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THE HIDDEN WAYS AND MEANS OF ANTONIO
VIGNALI'S *LA CAZZARIA*

"What has a refined bewitching orator
to do with the vulgar masculine?"

Lucian of Samosata, *The Rhetorician's Vade Mecum*, xii

Antonio Vignali's dialogue *La Cazzaria* was written in Italian between 1525 and 1527 and, much like other early pornographic material, enjoyed a certain clandestine notoriety as a scandalous, even obscene work of Italian Renaissance erotic literature. It was first shared among the author's peers at the Accademia degli Intronati of Siena and later, through academic connections between Tuscany and the Veneto, copies, translations, and elaborations were disseminated throughout Europe by means of various underground channels.¹ *La Cazzaria* has earned Vignali a place of distinction among such notorious authors as Pietro Aretino and Antonio Rocco since many consider *La Cazzaria* the summit of sodomitic satire that inspired subsequent works of early modern pornography.² Vignali's text is striking for the explicitly homoerotic nature of the dialogical interaction of the interlocutors, the fable and embedded dialogue of speaking genitalia that provide a critical political allegory of early sixteenth-century Siena, the

¹For the historical background and publishing history, see Pasquale Stoppelli's "Nota bio-bibliografica," 29-33 and "Note al testo," 153-162 in his edition of *La Cazzaria*. See also Paula Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography," 92.

²In the introduction to his English translation, *La Cazzaria. The Book of the Prick*, Ian Frederick Moulton explores the connection between Vignali's text and those of Pietro Aretino, among others; see pp. 1-8. See also Carla Forno, *Il "libro animato,"* 310. Regarding the relationship between *La Cazzaria* and Antonio Rocco's *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, see Findlen, 88, 94; and Philippe-Jean Salazar, "Sex and Rhetoric," 18. The relation between Vignali's and Rocco's texts is a rich and potentially very fruitful field of inquiry regarding the treatment of submission, seduction, complicity, and knowledge; this, however, is beyond the immediate scope of the present study. In addition to the introductions and notes to the Italian and English editions of *L'Alcibiade*, I refer to Salazar's insightful article. See note 30, below, for one further observation regarding Antonio Vignali, Pietro Aretino, and Antonio Rocco.

academic flavour of the exchanges, and the cross-pollination of distinct models of classical dialogue forms. By exploring these aspects, I intend to discern “the hidden ways and means”³ of Vignali’s witty and intellectually seductive art that contribute to making *La Cazzaria* a work of erudite obscenity that has emerged from the shadows of the dubious world of erotic curiosities for the connoisseur of *spintrialia*⁴ in order to shed light on Cinquecento social and literary practices. In other words, the unveiling of the hidden ways and means of *La Cazzaria* should clarify aspects of “the intersections of sexuality, politics and learning” that characterize Renaissance pornography as an issue of fundamental importance.⁵

As its etymology reveals, pornography was borne of the literature and imagery that recounted the exploits of prostitutes. More broadly, pornography may be characterized as those works that treat acts of an explicitly sexual nature in order to arouse thoughts of non reproductive gratification which conflict with accepted rules of religious orthodoxy, moral conduct, and/or social decorum.⁶ While its classical roots can be traced back to Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Courtesans*, modern pornography emerged in sixteenth-century Italy as political satire and coincided with the rise of print culture and strict censorship. The incidents surrounding *I modi* and the *Sonetti lussuriosi* are a famous case in point.⁷ With the rise of print culture,

³This quotation is Ian Frederick Moulton’s translation of the original “i modi e le vie coperte.” The English passage appears on page 77 of Moulton’s translation; the Italian is on page 44 of the recent edition. More expansive and better contextualized versions of each passage are provided further on. The references to, and quotations from the Italian edition shall be taken from Pasquale Stoppelli’s edition and will be indicated by referring to the Italian title, while those taken from Ian Frederick Moulton’s translation will use the English title. All references and quotations will be made parenthetically in the body of the text. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations are mine.

⁴On *spintria* (or *sphintria*), see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, 56.

⁵Findlen, “Humanism,” 52.

⁶Regarding the definitions and debates over what constitutes pornography, see Laurence O’Toole, *Pornocopia*, 1-26. Its thorny and elusive nature is summed up by O’Toole with these words: “Despite all the talk and trials over porn, any attempt to fix upon a satisfactory, abiding definition has failed” (6). Although O’Toole does discuss the differences between what is considered pornography and eroticism, perhaps the most succinct definition was provided by Roman Polanski during the making of his film, *Bitter Moon*: “Eroticism is where you use a feather and pornography is where you use the whole chicken” (Peter Howarth).

