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The Demons' Reaction to Sodomy: Witchcraft and Homosexuality in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Strix*

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This study draws on theological and demonological works that discuss demons' reaction to sodomy, and concentrates on Gianfrancesco Pico's 1523 dialogue *Strix*. While the medieval theological view stressed the demons' abhorrence of sodomy and refrainment from engaging in sodomitical relations, fifteenth-century demonologists already found it difficult to reconcile such a view with the newly developed theory of diabolic witchcraft. During the sixteenth century, the notion of the demons' disgust at sodomy was radically transformed. This transformation was gradual, but in *Strix* the shift away from the traditional view was already decisive. The article examines Pico's original configuration of the relations between sodomy and witchcraft, and suggests a few possible reasons for his decision to challenge the medieval notion. These include the influence of Girolamo Savonarola's antisodomy campaign, the growing emphasis on demonic sex in sixteenth-century demonology, and the predominance of men among the alleged witches in the Mirandolese witchcraft trials, in which Pico was personally involved.

WHILE BOTH SODOMY AND WITCHCRAFT engendered serious fears in the Italian city-states of the Renaissance, they were not perceived as related practices, but rather as two distinct and essentially disparate ones.[1] The theory of diabolic witchcraft necessarily entailed the belief in the devil's enthusiastic encouragement of the witches' sinful deeds and his active cooperation with them. Sodomy, on the other hand, was considered to be such a heinous practice that it was usually believed, and asserted by the most prominent theologians and preachers of the time, that even the

[1]Support by the George L. Mosse Fund is gratefully acknowledged. I thank Michael Heyd, Moshe Sluhovsky, and Armando Maggi for their comments.

I use the English word sodomy for the Latin word *sodomia,* which medieval theologians used as a general term referring to unorthodox sexual acts that were perceived as being done *contra naturam* ("against nature"), that is, as acts done deliberately in a way that could not result in conception. The word *sodomia* was sometimes used to designate heterosexual acts between a male and a female, and in some cases even when referring to masturbation. By the fifteenth century, however, the Italian users of the term *sodomia* had in mind mainly sexual relations between males. I am using the word "sodomy" in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century meaning of *sodomia* and, therefore, refer to "homosexuality" (or "same-sex relations") and "sodomy" interchangeably, despite the fact that the modern term "homosexuality" is different from the medieval meaning of *sodomia*. On the concept of *sodomia* in the Middle Ages see: Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 29–44. On the uses of the word in late medieval and Renaissance Italy see: Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 114; Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12.

devil himself "flees with horror" in the sight of this sin. Contemporaries did, of course, regard sodomy as a diabolic practice, a sin against creation, and a severe offense to God.[2] The notion that sodomites are committing "diabolical sins" did not, however, seem to contradict the view that the devil and the demons are repelled by the physical act of sodomy, are disgusted by seeing men engage in it, and do not participate in sodomitical relations themselves.

The origins of this theological view of the demons' reaction to sodomy can be traced in the thirteenth century. It remained the dominant view for almost three hundred years, and was only gradually transformed during the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, theologians and demonologists were already stressing the demons' active engagement in homosexual relations during the witches' sabbath. The modification of the medieval notion was a gradual one, and this essay will focus on an early-sixteenth-century demonological work, called *Strix*, in which the shift away from the traditional view was already decisive.

Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), nephew of the renowned philosopher Giovanni Pico, wrote *Strix* in 1523, and it soon became one of the most popular demonological works in sixteenth-century Italy. To understand the significance of Pico's discussion of the devil's engagement in same-sex relations with witches, we need to go back to the traditional theological view that he rejected. I therefore begin with an examination of this traditional view, its incorporation in fifteenth-century demonological writings such as the *Formicarius* (ca. 1435) and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (ca. 1486), and the growing difficulty of reconciling it with the newly developed notion of diabolic witchcraft expounded in these writings. I then turn to the circumstances in which Pico composed and published *Strix*, the work's unique literary characteristics, and its explicit advocacy of the diabolic witchcraft theory. I argue that, whereas most of Pico's arguments regarding the sect of witches were very close to those of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, his presentation of the demons' involvement in sodomy with male members of this sect was very different from the view expressed in the notorious German tract. Pico's discussion of sodomizing demons is based on mythical tales that he uses as ancient precedents, and I suggest that his treatment of the classical myths—here, again, in a way very different from their conventional medieval treatment—was aimed at convincing his potential learned readers of the reality of diabolic witchcraft by adopting their notion of *prisca theologia*. Finally, I discuss the possible reasons for Pico's decision to challenge the traditional theological view. The influence of Girolamo

