

homosexuality and pedophilia has been made by those determined to oppose gay marriage at any cost. In her book *Le "Mariage" des homosexuels?* (Marriage between homosexuals?), conservative French politician Christine **Boutin** wrote: "Where will we draw the line, for an adopted child, between homosexuality and pedophilia?" On the same note, in March of 1999 a caricature appeared in the French newspaper *Présent* in which a male couple proposes to a young boy to receive him "with open sheets." In another example, as if it were necessary, a well-distributed leaflet by a French association called *Avenir de la culture* (Future of the Culture) began with the following terms: "It's a revolution. Do you want an old homosexual couple at the door of the school tomorrow, waiting for your children or grandchildren to come out?" Or this slogan from a demonstration in France against the PaCS (Pacte civil de solidarité; Civil solidarity pact) domestic union proposal: "The homosexuals of today are the pedophiles of tomorrow." In each of these examples, the intent was to extend the stigmatism of pedophilia to homosexuality itself.

Certainly, the phonetic proximity between pedophilia and pederasty (the latter being long synonymous with male homosexuality) facilitates this confusion; and by this fact, there are many who, in all innocence, confuse the two subjects as a result. However, specific declarations of this kind, especially when they are made by someone who is a member of parliament (and now a government minister) like Boutin, are obviously deliberate, and baldly homophobic.

—Roger Téoul

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—*Abnormal; Debauchery; Family; Gayphobia; Perversions; Parenting; Rhetoric; School; Vice*.

## PERIL

Homosexuals, according to the homophobic worldview, are paradoxically both inferior and dangerous. They are a danger to the **family**, the country and to humanity, and dangerous, as well as contagious, to children. The myth of the homosexual "peril" as a deadly, imminent, and generalized threat appears in the medieval interpretation of the biblical episode of **Sodom and Gomorrah**, and survives to this day, confirmed once again by the parliamentary debates that accompanied the vote on the French law **PaCS** (Pacte civil de solidarité; Civil solidarity pact). The supposed cause of "peril" today has turned from homosexuality *per se*—so far tolerated as long as of subordinate status—to the frightening prospect of legal and social equality of the sexes and of sexual orientations. As quoted by a Catholic group in 1998: "A society that places homosexuality and heterosexuality on the same footing is only working towards its own disappearance and could greatly compromise child education." The turn toward equality has not silenced this refrain, whose presence has even increased, whether explicitly or in the background, not only in the public mindset but also, notably, in the political discourses—pseudo psychoanalytical or anthropological—that have begun to appear in the press.

The peril discourse selects themes without appear-

ing to maintain any coherence: when singular, it is to the collective what the discourse of sin is to the individual. In a rather contradictory measure, homosexuality is a practice that appears to be both **against nature** yet capable of transmitting itself. This **contagion** is always thought to be one way, i.e. from homosexuals to heterosexuals, and never the reverse. Though widespread, heterosexuality has never been perceived as being a contagious practice. Throughout history, the myth of sexual peril in all its forms has known many moments of crystallization: it has justified purges against sodomites, women of more unbridled sexuality, and more generally, against the many manifestations of erotic "deviance." In each particular case, we find a common schema, sometimes under the guise of religion, sometimes under a more secular form: the earthly punishment of scapegoats anticipates and prevents a divine punishment of all, which is indiscriminate and, therefore, more frightening. This philosophy originated in thirteenth-century discourse regarding sodomites and heretics, the two so often confused with each other. In a very different form, it was also resurrected in Nazi Germany: the **treatment** reserved for inverters was meant to prevent the collective **degeneracy** of the Aryan race. In the United States, under McCarthyism, the nebulous illusion of peril wore the veil of a generalized homosexual "conspiracy" (nowadays, one would speak rather of a gay "**lobby**").

"Sexual panics" often return during times of conflict (the moment when those in power need to find internal enemies in order to "discipline" the national population or to distract it from the real issues). Collective and visible, the existence of homosexuals would "contaminate" society as a whole through a general "softening" of morality, which would compromise the "good health" of civilization, notably by reducing the fierceness of soldiers in battle. Today, in the sense that threats of war on Western nations are distant, homosexuality appears more as a purely egotistical "behavior" which, being part of a "value-destroying" contemporary hedonism, seeks only the narcissistic satisfaction of its own immediate pleasure. It forgets the hard task of reproduction that is the responsibility of courageous heterosexuals, whose method of mating is intrinsically linked to the general interest.