⁷Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, 3-19. See also Lynn Hunt “Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity,” 10.

manuscripts that previously were circulated by hand among close associates or confidantes were now more easily available to a far greater number of people. Against the background of the recent Reformation, the Catholic Church sought to curtail and eradicate all religiously unorthodox, morally scandalous, and lascivious works through the Inquisition and the Index of Prohibited Books. In addition to Protestant works that defamed the Church, pornographic materials were also censured and, where possible, destroyed. Conversely, in a population that had grown accustomed to acquiring books these efforts created a special underground market for such exceptional material.⁸

Even though *La Cazzaria* did not enjoy anywhere near the fame of Aretino's *Ragionamento*, a pornographic dialogue on whoredom, it was circulated throughout Europe in manuscript and print forms and gained a number of enthusiastic supporters and imitators.⁹ While one point of distinction between *La Cazzaria* and the *Ragionamento* is homoeroticism, another is the heightened degree of obscenity in Vignali's dialogue. If, by obscenity, we take Jean Baudrillard's definition as "the absolute proximity of the thing seen,"¹⁰ then the speaking Cazzi, Cogliani, Potte, and Culi of Vignali's text may outdo the whores of Aretino. These characters are simultaneously an integral part of Vignali's political allegory and a clever display of his literary experimentation. The homoerotic nature of the academic discussions between Arsiccio, the older and more experienced teacher, and the younger Sodo, centres on the attempts of the former to seduce the latter by convincingly arguing for the superiority of "bugerare" over "fotere." The references to anal sex in Aretino's works notwithstanding, Vignali's dialogue is less inhibited and would run a far greater risk of upsetting the moral and civic authorities of the time. As Guido Ruggiero has pointed out, sodomy was associated with the most extensive language of sex crime, regularly appealed to fear of divine reprisals in the minds of the populace, and received cruel and severe penalties from the authorities.¹¹ In *La com-*

⁸Findlen, "Humanism," 53-57. See also Grendler's chapter IX, "The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605," in his *Culture and Censorship*.

⁹See Ian Frederick Moulton's introduction (51-58) and Pasquale Stoppelli's "Nota Bio-bibliografica" (29-33) and "Nota al testo" (153-158) in his edition of *La Cazzaria*.

¹⁰Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 59. See also O'Toole, *Pornocopia*, 8-13. On Vignali's obscenity, see Nino Borsellino's introduction to *La Cazzaria*, 7.

¹¹Regarding the severe penalties for convictions of sodomy, such as castration, burning, decapitation or a combination of these, see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 111-113. Ruggiero points to the rise of Tuscan humanist culture and the

media degli Ingannati, a play by the Accademia degli Intronati datable to the same period as Vignali's dialogue, this reality is given comic dimensions in IV,i where, in an animated argument, Stragualcia makes a threatening comment regarding Messer Piero (whom he had earlier insulted as "sodomito") with the words, "I could get him burned at the stake, and still he does everything he can to get on the wrong side of me—in more senses than one" ("s'io volesse, il potrei fare ardere, e pur mi sta a rompere il culo").¹² In the tradition of salacious satire, *La Cazzaria* is an audaciously homoerotic dialogue that intrigues and compels the reader to delve further into its motives and mechanisms.

The work opens with a frame tale that provides a fictional presentation of the dialogue's discovery and subsequent circulation. In a letter from il Bizzarro to Moscone, two other members of the Academy of the Intronati, the first relates how, while waiting in the study for Arsiccio (another Intronato and principal interlocutor of the dialogue) to return with "his slut" ("quella sua carogna") with whom he was to have sex, he began to leaf through "certain naughty books, among which I found many sketches of Arsiccio's own composition, and—by God—some pretty good ones" (73; "certi libracci, tra i quali [...] molti schizzi di varie sue composizioni, per Dio, assai belle," 38). *La Cazzaria* was among them. After his brief and squalid encounter with the servant girl,¹³ he stole the dialogue and sent it off to Moscone.

Ora io ve la mando con patto che subito che l'avete letta me la rimandiate. E sopra tutto guardatevi che altra persona che voi non la veggia; impe-

immigration of Tuscans as a possible reason for the flourishing homosexual culture in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice. See also his *Binding Passions*, 175-222.

¹²Accademici Intronati, *Gli Ingannati*, 196; *The Deceived*, trans. Penman, 250. To continue the play on words, I would translate the lines in this way: "If I wanted, I could have him burned, yet he is still being a pain in the ass." See also Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, 222. Regarding the theme of homosexual love in the popular literature of the time, see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 4.

¹³The Italian text refers to her as "carogna" (38), which Moulton renders as "slut" (74). The terminology regarding women is frequently demeaning in this dialogue. Typical for the time, there is no mention of women being allowed access to the teacher-student dynamic where, especially in this episode, it appears to have been overshadowed by the issue of the 'commodification' of woman. Regarding the education of women in the Renaissance, see, for example, King, "Virgo et virago": Women and High Culture" in *Women of the Renaissance*, 157-239; for the connection between woman and commodity in the Renaissance, see Freccero, "Economy, Woman, and Renaissance Discourse," 192-208.

roché, ov'egli lo sapesse o risapesse, come quello che è più sdegnoso d'uno culo, ne piglierebbe tal colera e così ne salterebbe in bestia, che mai più mi lascerebbe entrare nel suo studio, e così mi priverei di poter vedere parecchie altre sue belle cose, over operette, de le quali egli fa menzione in questo dialogo, quali ho visto e in parte lette. E se ei non si avede di questa, io spero di farvele vedere in questo medesimo modo; e però leggetela e quanto più presto potete mandatela indietro. (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 38-39)

