Raffalovich's ideal of chastity.

According to Raffalovich, the responsible homosexual is perforce obliged to lead a life of chastity. As he points out, however, 'chastity is a positive virtue, not a negative one, which writers often forget.' (p. 73) Man does not have a right to sexual gratification and the chaste homosexual realises this:

They attain an intellectual and moral maturity which no longer considers sex as the pivot of the universe. They no longer have to complain of their lot. They have to fulfil their mission here below, and they try their best. In the same way there are heterosexual men who free themselves from the genital life at a period of their growth. (p. 74)

The chaste homosexual, however, needs some support in life to achieve his ideal. Christianity, he suggests, can provide such help:

... and the sad or timid uranist who is not possessed of the calm or the wisdom which Goethe found in Winckelman, will do well eventually to take shelter under any form of Christianity, whether orthodox or heretic, symbolic or strict. (p. 240)

The Catholic Church, in particular, has understood the nature of the chaste homosexual and has gladly accepted him among her priesthood:

The Catholic Church has, indeed, recognised that inversion was often less scandalous than heterosexual sexuality; she has also always known the extent and ramifications of it; she ought to be the storehouse of rules for the education of inverts, and still

6 'In view of the possible hereditary nature of epilepsy medical men were apt to advise those with a family history of the disease not to marry. But it is now believed that direct transmission of the disease is uncommon, and medical prohibition of marriage and child-bearing is less dogmatically applied.' *Black's Medical Dictionary*, 27th edition, (1967), 'Epilepsy', p. 323.

today she ought for preference to choose for priests superior inverts, chaste and devoted men; and then heterosexuals who have broken with the world or who have the strength of character necessary; and the coarse invert ought naturally to be one of the worst dangers in any religious institution. (p. 32)

The celibate priesthood is one way of serving society as well as God and Raffalovich is very conscious of the social usefulness of the homosexual. He is able 'to perform a truly social function' and can 'devote himself to an art, a science, a vocation, any kind of ideal.' (p. 207) He draws a comparison between the worker bee and the worker ant and the homosexual: 'Bees and ants have workers who do not reproduce. Is it possible, remotely possible, to make use of uranists?' (p. 213)

But if the homosexual is to fulfil an important social role he must come to terms with his sexuality:

Great inverts have never felt guilty about their inversion; it has never prevented them from being themselves, from accomplishing their work on this earth. (p. 91)

It is in the context of this self-discovery and self-acceptance that Raffalovich insists on the need for the education of the young congenital invert; he must be educated for his role in society as soon as his real nature becomes apparent:

The education of the uranist is a duty; it will soon be a necessity. If we apply ourselves to discovering the child uranist and to perfecting him and improving him, if we help him towards continence, chastity, seriousness, duty, we will find ourselves faced with a new class, fit for celibacy, work and religion (since the realisation of their desires is not in this world). Like Plato's ideal doctor the best among them will have a constitution weak enough to understand the disorders of their fellows, and a will strong enough to render them useful. (p. 39)

Raffalovich, however, accepts the need for some form of homosexual relationship and proposes friendship as the necessary support for the homosexual in his quest for chastity. He recalls that Christian marriage was instituted to preserve chastity as well as for purposes of procreation. St. Paul recommended those tempted to fornication to get married. Raffalovich compares the Greek ideal of homosexual friendship with the Catholic ideal of marriage:

When the Greek philosophers chose to show the superior and spiritual side of homosexuality, they wished to show how in raising oneself above a natural and instinctive inclination one was able to make use of it for the mutual perfecting of men; they wanted to give to feelings altogether natural, instinctive, come from the very roots of humanity, a sanction, a pardon, an elevation which one can only compare to the Catholic Church's attitude towards marriage. Marriage is a sacrament; marriage has continence and the perpetuation of the race for

its end; it is for those who cannot attain to perfect chastity, who cannot preserve their virginity, and who do not wish to be consumed with desire for fornication.

It is thus that Greek philosophy has envisaged homosexuality. It has seen that congenital or acquired inversion was natural, springing from human nature, a fact which contemporary science, thanks to medicine and embryology, has discovered again, without bothering about the psychological discoveries of former times, just as congenital or acquired heterosexuality is natural, springing from human nature. Instead of rising and rebelling against one's inherent sexuality, it has wanted to prove that heroism, constancy, temperance, justice, in a word, manly virtue, were not totally contrary to human nature, that the ideal of chastity was not contrary to the ideal of continence, and that the ideal of continence could be attained by the sensual man at least to purify and reduce his sensuality until he became capable of perfecting himself or perfecting another.

Moreover, the best were obliged to help the less experienced, and the creation of immortal children, that is to say beautiful actions issuing from beautiful thoughts, was the necessary end of this spiritual marriage, to which Plato and his fellows gave a heavenly sanction comparable to the sacrament of Catholic marriage. (pp. 199-200)

The sentiment is heady; the argument lacks lucidity in parts. What exactly does he mean by the ideal of chastity not being contrary to the ideal of continence? I presume that, in so far as the ideal of friendship sanctions the homosexual orientation, the four cardinal virtues are not needed as moral storm-troopers, so to say, to extirpate such feelings, but are, in fact, present in the form the particular friendship takes and that, by analogy, chastity (abstinence) is not in opposition to continence (restraint) because in this case they are the same virtue.⁷ What is clear, however, is the late Victorian–Edwardian flavour of the passage. One hears Pater's voice behind the argument; it reflects a decidedly turn-of-the-century evaluation of Greek culture.