[2]The Venetian *Signori di Notte* refer to sodomy in their trial descriptions as a "diabolical desire" or a sin "instigated by a diabolical spirit" (see Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros,* 111). Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1999), shows that preoccupation with both sodomites and witches (but also with the Jews) characterized Bernardino of Siena's preaching mission in the first half of the fifteenth century. Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros,* 140, notes contemporary perception of both witchcraft and sodomy as serious threats to Renaissance Venice's dominant culture, and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, 2000), 42, points out the parallel chronological pattern of later prosecutions for sodomy and witchcraft in the Catholic regions of Europe during the Counter-Reformation.

Savonarola's antisodomy campaign on Pico's attitude towards same-sex relations, the growing emphasis on demonic sex in sixteenth-century demonology, and the predominance of men among the alleged witches in the Mirandolese witchcraft trials, in which Pico was personally involved, all contributed to his original configuration of the relations between sodomy and witchcraft.

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As Dyan Elliott has recently shown, the late medieval insistence on the devil's disgust with sodomy was part of the general characterization of demons as noncorporeal entities of angelic origin.[3] The thirteenth-century theologian William of Auvergne (ca. 1180–1249) was one of the first to insist on the demons' abhorrence of same-sex relations between males. William explained that God protected men from the demons' unrestrained lust, so that no man has ever been known to engage in sodomitic relations with demons. Furthermore, demons are not known to practice sodomy among themselves, and the fact that even they refrain from it shows, according to William, just how perverse human beings who engage in it really are.[4]

This view was generally accepted by Italian theologians of the fifteenth century. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), the prominent Franciscan preacher and theologian, emphasized the angelic origin and, therefore, "most gentle" nature of demons. Bernardino argued that the devil operates only according to the laws of nature, and is repelled by acts done "against nature." Since sodomy is a sin not only against God, but also "against nature," the devil cannot stand the sight of sinners engaged in sodomy, "for the shame of it." Another important Italian theologian, Antoninus (1389–1459), Bernardino's Dominican contemporary and archbishop of Florence, similarly argued that, when the devil tempts men to commit sodomy, he immediately flees with horror, because of the "nobility of his nature."[5]

In emphasizing the devil's disgust at sodomy and sodomites, Italian theologians agreed with demonological tracts written north of the Alps in the fifteenth century. These tracts—the most notorious among them being, of course, the *Malleus Maleficarum*—inaugurated a new period in demonology. They contributed to the escalating anxiety over witchcraft in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries,

[3]See Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), esp. 150–56 and 264–65 nn. 159–60.

[4]William of Auvergne, "De Universo," in *Opera omnia Guillelmi Parisiensis* (1674; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), 1:1071.

[5]Bernardino of Siena, *Prediche Volgari sul Campo di Siena, 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno (Milan: Rusconi, 1989), 2:1148–49. See Antoninus's assertion: "Ipse diabolus tentans de hoc vitio, postquam inducit homines ad hoc, fugit abominans ex nobilitate suae naturae tantum scelus" in *Summa Theologica in quattuor partes distributa* (Verona, 1740), 2:671. Antoninus includes different kinds of sexual practices in the category of "the sin against nature," but he is concerned mainly with same-sex relations between men. After describing the devil's reaction to people's committing the "sin against nature," he goes on to discuss the story of Lot, who preferred to have his virgin daughters violated to having his townsmen commit sodomy with his guests—because the sin of sodomy is such a terrible one; ibid., 2:667–68. The earlier references to "the sin against nature" in this passage, therefore, seem to concern only homosexuality, but see the discussion below of sixteenth-century interpretations of this text that refer specifically to heterosexual anal intercourse.