(Now I send you this dialogue, on the condition that you send it back to me as soon as you have read it. Above all, be sure that no one else sees it but you, because, if Arsiccio knew of this or heard about it, he would be more scornful than an asshole; he would practically turn into a wild beast, and he would never again permit me to enter his study. This would prevent me from seeing a few other pretty things of his – little trifles that are mentioned in this dialogue, which I have seen and, in part, read. But if he doesn't notice this one is missing, I hope to send you more of the same in a similar way. So read it right away and send it back to me as quickly as you can. [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 74])

This clever fiction is very effective and revealing. In the first place, the opening reflects the work's clandestine diffusion and secret enjoyment among select *cognoscenti*. The familiar *topos* of the unauthorized dissemination of a work that the author deems unready for publication is presented here as outright theft by an ungrateful guest. Il Bizzarro notices the superior eloquence of this naughty book and steals it in order to bring it to the attention of others. Consonant with the general theme of *La Cazzaria*, an illicit act is justified because it is deemed to have beneficial consequences. Hence, eloquence and theft are paired and the reader is drawn into a relationship of complicity with the thief. It is by no accident that the talents of eloquence and thievery are joined since this would allude to the mythological figure of Mercury who, in the Lucianic tradition, is a polysemic deity who represents contrasting qualities. While he is referred to in terms of eloquence, mediation, and culture, he is also the god of shopkeepers and thieves, and is recognized in both the Christian and pagan worlds.¹⁴ The references to Arsiccio as a “culo” and a “bestia” suggest transformation, a significant theme within the tradition of the dialogue, both the intellectual progress associated with the pedagogical ideal of Socratic

¹⁴de La Garanderie, “Le nom de Mercure,” 15-17; Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, 179. See also Calvino's reference to Mercury as “*principium individuationis*” in *Six Memos*, 51-52.

dialogue and the physical metamorphosis of characters into lower-order beings that populate Lucianic dialogues.

By means of the teacher-student dynamic, characterized by questioning that intends to have the pupil eventually come to the realisation of his erroneous thoughts and actions, in the Socratic dialogue the teacher guides the student's development, draws out his latent potential, and brings about the transformation of the student into a well-rounded individual.¹⁵ There is also a significant connection between the popularity of the Socratic dialogue as a didactic tool and, simultaneously, one of pornographic discourse in the Renaissance.¹⁶ In the Lucianic tradition, transformation is viewed differently. For example, the goal of transforming society through satire is at the forefront. This is accomplished through the coupling of peculiar and fantastic characters as unlikely interlocutors (for example, the personifications of concepts, deities, insects and animals) in locations freed from all spatio-temporal constraints that Forno describes as "the coordinates of this universe in perpetual metamorphosis".¹⁷ As we see, Vignali's frame tale offers important clues regarding the interpretation of his work, not the least of which is the experimentation between Socratic and Lucianic dialogical models.

The two principal speakers in *La Cazzaria* are identified by their academic names within the Siense Academy of the Intronati, Arsiccio and Sodo, and refer clearly to the author, Antonio Vignali, and his younger friend Marcantonio Piccolomini.¹⁸ Although historically real, their identi-

¹⁵Wilson, *Incomplete Fictions*, 23-28.

¹⁶Salazar, "Sex and Rhetoric," 5-19.

¹⁷Forno, *Il "Libro animato"*, 179-188. Among the numerous Lucianic dialogues that appeared in the Italian Renaissance, *La Circe* by Giovan Battista Gelli stands out for its influence and use of humans transformed into animals by the mythological sorceress as speakers. Of particular importance is *Momus* by Leon Battista Alberti. It was completed between 1443 and 1450 and circulated among scholars for many years before the first printed edition appeared in Rome in 1520, shortly before the composition of Vignali's text. The tardy publication of Alberti's dialogue was actually quite significant since it appeared at the same time that the works of Erasmus and More were being translated and receiving considerable attention. See Sarah Knight's Introduction to *Momus*, vii-xxv.

¹⁸In *The Book of the Prick* (165, n. 3), Moulton provides a brief identification of the two interlocutors. Their discussions are presented mimetically, without any trace of diegetic description as in Pietro Bembo's *Asolani* or Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, two extremely popular and influential dialogues of the same period. This mimetic quality places greater emphasis on the importance of the words spoken by the interlocutors; any consideration of setting is secondary.

ties in this text are tied to their academic affiliation. There is an unmistakable academic flavour to their dialogical exchanges as evidenced by the use of the vernacular instead of Latin and in the manner in which philosophical, scientific and even political topics are engaged through a discussion concerning "all the causes and circumstances of fucking" (74; "tutte le ragioni de le circonstanze del fottere," 38). Like most academies of the period, the Intronati boasted of broad intellectual pursuits and literary experimentation.¹⁹ As Paula Findlen has indicated, pornographic literature was particularly fitting to the goals of most academies since it "destabilized the site of artistic literary production by purporting to dissolve the boundaries between 'high' and 'low.'"²⁰ *La Cazzaria* may be viewed as typical of this milieu where the equation between humanism and libertinism often led to accusations that members frequently occupied their leisure time writing about prostitutes and sodomy.²¹ This uncanonical work was produced by a group of scholars who considered themselves a cultural elite free from the obsessive restrictions of the universities and the obsequious sycophancy of the courts. It expresses unequivocal praise for scholars whose training and erudition single this group out as ideal practitioners of erotic love. The many references to the superiority of the erudite lover are characterized by his ability to combine seamlessly the lofty with the lewd, the brainy with the bawdy. He must be the consummate orator, able to shift modes and registers with ease as circumstances demanded.