But the late Romantic (and, in this sense, decadent) sentiment of the passage and the obscurity of the argument are much more significant than that. We must remember that Raffalovich, in offering the ideal of friendship as a support for chastity, is comparing it with the Catholic sacrament of matrimony. By tradition, marriage is, indeed, as he reminds the reader, a preservative for chastity. But

⁷ 'Au lieu de s'insurger, de se révolter contre la sexualité inhérente, elle a voulu démontrer que l'heroïsme, la constance, la tempérance, la justice, la vertu mâle en un mot, n'étaient pas en tous points contraires à la nature humaine, que l'idéal de la chasteté n'était pas contraire à l'idéal de la continence, et que l'idéal de la continence pouvait être atteint par l'homme sensuel ou du moins purifier et atténuer sa sensualité jusqu'à ce qu'il devînt capable de se perfectionner ou de perfectionner un autre.'

chastity is an ambiguous concept; it means different things to different people. What would be accepted as chaste behaviour in wedlock, would be decidedly unchaste outside. The chastity of the married man is different from the chastity vowed by the monk. The precise meaning of the concept of chastity depends on the status of the person of whom its possession is predicated. Raffalovich's analogy between Catholic marriage and ideal friendship blurs this distinction. No doubt it was done unwittingly; it is, however, further evidence of the tension he experienced intellectually in trying to reconcile his acceptance of the variety of the human personality and natural law.

No one disputes that in his own case Raffalovich lived out his ideal; his decision and his practice deserve our respect. As we noted above, the same year, 1896, saw both his conversion and the publication of *Uranisme et Unisexualité*. He had accepted his homosexuality; he wished to lead a life of chastity; he found the necessary support in the Church, in his friendship with Gray, and in the arts. As he wrote to Huysmans:

Yes, chastity outside the Church is theoretical, negative; in the Church it becomes positive. The chaste man who is not a Catholic feels impoverished, contracted, while the Catholic is enriched, is nourished by chastity. This is what I know from my own experience, and you must know it also.⁸

For the last thirty years of their lives Raffalovich and Gray lived near each other in Edinburgh; Raffalovich assisted at Gray's morning Mass; Gray was a frequent visitor at Raffalovich's house. The ideal of *Uranisme et Unisexualité* was shared by both.

However, the assurance of the tone of the book—an assurance derived from the recent resolution within the author's own personality of the potentially conflicting claims of his religious and sexual natures—should not overwhelm us. *Uranisme et Unisexualité* is a chapter of autobiography every bit as much as an ethical disquisition. The particular form that the resolution of Raffalovich's different sexual and religious impulses took need not be the pattern for others—even Christians. His assurance is ultimately based on assertion. But—as we have seen, these assertions are buttressed by false analogies—with epilepsy, with Christian marriage. Certainly friendship built on chastity is one course open to the homosexual. But once personality has been accepted as the primary criterion for evaluating manifestations of human sexuality (and here, I would argue, Raffalovich anticipated a broadly held view of today) the implications will hardly be checked by an axiom of a theory of natural law. It is unsatisfactory to argue that, although the orientation is natural, and indeed God-given, the practice is gravely sinful. The sceptic can be forgiven for questioning the sincerity of the concession: to censure the activity is, it would seem, by implica-

⁸ Brocard Sewell (ed), *Two Friends: John Gray and Andre Raffalovich* (1963). p. 191

tion, to censure the orientation. This is where Raffalovich's book is so instructive: in classical form, it tries to justify the personality while, at the same time, it decries the expression, and thus shows up the tensions implicit in the would-be liberal, would-be charitable stance of orthodox Christianity. The defective logic of his argument, as evinced in his choice of analogies, is significant; it belies, of course, the assurance of his position, it reveals a mind which has looked back.

Questioning Critics: Hardy and Williams

Bernard Sharratt

Literary criticism seems to be in an odd cul-de-sac at present. Two recent works by widely-esteemed critics can serve as pointers to a persistent paradox. In reviewing together the latest offerings of Barbara Hardy and Raymond Williams I don't intend to do 'justice' to each volume individually, but to suggest, by their juxtaposition, a curious state of affairs: the simultaneous importance and irrelevance of 'literature'—its importance within an educational apparatus and as the focus of a political project, and yet a concomitant sense that neither critic, or approach, has much to say about why anyone might actually continue reading poems and novels anyway. As a link, or diversion, I also glance at an aspect of Walter Benjamin's work still largely unappreciated—his criticism of Brecht's poems.¹

Barbara Hardy entitles her book *The Advantage of Lyric: Essays on Feeling in Poetry*. Almost every word here invites comment, but the most provocative is "advantage". The 'advantage of lyric in itself is its concentrated and patterned expression of feeling. This advantage is negatively definable: the lyric does not provide an explanation, judgment or narrative; what it does provide is feeling, alone and without histories or characters.' (p.1). The absence of history and explanation is frequently noted, and approved; an interesting example is the quoting (p.5) of Quiller-Couch's cut-down version of Emily Bronte's long poem *Julian M. and A.G. Rochelle*: in Q's version 'virtually all we are left with is the

¹ I refer to B. Hardy, *The Advantage of Lyric*, The Athlone Press, 1977, pp. 142, £5.50. R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 218 £3.50. W. Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, New Left Books, 1973, which includes 'From the Brecht Commentary' and 'Commentaries on Poems by Brecht'. The general argument of this article might be taken further and modified by considering also Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology*, NLB, 1976, and Gabriel Josipovici's *The Lessons of Modernism*, Macmillan, 1977.