and to transforming the learned medieval notion of sorcery to the early modern notion of diabolic witchcraft. In the course of the fifteenth century the emphasis on the witch's ritualized intercourse with the devil increased, and the demonological tracts presented it as the central part of the witch's demonic pact. Since most theologians viewed witchcraft as a feminine crime and assumed that the devil tempted mainly women to join the witches' sect, they did not consider homosexual intercourse as one of the unorthodox sexual activities between members of this sect and the devil.[6]

In the notorious demonological tracts of the fifteenth century we find many descriptions of the devil—always perceived as a male in Christian thought—or of incubi (demons in the shape of men) having "heterosexual" copulations with female witches. In the relatively few cases referring to sexual intercourse between a man and a demon, the authors emphasize that the demon in question is a succubus (a devil in the shape of a woman) who is, therefore, copulating in a "heterosexual" manner only. The Dominican theologian Johannes Nider argued in his *Formicarius* that the demons are restrained from inciting men to commit the sin of sodomy by the angelic nobility of their nature, and Heinrich Krämer similarly asserted in the *Malleus Maleficarum* that even the devil himself would detest being involved in same-sex relations.[7]

As copulating with the devil gained importance in the newly developed notion of diabolical witchcraft, however, the theological question regarding the noble nature of demons became crucial. Demonologists like Krämer felt that they needed to provide explanations for the claims that witches can have sexual intercourse with demons, and even get pregnant by them—explanations that would be compatible with the traditional view of the noncorporeality of demons. They could rely on Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74), who had already explained that demons might disguise themselves as human beings and copulate with humans as if they had real bodies. In this manner, demons disguised as men could have sexual intercourse with female witches, while demons disguised as women could copulate with men. But the problem of diabolic conception was more difficult. Aquinas claimed that demons could never impregnate women with their own semen, since they did not have any. In order to impregnate a woman, they had to use human semen. Aquinas, who viewed demons as creatures that do not have a fixed gender, suggested that a demon disguised as a succubus could obtain semen from a human male during intercourse, save it, and use it at a later stage when performing the role of an incu-

[6]See Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 155; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 112–17.

[7]As Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality*, 131, comments, homosexual relations with the devil appear, in the fifteenth century, "to have been impossible for even demonologists to imagine." See Johannes Nider, *Formicarius* (n.d. [ca.1480]; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck–u. Verlagsanstalt, 1971), 213; Heinrich Institoris (alias Krämer), *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487; repr. of 1st ed., ed. André Schnyder; Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 25, 28 (hereafter cited as Krämer, *Malleus*; all page citations are to this edition). Though the *Malleus* was attributed to both Krämer and Jakob Sprenger, most historians today agree that the former was its sole composer. See Walter Stephens, "Witches Who Steal Penises: Impotence and Illusion in *Malleus Maleficarum*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998): 495, 518 n. 2.

bus and copulating with a woman—thus impregnating her with human semen.[8] For fifteenth-century demonologists such as Krämer, the performative aspect of gender in this explanation was disturbing. While they relied on Aquinas in their arguments regarding the possibility of sexual relations between humans and demons, they found it difficult to accept his model for diabolical conception, in which incubi and succubi do not have a fixed gender and may copulate with both men and women at different times. As Elliott has shown, it was for this reason that the idea that incubi can have sexual relations with men "against nature" was explicitly discussed—and refuted—in the *Malleus.*[9]

In the context of dealing with the question of diabolical conception, Krämer explains that two demons, a succubus and an incubus, might be cooperating in the operation of impregnating a female witch. Thus the succubus, after having copulated with a man, saves the latter's semen and passes it on to another demon, an incubus, who then inseminates the witch with it—since the incubus himself "abhors to commit" filthy actions such as copulating with a man. A few pages later, Krämer repeats Nider's argument about the demons' abhorrence not only of sodomy but also of all the other sins "against nature."[10]