From the beginning, the scholar is praised over and above the boorish braggart in his ability to satisfy a woman completely. While the rustic lover may be equally equipped to please a woman physically, wit and discretion are not among his endowments.

Appresso se noi vorremo pensare che bisogni ingegno a saper trovare i modi e le vie coperte, non si cercherà mai altrove che fra i literati, quali non si mettono a tale esercizio se non per sublimità d'ingegno; e troverai tutte le malizie e tutte le ribalderie dove sono i scolari, né saria possibile d'immaginarsi le acute e sottili invenzioni sopra di quelle cose ch'essi vogliono

¹⁹Richard S. Samuels notes that, according to the association's bylaws, the members were devoted to "reading, composing, interpreting, and writing" in what they regarded as the three most important languages: Tuscan, Latin, and Greek" and, further, that they covered "an extremely wide range of subjects: philosophy, the humanities, law, music, poetry, mathematics; or, as the bylaws put it 'all disciplines and all liberal arts'"; Samuels, "Benedetto Varchi," 608.

²⁰Findlen, "Humanism," 59. She also claims that by thus rendering authorship problematic these writers of pornography included themselves in the "third sex" among prostitutes and sodomites.

²¹Findlen, "Humanism," 86; Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 232.

mettersi a fare: oltre che d'animo e di sicurezza di core sono tutti o la maggior parte valorosi e grandi, e conoscono quello che sia bene e quello che sia male, e queste cose che sono vituperose e quelle che sono d'animo generoso, e non saprebbero fare se non quelle cose che fossero virtuose e gentili. Ma di molto più stima fo i belli ragionamenti, le dolci parole, i dilettevoli intrattenimenti, i loro faceti e amorosi morti, di quali più prendono conforto quelle donne gentili, che hanno l'animo elevato, che del fottere [...]. (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 44) [emphasis added]

(On the other hand, if one considers the wit necessary to find *hidden ways and means*, one will only look among educated men, who always apply themselves to such activities with an excellent and keen wit. You will find all maliciousness and dirty tricks where scholars are, and you cannot imagine all the sharp and subtle lies they tell about things they want to do. Beyond that, in spirit and certainty of heart they are all—or for the most part—valorous and great. They know what is good and what is bad, which things are disgraceful and which show a generous spirit, and they would be incapable of doing anything that was not virtuous and noble. But most of all they are esteemed for their beautiful conversation, their sweet words, their pleasing entertainments, their jokes and amorous pleasantries, which noble and refined ladies enjoy even more than fucking [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 77-78]). [emphasis added]

The dialogue itself opens rather casually, seemingly in mid-conversation, with Arsiccio responding to Sodo and admonishing him for his ineloquence and social ineptitude at a gathering in which he was asked “why the balls never go either into the cunt or the asshole” (81; “la cagione perché i coglioni non entrano mai in potta o in culo,” 48).

ARSICCIO lo intendo a punto, Sodo, e confessoti essere vero quanto mi dici. Ma io ti vorrei ammettere queste tue scuse, quando tu avessi a parlar con donne o con uomini di qualche gravità, ove s'appartiene essere modesto negli atti e ne le parole; e non dove tu fussi in un ritrovo di giovani a te e per età e per esercizio conformi, e per prendere solazzo adunati, come è stato questo di stasera, ove pareva lecito di ragionar di tutte quelle cose che ci venivano a bocca. Imperoché ancora che biasimevole e vituperoso sia il mettersi a ragionare di queste cose disoneste come fottere e bugerare, ed empirsi la bocca di cazzo, potta, culo e altri simili, non dimeno non mi piace che, occorrendovi pur ragionare, tu non ne sappia dare qualche risposta: perché secondo i filosofi non è così brutta e così vil cosa, che non sia molto più vile e brutto non saperla. (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 41)

(Arsiccio: I understand perfectly, Sodo, and I'll admit what you tell me is true. But your excuses are only valid when it comes to speaking with dignified women or men—when it is appropriate to be modest in action and speech. It is different when you are at a gathering of young people,

similar to you in age and habits, who get together for pleasure—as was the gathering this evening—where it seems permissible to speak of anything that comes into your mouth. It may be shameful and disgraceful to start talking of indecent things like fucking and buggery and to fill your mouth with cocks, cunts, assholes, and such, but it still doesn't please me that if such things come up you don't know how to discuss them. According to philosophers, no matter how ugly and vulgar a thing is, it is more vulgar and ugly not to be knowledgeable about it. [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 75]).