In a barely more euphemized version, the call for equality of the sexes and of same-sex couples would also be guilty of wanting to "disestablish the **difference** between the sexes." This difference being un-

derstood as the fundamental difference that allows us to conceive of all other differences; it is the whole of the "**symbolic order**" that would be threatened with extinction, and with it language, the possibility of recognizing others, and finally society itself. Children in gay families would be deprived of all references to "**otherness**" and, being incapable of "accessing the symbolic," would risk falling into inhumanity, bringing future civilization with them.

Until now, the dominant strategy of the contemporary gay and lesbian movement has been to emphasize the ridiculousness of these homophobic fantasies, for example, the strangely simplistic character of an "otherness" systematically centered on the differences in genital organs. It has been suggested that if there is in fact a symbolic order (a condition permitting members of a society to understand each other and coordinate), such an order is neither unchanging nor eternal. As a contingent product of history and political struggles, it is susceptible to being changed by that history and by present or future struggles. It has been argued that the fear of a "psychological unstructuring" of children of gay families and—by extension, of all "future generations"—was based upon a naively heterocentric projection of adults who have been trained to believe in the "natural" character of the heterosexual family. This is the final bastion of the mystery of blood: to imagine that a young child, free of all socialization, can expect a father (strict and dominating) and a mother (kind and understanding), and that the sight of two same-sex parents will cause irreversible harm and atrocious psychological problems. Incapable of imagining any alternative social reality, homophobic thought projects its own imagination into the newborn's mind. In short, defenders of gay rights and intellectuals concerned with social justice have stated that the homophobic sentiment of disorder and the fear of the "homosexual threat" do not come from objective reality, but rather from a subjective lack of perceptual categories that allow one to conceive of the possibility of a different order.

#### *An Internal Threat*

However, homosexuals should not allow their understandable desire for legitimization to minimize the subversive charge that their demands and their collective existence bring to bear against the heterosexist social order. For too long a list of euphemisms would eventually render them as unintelligible as that homophobic

resistance to sexual equality. In order to avoid this risk, it is necessary to take the discourse of peril seriously and try to ascertain the real threat of mythical peril in a transfigured form. What exactly do sexual equality and sexual orientations "threaten with extinction"? What does legal recognition of same-sex couples put into "peril"? Not "civilization" itself, but heterosexist civilization; not the "symbolic order," but the homophobic symbolic order. Not only the dominant ideology, but also the entire structure of social relations that is legitimized by presenting the "socio-sexual" hierarchies and inequalities as natural. The threat, therefore, is a political one; the "peril" that homophobes perceive is real. It concerns the disappearance of their sexual, institutional, symbolic, and epistemological privileges.

Yet, the fear of homosexual demands cannot be reduced to an awareness of their capacity to question political privilege. Contrary to other forms of racism, notes Leo Bersani, "homophobia is entirely a reaction to an internal possibility." While "even the worst racist could never fear that blacks would have the seductive power to make someone black," the myth of peril finds its strength in the fantasmatic fear that gay and lesbian affirmation will lead to the "recruitment" of heterosexuals. Gay peril is also, therefore, an internal threat. At the beginning of the 1990s, the debate launched in the United States by President Clinton on allowing "openly homosexual" individuals to enter or remain in the **army** revealed a fear that this reform would engender a form of contagion. According to Bersani, this phobia of male homosexual contagion reveals repression not of a "homosexual" desire *per se*, but of the "overwhelming pleasure" of the feminine jouissance "as the male body has fantasmatically lived it," "as the seemingly suicidal ecstasy of taking his sex like a woman" and which the body anticipates in the fascinating perspective of its own recruiting. In this sense, the myth of homosexual peril transforms, in political terms, an internal tension into homosexual desire.

The political affirmations of contemporary gay and lesbian movements have troubled collective opinions and self-imaging by claiming to put a name and "identity" on age-old practices that were historically tolerated as long as they remained clandestine and secondary. In a rather classic paradox, this "negative freedom," which allowed one to be and do whatever one wished under the shelter of secret practices and love without a name, found itself threatened by "liberation," lead-

ing to phases of collective tension; a response, in the first instance, to the assertion of identity. Using the example of the army, Bersani notes that "the inherent homoeroticism of military life certainly risks being revealed to those would want to both deny it and continue to take advantage of it, if active homosexuals publicly proclaim their preference." More radically, it is the entirety of "homo-social" relations that homosexual affirmation threatens to "desubliminate" by revealing the homosexual eroticism within these relations, often are tacitly exploited in everyday interactions (consider, for example, the sublimated sexual tension that in the "frank and virile camaraderie" of men).