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The belief in diabolic witchcraft was prevalent in the Italian peninsula prior to the publication of the *Malleus*. Witches were severely persecuted, especially in the northern parts of the peninsula, throughout the second half of the fifteenth century. After publication of the *Malleus*, however, this tract became the focal point in a polemical dispute about the justification for persecuting witches in Italy, and most of those calling for the extermination of the diabolic sect in the early sixteenth century relied on Krämer's main arguments to justify it.[11] Among those supporting the persecution of witches in the early cinquecento were some prominent Dominican inquisitors, notably Leandro Alberti, Silvestro Mazzolino (or Prierias), and Bartolommeo Spina,[12] but the most enigmatic, and perhaps the

[8]Thomas Aquinas, "De potentia," in his *Opera Omnia: Secundem impressionem Petri Fiaccadori Parmae 1852–1873...*, Latin text with English translation and introduction by Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Musurgia, 1949), 8:141. See also the discussion in "Commentum in quattuor libros sententiarum" in ibid., 6:456–57, and in idem, *Summa theologiae*, ed. and trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 9:42.

[9]Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 153–54.

[10]Krämer, *Malleus,* 25, 28. This last argument is very similar to the one presented in the *Formicarius*; both refer to Ezek. 16, though Krämer erroneously attributes his quotation to Ezek. 19.

[11]G. R. Quaife, *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: The Witch in Early Modern Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 25–26; Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Florence: Sansoni, 1990), 52–70; Julio Caro Baroja, "Witchcraft and Catholic Theology," in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries,* ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 30–32.

[12]Other Italian Dominicans who expressed the belief in the diabolic witches' sect in their writings or contributed to the persecution of witches in the early cinquecento were Bernardo of Como, Vincente Dodo, Domenico of Gargnano, Giovanni Cagnazzo of Taggia, Giorgio of Casale, Girolamo of Lodi, Luca Bettini, Isidoro Isolani, and Girolamo Armellini. See Michael Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works of Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio, 1456–1527* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 37–38, 122–27, and see below.

most interesting figure among them, was a layman, Gianfrancesco Pico.

Pico was a famous humanist and scholar, respected in his lifetime for his philosophical, theological, and literary works. Known for his interest in supernatural phenomena of both godly and diabolic origin, he corresponded with female mystics, wrote about the problem of discernment of spiritss, and had a lifelong preoccupation with issues of magic and witchcraft.[13] This preoccupation did not remain solely theoretical. As the feudal ruler of Mirandola, he collaborated with the inquisitor Girolamo Armellini of Faenza in the prosecution of witches throughout his domain. From 1522 to 1525, more than sixty alleged witches were tried in Mirandola, ten of whom were convicted and executed. Pico was personally involved in conducting the witchcraft trials, helping the inquisitors and participating in the interrogation and torturing of the accused. When people in Mirandola and its vicinity began to criticize the harsh treatment of convicted witches, Pico composed and published his *Strix,* in which he attested to the cruelty and perversity of the Mirandolese witches, justifying their execution as the only effective way to deal with members of the diabolic sect.[14]

The first Latin edition of *Strix* ("The Witch") was published in Bologna in May 1523. By April 1524, Pico's Dominican friend (and editor of the original Latin edition), Leandro Alberti had already finished working on its Italian translation, which was published with the author's consent. Alberti's translation made *Strix* the first Italian demonological tract ever to be published in the vernacular. It became very popular and was published in four different editions from 1523 to 1556.[15]

[13]On Pico's philosophic works see especially Charles B. Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533) and His Critique of Aristotle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967). On his interest in supernatural phenomena see Gabriella Zarri, "Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 228, 244–49, 267 n. 58, 292–94 nn. 160, 168; Paola Zambelli, *L'ambigua natura della magia: Filosofi, streghe, riti nel Rinascimento,* 2d ed. (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), 176–210.