The opening establishes that the reader has happened upon the interlocutors during an animated disagreement. As a consequence of missing the previous statements to which Arsiccio's first words are a response, curiosity is aroused and the reader is immediately engaged in order to deduce what was said previously. Consequently, a certain verve and momentum are established. Furthermore, Arsiccio adopts the role of teacher to Sodo's pupil, thereby confirming a power relationship. His intellectual superiority over Sodo is confirmed by the way in which he responds to Sodo's protestations that, since most women prefer their men stupid, he attempts to "seem as foolish as possible" (76; "dimostrare d'essere più presto sciocco che altrimenti"). Arsiccio responds by saying, "Certainly it can't have been very hard for you to look like a fool if you believe that" (76; "Per certo che tu vi dèi aver durata poca fatica in fare lo sciocco, se tu sei in cotesta openione," 43).

Arsiccio completely rejects Sodo's protestations that "My philosophy does not deal with cocks and assholes" (80; "la mia filosofia non tratta di cazzi o culi," 48) because, in order to be truly knowledgeable, one must be prepared to speak of all aspects of the natural world as well as the speculative. By a deft mixture of registers and argumentation, Arsiccio declares that the natural world, including human sexuality, is of fundamental importance. Indeed, sexual knowledge is seen as the core of natural philosophy. It is not passive but active knowledge, in the sense that one participates in it and, like all other forms of knowledge, must be prepared to discuss it eloquently. Never again must Sodo be in a similarly embarrassing social situation. By allowing himself to be held up to ridicule without responding, Sodo has assumed the passive position that, at least on a social level, has 'feminized' him.²²

²²On the stigma attached to the passive male in the Renaissance, see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 121-122. David Chambers and Brian Pullan provide a Venetian document of 1509 that conveys the social preoccupation associated with this practice; *Venice*, 124-125. For the classical antecedent of male passivity, see Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 194-196.

Arsiccio's arguments are philosophical reasoning presented in coarse or, rather, realistic language intended to inspire a virile, active response. For example, when he frequently peppers his responses with rhetorical questions intended to provoke his pupil and indicate the error of his thinking, he also points to the practical experience that should inform the student's opinions since "from the mixing of the cunt, the cock and the asshole comes the science of fucking and buggery, and thus knowledge is enlarged" (82; "del mescolamento poi de la potta, del cazzo e del culo ne segue la cognizione del fottere e del bugerare, e così viene allargando la scienza" 49). The teacher's provocative stance is made clear in the following passage:

ARSICCIO [...] E che diavolo ne fai tu intorno al culo, se tu non ne impari cosa alcuna? Che diavol ti è giovato e giova il tanto fottere ed essere bugerato, se tu non ne hai tanto di construtto di saper almanco perché i coglioni non ti sono un tratto entrati nel culo o tu non gli hai al altro o dietro o dinanzi cacciati? (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 50)

(Arsiccio: [...] What the devil have you been doing poking around the asshole if you haven't learned anything about it? What use has it been to you to have fucked and to have been buggered so often if you haven't even contrived to learn at the very least why no one's balls have ever once entered your ass and you've never put yours in anyone from the front or behind? [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 83]).

Throughout *La Cazzaria*, Vignali enhances Arsiccio's responses by providing extradiological *quaestiones* in the margins of the text, typical of philosophical dialogues and treatises. These *quaestiones* range from the philosophically sound, "Why it is Praiseworthy to Control Oneself" (149; "Perché sia lodevole il vincere se stesso" 120), to the philosophically questionable, "Why Women's Asses Have No Hair" (90; "Perché il culo de le donne non sia peloso" 58), to the philosophically vulgar, "Why, as Soon as Man has a Shit, He Looks at the Turd" (95; "Perché subito che l'omo ha cacato miri la merda" 62). Although the reading public for whom Vignali intended the work will recognize this as satirical, Arsiccio's effective and eclectic mixture of registers and references serves to intimidate Sodo and reinforce the former's position of dominance within the dialogue.

Whereas Sodo's exchanges are either weak protestations or short expressions of a desire for clarity, Arsiccio's are longer and more complex, and also more replete with learned references. Sodo is undeniably submitting to Arsiccio. This is made abundantly clear after Arsiccio has finished his praise of anal sex. Not only does this exchange reveal the teacher-student dynamic, but it leads to the intriguing relationship between power and knowledge that informs their interaction.

SODO: Arsiccio, tu mi tocchi i lombi con questo tuo ragionare. Hammi accesso d'una voglia e d'un fervore, ch'io non vorrei essere in paradiso e non saper queste cose, e voglio confessare ch'io mi vergogno come un cazzo e parmi essere stato sino qui ignorante. Hai mille ragioni, e lo conosco ch'io ho fatto male a non ti dimadar di tutte queste cose, ma io non pensai che 'l fottere andasse più in là che ficcare il cazzo in culo o in potta e menando compire. Ora per quello ch'io ne ho udito, il manco piacere è questo.