Finally, just as spelling mistakes, if they are too numerous, threaten to drastically change spelling (unlike an error in counting, which, in itself, has no consequence for mathematical truth), homosexuality threatens, if it is too radically emancipated, to "deinstitutionalize" heterosexuality. That is to say, to rob it of its socially dominant status. The "peril," therefore, is not simply in the minds of homophobes, but in the reality of a political relation that is under construction. It does not concern "society," but rather a certain structure of oppression. If the "spontaneous" impression that there are "more and more" homosexuals corresponds to an optical illusion repeated from generation to generation, this illusion depends on a rather well-founded awareness of the risks such a "spontaneous generation" poses to heterosexual privileges. Thus, we could conclude by saying that after further examination of the social logic at work, there is no possible doubt: gays and lesbians are, in fact, dangerous.

—Sébastien Chauvin

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—*Abnormal; Communitarianism; Contagion; Debauchery; Heterosexism; Otherness; Proselytism; Rhetoric; Sodom and Gomorrah; Sterility; Symbolic Order; Theology.*

## PERVERSIONS

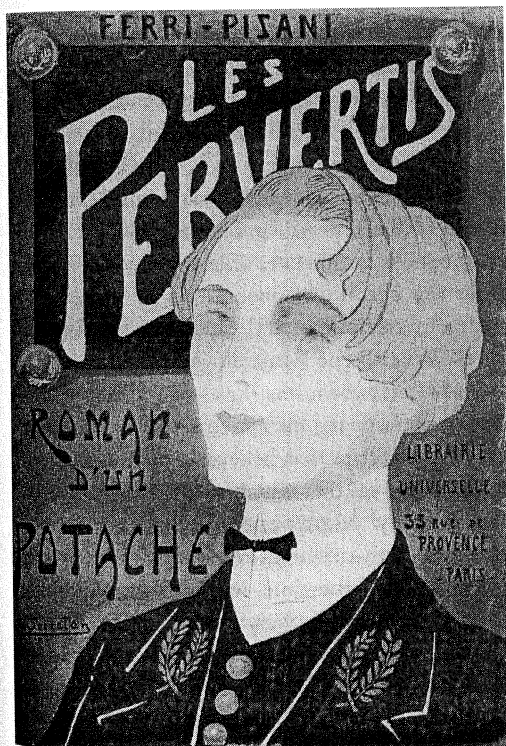
“Sexual perversion” was the generic term used in psychiatry during the second half of the nineteenth century to describe all sexual practices and attractions that did not lead to reproduction. The work of German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing to classify “perversions” is at the center of this definition. In his study *Psychopathia Sexualis*, he determined a typology of four different categories of sexual deviance, defined by flawed sexual desire (e.g., homosexuality, bestiality, fetishism), behavioral anomaly of the sexual instinct (e.g., sadism, masochism), diversion of other physical

functions to a sexual end (e.g., urophilia, scatophilia), or finally, the limiting of sexual behavior to practices perceived as “preliminary” (e.g., voyeurism, **exhibitionism**).

However, despite the enormous list of perversions identified by Krafft-Ebing, homosexuality served as the theoretical model upon which he constructed the base of his scientific theory, and which furthermore was most often associated with other perversions in his clinical descriptions (e.g., homosexuality and sadism, homosexuality and fetishism, etc.). In this manner, homosexuality is depicted as the “mother” of all perversions and, as such, it is not surprising that the terms “homosexual” and “pervert” became almost synonymous among homophobes.

Without reverting to the concept of perversion in analytical theory—which, after the works of Freud, have very little to do with the psychiatric concepts of the nineteenth century—“sexual perversions,” as understood by Krafft-Ebing, were an important part of the vocabulary of contemporary sexology, but were also pornographic, thus reinforcing the enduring negative representations of homosexuality as “perverse.”

—*Pierre-Olivier de Busscher*



Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, the theme of sexual perversion was frequently found in literature dealing with homosexuality.

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—*Biology; Degeneracy; Fascism; Endocrinology; Ex-Gay; Genetics; Himmler, Heinrich; Hirschfeld, Magnus; Inversion; Medicine; Medicine, Legal; Pedophilia; Psychiatry; Psychoanalysis; Treatment; Vice.*

## PETAÏN, Philippe

There is no doubting the homophobia of Philippe Pétain (1856–1951), the French general who eventually became the Chief of State of Vichy France