[14]Albano Biondi, "Gianfrancesco Pico e la repressione della stregoneria. Qualche novità sui processi Mirandolesi del 1522–1523," in *Territorio e società,* vol. 1 of *Mirandola e le terre del basso corso del Secchia dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea,* ed. Giordano Bertuzzi (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1984), 331–49.

[15]Most of the prominent early modern Italian demonologists refer to *Strix* in their works, as do the German Johannes Wier and the Frenchman Jean Bodin. See: Bartolommeo Spina, *Quaestio de strigibus, una cum tractatu de praeeminentia sacrae theologiae et quadruplici apologia de lamiis contra Ponzinibium...* (Rome, 1576), 4; Hieronymus Cardanus, "De Rerum Varietate" in *Opera Omnia Hieronymi Cardani* (Lyon, 1663), 3:290; Girolamo Menghi, *Compendio dell'Arte essorcistica, et possibilita delle mirabili et stupende operationi delli Demoni, et de Malefici* (1576; repr., with bibliography and indexes by Antonio Aliani, Genova: Nuova Stile Regina Editrice, 1987), 19; Johannes Weyer, *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus, Libri Sex* (Basel, 1568), 322–23; Jean Bodin, *Le Fléau de demons et sorciers* (Niort, 1616), 232–33. Since the 1970s, scholars have been aware of the significant contribution of *Strix* to the study of the history of witchcraft in Italy. Giuseppe Bonomo, *Caccia alle streghe: La credenza nelle streghe dal sec. 13 al 19 con particolare riferimento all'Italia* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1971), 355, even describes *Strix* as the most important document of sixteenth-century Italian demonological literature. On the work's different editions see: Peter Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic in Renaissance Italy: Gianfrancesco Pico and His *Strix*," in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft,* ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge, 1977), 50 n. 10. Alberti's Italian translation was published in a modern edition: *Libro detto Strega o delle ilusioni del Demonio del Signore Giovanfrancesco Pico délla Mirandola nel volgarizzamento di Leandro Alberti,* ed. Albano Biondi (Venice: Marsilio, 1989). Unless stated otherwise, all page citations are to the work's second

In *Strix*, Pico clearly identifies himself with those who supported the *Malleus*. He praises the German tract explicitly, even though lauding a book written north of the Alps, in what was considered an old-fashioned Latin style, was not an easy task. A close friend of some of the leading figures of Italian humanist culture, Pico knew that the prestige of literary works was based not only on their content but first and foremost on their aesthetic quality as works of art. He was aware that the scholastic style in which Krämer wrote the *Malleus* made it unattractive to many learned Italians. *Strix* was directed to precisely these educated readers, who doubted the real existence of witches; Pico—who argued that the *Malleus* is very important for understanding Italian witchcraft—used his classical erudition and adopted the literary form of a dialogue to make its content more palatable to contemporary readership. His *Strix* is, therefore, a lively Renaissance dialogue, very different in its genre and style from the *Malleus* and from most quattrocento and cinquecento Italian demonological tracts.[16]

Pico's dialogue is divided into three parts, and four characters participate in it. All four have characteristic names: Apistio (the unbeliever) represents a typical Italian skeptic, who by the end of the third part of *Strix* undergoes a conversion and changes his name to Pistico (the believer). Those responsible for Apistio's conversion are Dicasto (the judge), a Dominican inquisitor in charge of prosecuting witches, and Phronimo (the wise), who, like Pico himself, is well versed in classical literature and yet a firm believer in the reality of the witches' sect.[17] To achieve their goal, Dicasto and Phronimo use learned arguments, and also rely on the testimony of Strix, an old repentant female witch whose participation in the dialogue confirms the horrifying descriptions of the witches' dangerous activities. Pico was the first demonologist to write a dialogue in which a female witch participates and the entire work is named after her character.