ARSICCIO: Io non t'ho detto cosa alcuna, Sodo. Ma innanzi ch'io dorma, già ch'abbiamo commodità di ragionare, poichè siamo entrati in questa materiale, ti voglio dir cose che tu confesserai fin a qui esserti inteso poco di questo mondo, se il sonno non ne impedisce. Perché io mi sento in vena di dire, andiamo a casa e colchiamoci; e così nel letto diremo o tutto o parte de le cagioni perché i coglioni stanno fuor de la potta. E quell ch'io non ti porrò dire questa sera lo serbarò a domattina (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 68-69).

(Sodo: Arsiccio, your reasoning fills me with ecstasy. You have enflamed me with fervour and desire; I would rather be cast out of Paradise than to be ignorant of these things, and I want to confess that I'm as shameful as a cock. I feel that I have been entirely ignorant until now. You're completely right, and I know I've done badly not to ask you about all of these things, but I didn't think that fucking went beyond thrusting your cock into a cunt or an asshole until you came. Now from what I've heard, that is the least of pleasures.

Arsiccio: I haven't told you anything, Sodo. But before I go to bed, while I still have the energy for rational discussion, since we have entered into these matters, I would like to tell you—if sleep does not prevent me—about things in this world that, as you admit, you have little understood until now. Since I feel in the mood to talk, let's go to my house and go to bed together. And in that way, in bed, I will tell you some or all of the reasons that the balls stay outside the cunt. Those things that I can't tell you tonight we'll save for tomorrow morning. [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 100])

Through his argumentation, Arsiccio leads Sodo to question his uninformed opinions. On the few occasions when Sodo interrupts or deviates the discussion (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 94-100; *Book of the Prick*, 124-131), Arsiccio threatens to stop talking and leave him to his own ignorance. Sodo beats a hasty retreat and signals his submission. Throughout the dialogue, the student is led to the realisation of his error, a Socratic *elenchus*, and must admit defeat. Arsiccio's words are intended to be both persuasive and seductive. As can be seen from Arsiccio's response, the superior eloquence of the teacher is linked to the body, for Sodo's intellectual submission implies a physical one. Just as Arsiccio argued earlier that the physical must

go hand in hand with the speculative, so too must their speculative discussions be further grounded in material reality. The teacher's theoretical instruction leads to practical implementation. In other words, the talk of sex leads to sex. Contrary to the standard Socratic dialogue, where love inspires the teacher to instruct the student and guide his transformation into a superior being,²³ in this dialogue there appears to be a price attached. The insemination of knowledge is associated with physical insemination.

Arsiccio's intellectual superiority is further proven by his erudite references to works of classical antiquity. While at times fanciful, if not corrupted, they are perfectly concordant with his ultimate goal of intellectual and physical conquest. Arsiccio's claim to extensive knowledge of genitalia is supported by reference to the trilogy he is soon to publish. Entitled *Lumen pudendorum*, it is subdivided into three books: *On the Genealogy and Baptism of the Cock*, *On the Nativity and Works of the Cunt*, and *On the Life and Passion of the Asshole* (139; *De la geneologia e battesimo del cazzo*, *De la natività e opera de la potta*, and *De la vita e passione del culo*; 82).²⁴ More directly, it provides evidence of his ability to bestow on inappropriate topics the gravity usually reserved for more weighty subjects. Arsiccio's fictitious claim to authority seems to convince Sodo to pay careful attention to the narrated fable concerning the congress of Cazzi, Potte, Coglioni and Culi that is presented with similar vague references to the same authoritative classical authors.

The inclusion of speaking genitalia and explicitly pornographic exchanges is specifically Lucianic in inspiration. Couched in classical references, vague allusions to a by-gone age, and confusion concerning chronological coordinates,²⁵ this veiled political allegory regarding the imminent

²³On the concept of *philia* and its association with the imparting of knowledge through conversation, see Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 201-203. On the explicitly erotic nature of this transformation, see Salazar, "Sex and Rhetoric," 12-17.

²⁴Despite the academic preference for the vernacular, Arsiccio declares that the composition of this work in Latin will keep it from the hands of the vulgar rabble that will not appreciate it (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 83). Nonetheless, this choice is very much in keeping with the academic elitism expressed throughout the dialogue.

²⁵The nonsensical and fantastic spatio-temporal coordinates provided by Vignali are, "[...] in the days when Beffania held the Dukedom of Archifanfano di Baldracca in Aldalecca, on Giudecca near the Yellow Sea [...]" (139; "[...] al tempo che la Beffania teneva il ducato de l'arcifanfano di Baldracca in Aldalecca, ne la Giudecca appresso 'l mare giallo [...]" 109). On the fantastic coordinates of the Lucianic satirical tradition, see Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, 181-210.

