

Between Identities and Representations in the Eighteenth Century

Tra identità e rappresentazioni nel Settecento

edited by / a cura di

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BETWEEN

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TOMMASO SCARAMELLA

Effeminacy, Male Homosexuality, and Self-Identity: Exploring Emotions in Eighteenth-Century Letters*

Effeminacy has consistently played a significant role in shaping male (homo)sexual identity in Western cultures. Across diverse historical periods, from antiquity to the present day, the portrayal of male-male sexual attraction as a manifestation of gender nonconformity has gained considerable recognition. Studies indeed emphasize the emergence of this connection in the nineteenth century, as European medical science began linking same-sex expressions to the pathology of sexual inversion – especially male sexual inversion.¹ Individuals previously labeled as sodomites during the medieval and early modern periods came to be perceived as embodying «a feminine soul enclosed in a male body».² However, even before this paradigm shift, male sodomy has never been solely a matter of prohibited sexual acts; it was often represented – both by

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1. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 4 vols., London, Penguin, 1998, vol. I, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 43. Among all the reinterpretations of Foucault’s paradigm, see David M. Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

2. See Gert Hekma, “A Female Soul in a Male Body”: *Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology*, in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. by Gilbert Herdt, Brooklyn, Zone Books, 1993, pp. 213-239. On female sexual inversion, see Chiara Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology (1870-1920)*, London-New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.