Despite Pico's originality in using the dialogue form and a witch as a witness to the crimes of the diabolic sect, the arguments presented in *Strix* were, in most cases, hardly original. The book relies on the theory of diabolic witchcraft that Krämer elaborated, and is therefore similar in content to other Italian demonological books written under the auspices of the *Malleus*. Pico repeats the *Malleus*'s views that diabolic magic can change men into beasts, and that witches are actually transported in

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Latin edition: *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum dialogi tres. Nunc primum in Germania eruti ex bibliotheca M. Martini Weinrichii: Cum eiusdem praefatione ... itemque epistola...*, ed. Carl Weinrichius (Strassburg, 1612), hereafter cited as *Strix*, which I compared with the 1523, 1524, and 1555 editions.

[16]See Pico's explicit praise of the *Malleus* in *Strix*, 130–32. Pico was involved in some of the debates on issues of literary criticism and genres in his time, and even challenged Bembo's views on the imitation of ancient writers. See *Le Epistole "De Imitatione" di Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e di Pietro Bembo*, ed. Giorgio Santangelo (Florence: Olschki, 1953); Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, 25, 199. On the Renaissance stylistic aspects of *Strix*, see Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 34; Gustavo Costa, "Love and Witchcraft in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola: *La Strega* between the Sublime and the Grotesque," *Italica* 67 (1990): 428; Federico Pastore, *La Fabbrica delle streghe: Saggio sui fondamenti teorici e ideologici della repressione della stregoneria nei secoli 13–17* (Pasian di Prato: Campanotto, 1997), 173–74; Bonomo, *Caccia alle streghe*, 349–56.

[17]On Apistio's conversion see *Strix*, 158–60.

the air whenever they wish to attend their nocturnal assemblies. Like Krämer, Pico describes the members of the witches' sect as cruel and perverse people who choose to abjure the true religion and submit themselves to the devil body and soul, engaging in antisocial and antireligious crimes of the worst imaginable kinds.[18]

Throughout the dialogue, Pico points out the crucial role of sexual desire in recruiting members to the diabolic sect. Though he mentions other possible motives for devil worship (the hope for future material gains or to avenge one's enemies with Satan's aid), he ascribes the greatest importance to sexual pleasure. Because of the pleasure that witches experience when copulating with their demonic lovers—a practice described as far more enjoyable than copulating with human mates—they are willing to keep fulfilling all the devil's wishes and participate in the horrendous activities of his sect.[19] This last argument is also taken from the *Malleus,* the first demonological tract to emphasize the sexual element of devil worship. When the characters in *Strix* refer to the insatiable sexual desire of witches, they echo Krämer's assertion that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust."[20] There was, however, one key issue on which Krämer and Pico differed significantly: their view of the relations (or lack of relations) between sodomy and witchcraft.

Pico treats demonic sodomy in the third part of *Strix* within the context of sexual relations involving humans and demons in general. In this stage of the discussion, Phronimo and Dicasto try to convince Apistio that sexual relations between demons and humans are possible. Phronimo, representing the learned and devout Christian, agrees with Apistio that demons, who have "neither flesh nor bone," cannot experience sexual desires or enjoy carnal pleasures in the way human beings do, thus reaffirming the traditional theological notion of demonic noncorporeality. Dicasto, the inquisitor and witches' prosecutor, then discusses the possibility of diabolic conception, using biblical and classical examples. Both Phronimo and Dicasto explain to the skeptic Apistio that demons pursue sexual relations with humans for

[18] *Strix,* 100–101, 107–8, 113–22, 134–38, 156–58; cf. Krämer, *Malleus,* 7–13, 59–63, 101–5. Krämer's insistence on the witches' diabolic power to change men into beasts and on the possibility of witches' being physically transported in the air challenged the traditional medieval view of witchcraft, based on a text known as the *Canon episcopi,* that argued against both; see Burchard de Worms, "Decretum liber decimus: De incantatoribus et auguribus," in *Patrologia cursus completes ... series Latina,* ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1853), 140:831–32. Italian writers opposing the persecution of witches sometimes relied on the *Canon* in their attempts to undermine the validity of Krämer's main assertions; see Romeo, *Inquisitori,* 64–71. Like other writers who supported the arguments of the *Malleus,* Pico had to deal with the problem of confronting its authority with that of the *Canon.* Even though he does not explicitly challenge the *Canon's* authority, Pico contends that some modern demonologists misinterpret the ancient text, which is therefore erroneously understood to contradict Krämer's arguments.