demise of Republican Siena is Vignali's *tour de force*. Critics have shown how each group, the Cazzi (big and little), Potte, Culi and Coglioni, is directly related to real political factions in Siena. The Cazzi refer to the Monte dei Nove, the most powerful, dominant and, hence, phallic bloc in the political arena of Siena. The distinction between big and little Cazzi refers to those who retained power (closely connected with the dominance of the Petrucci family) and those who were members of the Monte dei Nove but politically disenfranchised. The Coglioni represent the Gentiluomini, the oldest and most prestigious families who, nonetheless, were dependent on the Cazzi. The Culi are the Monte del Popolo and the Potte are the Riformatori, more recent, less powerful and, consequently, subservient in political and erotic hierarchies.²⁶ The tale is a thinly veiled retelling of the short-lived victory of communal government in Siena that, consequently, made *La Cazzaria* the "prototype of political pornography."²⁷

Arsiccio begins by stating that what he is about to recount derives from his readings of ancient and modern texts through which he has learned that violent tyrannical rule has never lasted long, nor been particularly profitable to those who sought it (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 94). Referring to the classical *topos* of the "body politic," the fable involves the arrogance of the big Cazzi and beautiful Potte in their dealings with the little Cazzi, the ugly Potte and the Culi. In short, the beauty and magnificence of the first group led them to believe that they could rule the body tyrannically without fear of retribution. What unfolds is a tale of war of titanic proportions, a kind of *giantomachy* of the genitals, or a *genitalomachy*, as it were. Basically, the big Cazzi grew in arrogance and daring and, consequently, alienated the ugly Potte. They, together with the little Cazzi, planned to overthrow this tyrannical rule and approached the Coglioni and Culi for support. Although initially in agreement, the Coglioni, who are pusillanimous by nature, betrayed the other genitals to the big Cazzi and this led to a slaughter of little Cazzi, ugly Potte, and Culi. Ultimately, despite the treachery of the Coglioni, the more numerous little Cazzi, ugly Potte and Culi prevailed, butchering almost all the big Cazzi and beautiful Potte. As a result, the number of big Cazzi and beautiful Potte was drastically reduced. There remained the question of suitable punishment for the Coglioni, who had been "the worst and truly malignant traitors" (152; "veri maligni e pessimi traditori," 123).

In the senate of the sex organs, many Cazzi, Potte, Coglioni and Culi expressed their views on an appropriate retribution. Vignali has the organs

²⁶Moulton in Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 33.

²⁷Findlen, "Humanism," 92.

employ in their various speeches stirring deliberative rhetoric. The power struggle between the organs is expressed primarily through the contrasting opinions of various factions within the Cazzi. Cazzatello, “a very honest, wise and moderate cock” (142; “un cazzo molto giusto, savio e riposato” 112), begins his oration with a balanced and soothing tone, referring to his audience as “Honorable brothers and sisters” (142; “fratelli e sorelle onorande” 112), and invoking the idea of justice and stable government over chaos. His words were particularly effective on the Culi:

ARSICCIO: [...] I culi parte sospiravano di compassione a le belle e affezionate parole di Cazzatello, a le quali erano sì attenti a bocca aperta, che pareva che gli uscisse il fiato [...] (Vignali, *La Cazzeria*, 115).

(Arsiccio: [...] The Assholes, for their part, sighed with compassion at the beautiful and affectionate words of Cazzatello, to which they had listened with open-mouthed attention—it seemed that the wind had gone out of them. [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 145])

A similar description of the reaction of the Culi and Potte follows Cazzo Albagio’s fiery condemnation of any sort of power sharing among the genitals. It elicited “a strong threatening shudder from the Assholes and the grinding of the lips of the Cunts” (147; “un rumore e un fremito altissimo del minacciare dei culi e de lo arrotare nei labbri de le potte” 118).

In the end, cool heads prevailed and calm was restored among the victorious Cazzi, Potte and Culi by means of a judicious sentence to be meted out to the traitorous Coglioni. In the interest of fairness, each Culo was paired with either a Cazzo or a Potta and the Coglioni were placed into sacks.²⁸ The Coglioni, fiercely hated by the other factions, were forever forbidden entry into either Culi or Potte whenever the Cazzi engaged in sexual activity. As eternal punishment for their crime, the Coglioni were thus to remain ineffectual witnesses to coital acts. This is another device that proves Vignali’s clever method of attuning classical antecedents to contemporary concerns. Through the shared etymology of “testimonio” and “testicolo,” the reference to the “testimonianza” of the Coglioni (128) harks back to the mnemonic image of the “testiculos arietinos” in the *Ad Herennium*, attributed to Cicero.²⁹ During the same period as the compo-

²⁸Moulton points out that this sentence was intended as an ironic parallel to the group of Gentiluomini whose families tended to live together in the same house (Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 33).

²⁹[Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (III, xx,33; 215). See also Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 26-27.

sition of Vignali's dialogue, Aretino used this image to great erotic effect when he concluded the first of his *Sonetti lussuriosi* with the verses,

"E s'è possibil fore
Non mi tener la potta i coglioni
D'ogni piacer fottuto testimoni."³⁰

("And if it is possible / don't keep your balls outside of my pussy / witnesses of every fucking pleasure.")