[19] *Strix,* 110, 117–20. Pico's view of the pleasure experienced by men and women when copulating with demons is even more radical than the one expressed in the *Malleus:* whereas Krämer argues that witches find copulating with demons just as sexually gratifying as having intercourse with real men, Pico presents his readers with witches confessing that their sexual relations with demonic lovers were far more pleasurable than their past relations with humans (*Strix,* 112–14, 139; cf. Krämer, *Malleus,* 111).

[20] *Strix,* 112–14, 118–20, 139; cf. the assertion in Krämer, *Malleus,* that "Omnia p[er] carnalem co[n]cupiscentiam ... Unde et cum demonibus causa explende libidinis se agitant" (45). On the centrality of the sexual element in diabolism in the *Malleus* see Jean Delumeau, *La peur en occident 14e–18e siècles: Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), 349; Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality,* 91.

the sole purpose of seducing them to sin. For this reason, the demons desire to "give carnal pleasures" to both men and women by having heterosexual intercourse with them, that is, when they are disguised as members of the opposite sex.[21]

But the evilness of the demons knows no limits. Phronimo goes on to argue that they are not satisfied with tempting humans to engage only in heterosexual intercourse with them; they also allure men to engage in sodomitical relations "against nature" with them. Phronimo holds the demons responsible for being the first to engage in same-sex relations in ancient times—thus inventing sodomy and setting precedents for all future homosexual relations. Disguised as the gods of pagan antiquity, the demons had engaged in sodomitical relations that later served as a justification for those men wishing to pursue same-sex relations, although Christ's laws teach humans to tell right from wrong and refrain from such abominable sins "against nature."[22]

Pico's assertion that the demons had been the first to engage in sodomy depends on his identification of the gods of pagan antiquity with the demons of the Christian theological tradition. In *Strix*, as in his earlier polemic works *De rerum praenotione* (ca. 1506) and *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (first published in 1520), Pico argued that the pagan gods were actually demons, and that ancient paganism should be regarded as an early manifestation of devil worship.[23] In viewing the pagan gods as evil demons, Pico differed significantly from Neoplatonist attitudes toward these gods that were common in Italian philosophical circles of his time. Whereas the Florentine Platonists understood the allusions to numerous pagan gods in classical texts as names of natural or divine forces distributed in the world by the omnipotent God of Christianity, *Strix*'s author rejected such interpretations vehemently. He similarly opposed his contemporaries' differentiation between demonic magic, made possible by the assistance of evil forces, and natural magic, which is based on natural forces manipulated by humans for their specific needs. For Pico, the origin of all magical practices was in pagan rites and they were all simply different manifestations of diabolic witchcraft.[24]

[21] *Strix*, 140–41.

[22] "Phronimo:'... facile posset in animum incidere obscaenos puerorum amores exemplo Daemonum tentatos ab iis, qui sese florem eorum carpere dicerent.... Sed ut beneficio Christianae legis ea in ora creditur extinctu[a], ita maxime apud Persas viguit et antiquo scelere, Christianae legis absentia, qu[i]a quid in moribus sanctum, quid profanu[m] sit, quid omnino scelestu[m] internoscimus. Itaq[ue] non tam malignus Daemon ut oblectaret mulieres in libidine[m] pronas, natura illas ad conceptum stimulante, sed contra naturam excogitavit spurcam tetramq[ue] libidinem...'" (*Strix*, 142–43). In Pico's first edition of *Strix*, the discussion of demonic sodomy is titled "Q[uod] puerorum amores nefarii sint i[n] daemonas referendi." See *Jo. Francisci Pici Mirandulae Domini et Concordiae Comitis etc. Dialogus in tres libros divisus: Titulus est Strix sive de Ludificatione Daemonum* (Bologna, 1523), sig. G4v.