In Vignali's dialogue, the reference to the Coglioni's punishment of eternally bearing witness carries with it the association of Ciceronian mnemotechnics, an essential part of a rhetorical tradition strongly associated with Republican ideals.³¹ Hence, the sexual, political and learned

³⁰Aretino, *Sonetti lussuriosi* in Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, 199. A further intriguing link may possibly be forged between Antonio Vignali, Pietro Aretino, and Antonio Rocco on the basis of this image. Of the four closing poems that accompany Rocco's *L'Alcibiade*, the first one concludes with the verses "But if, noble lord, you fuck in cunts / Your cock will rot by and by / And you will be called an Archdunce" ("ma se chiavate in potta, ser mastroni / vi marcirete il cazzo a l'otta a l'otta / e sarete chiamati arcicoglioni."). Further parallels may be detected in the second poem where the verses "I know well that neither of my balls / Has experienced the surges of a cunt / But are lords of the *Culiseum's* calls" ("Ben io lo so, ch'alcun de' miei coglioni / di potta mai provaron li suoi guazzi / ma sol del culiseo li fei patroni") seem to indicate Vignali's etymological study of the origins of the Roman coliseum, the "culiseo" (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 61). The verses "Must the most learned screw / (Listen please, it's not right!) / Where brutish animals do?" ("Devon fottor adunque i più saputi / (sentite in cortesia, non sta già bene) / dove che fotton gl'animali bruti?") of the third poem, and the references to "coglionerie" (foolishness, though playing on the Italian usage of "coglione," ball or testicle, as fool), "furberie" (wiliness), "ribalderie" (wickedness), and "ladrerie" (roguery) in poem four, are further enticements to seek possible links between these texts. As Laura Coci tells us in the "Note al testo," these unidentified poems (Rocco, *L'Alcibiade*, 89-92), acknowledged merely as "Di M.V.," may very well have been added to the original manuscript of *L'Alcibiade* sometime between 1630 and 1650 (Rocco, *L'Alcibiade*, 95). Nonetheless, they do seem to indicate a close reading of analogous, erotic, and uncanonical texts that extends the transgressive potential of Vignali's dialogue beyond the Cinquecento. The English renderings of the verses from the Italian poems are mine since the versions that appear in the English translation consulted (Rocco, *Alcibiades*, 97-100) differ significantly from the original in form and style. I thank Dr. Gerry Milligan for his helpful advice on the translations.

³¹Cox, "Ciceronian Rhetoric in Italy," 239-288; Rebhorn, *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, 4.

threads of *La Cazzaria* are tightly bound together in one vivid *imago memoriae*.

After this last memorable image, the conversation veers toward a few final considerations regarding coital logistics before closing with a reference to the Cazzi, Potte, and Culi that have been left behind in their senate.

SODO Io ti prego, Arsiccio, che tu faccia fine di grazia, perché ho troppo sonno, né mai più durai tanta fatica a star desto quanto da un pezzo in qua che questa tua chiacchierata m'ha cominciato a rincrescere.

ARSICCIO Tu hai ragione, Sodo; ma dimmi, vogliamo noi lasciare i cazzi e le potte e i culi nel senato ch'essi ancora non possano andare a dormire?

SODO None, ma caviamogli presto.

ARSICCIO No, no, bada pure a dormire a tua posta. Lasciamoli pur stare, che potrebbero far questa notte qualche bella cosa, che ci darà material di chiacchierare doman da sera. Buonanotte (Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 137).

(Sodo: I beg you, Arsiccio, finish up as soon as you can, because I'm very sleepy. I've never had so much trouble staying awake as in the last few minutes. Your chatter has begun to bore me.

Arsiccio: You're right, Sodo. But tell me, should we leave the Cocks, Cunts, and Assholes in their senate, so that they can't go to sleep as well?

Sodo: No, let's get them out quickly.

Arsiccio: No, no. You go off to bed now. Let's let them stay there; they may do some good thing tonight that will give us more to talk about tomorrow evening. Good night. [Vignali, *The Book of the Prick*, 164]).

The allusion to the late hour, the invitation to sleep and the hint at a resumption of the discussion the following day are the only references to time in the entire *Cazzaria*. It is a *topos* steeped in the dialogue tradition that Forno identifies as "the late hour," one that precipitates a conclusion yet still maintains interest by pointing to the potential for further elaboration.³²

With the closing fable, Vignali offers the conclusive word on the topic broached at the beginning of the dialogue: the ability of the properly educated young man to engage in all manner of discussions. He has shown by example how to answer cleverly the question "why the balls never go either into the cunt or the asshole." In his treatment of this salacious topic, he has shown his own virtuosity and inspired his pupil. He has led Sodo down the road of transformation in order to turn him into a well-rounded academic whose knowledge, both practical and theoretical, is appropriate to any

³²Forno, *Il "Libro animato"*, 297-301.

circumstance. The author has shrewdly borrowed from various traditions and produced an insightful work that shocks, destabilizes, entertains, and convinces. The mixture of practical experience, eclectic scholarship, and literary experimentation forms the hidden ways and means by which Antonio Vignali's *La Cazzaria* has earned a prominent place in the pantheon of pornography.

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