[23] Pico's *De rerum praenotione* and *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* were reprinted in Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (1557–73; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1969). On Pico's view of paganism see: Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola,* 192–93; D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), 146–51.

[24] That Gianfrancesco's view of the pagan gods and of magical practices opposed that of the Platonists and other Florentine philosophers (including his uncle) is exemplified in his attitude toward Orpheus. The mythical poet was associated in fifteenth-century Italy with homoerotic themes, and was sometimes referred to as the first human sodomite in history; see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 198;

Throughout *Strix*, Pico argues that the devil always has been trying to bring about the destruction of humankind by deceiving humans and making them sin. By tempting humans to stray from God and worship him instead, the devil attempts to prevent humans' future salvation; this has been the devil's goal from the beginning of history and it has never changed. Only the methods used by the devil to achieve his aim vary from one historical period to another. In the pre-Christian era, the devil chose to disguise himself each time as a different pagan god (throughout his dialogue, Pico refers to Diana, Jupiter, Apollo, and others), though these gods always were essentially embodiments of the same demonic entity. In doing so, the devil succeeded in tempting numerous humans to believe in the pagan gods and worship them—that is, to engage in devil worship. In Christian times, the devil has tried to spread heresy and promote devil worship in the different heretical sects; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he also resorted to diabolic witchcraft in order to destroy Christianity and bring about the eternal perdition of humankind.[25]

The identification of pagan gods with the demons of the Christian era enables Pico to characterize Apollo as a sodomizing demon, and also to dwell on the myth of Jupiter's abduction of Ganymede in order to prove the devil's persistence in seducing men and boys sexually.[26] Phronimo mentions the tale of Ganymede twice in the course of discussing demonic sodomy. First, he claims that Jupiter's affair with the Trojan youth served as one of the ancient precedents for those later men who followed the example of the pagan gods' "foul loves of boys" (*obscaenos puerorum*

James J. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 29–32, and Angelo Poliziano's poem *Stanzè per la giostra, Orefeo—rime* (con un' appendice di prose volgari), ed. Bruno Maier (Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostino, 1968), 95–114. Those who believed in the ancient theology, however, considered Orpheus as the first "ancient theologian." Ficino described his own use of the Orphic hymns in magical experiences, and Giovanni Pico argued that the names of pagan gods of which Orpheus sings are actually the names of natural powers, whose real origin can only be God, and they can, therefore, be used in present-day magical practices; see Giovanni and Gianfrancesco Pico, *Opera Omnia,* 1:103. Both Ficino and Giovanni Pico ignored Orpheus's homosexual reputation in this context, but for Gianfrancesco, the poet's unnatural "love of young boys" was related to his belief in many gods (whom he addresses in his hymns), because polytheism is an unnatural belief just as sodomy is an unnatural practice. This view was elaborated in the *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium* (ibid., 2:471–73) and repeated in *Strix:* "Orpheus ex Asia in Thraciam, Graeciamq[ue] profectius, ut Deorum multoru[m] cultus, ita execrandi illius vitii fuit autor primus apud Thraces..." (*Strix,* 142). See Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 22–34.

[25] *Strix,* 159.

[26] Apollo is mentioned at the end of Pico's discussion of sodomy as an example of the demons' promises to men in return to having same-sex relations with them: "Phronimo: '... et praemia iis, qui illam paterentur, pollicebatur ... aliis divinationem, ut Brancho pastori, cui fabulantur ab Appoline inspiratum vaticinium'" (*Strix,* 143). Apollo was conventionally referred to as a sodomite in Renaissance Italy; see Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance,* 58. But Pico was original in collapsing Ovid's description of the god's love for young boys with Herodotus's tales of the Branchides; see Herodotus, *Histories,* trans. George Rawkinson (London: J.M. Dent, 1992, bks. 157–60), a synthesis typical of his use of classical literature. The Branchides belonged to a sacerdotal family administering Apollo's oracle, and Pico, therefore, accused their ancestor of practicing divination with the devil's (Apollo's) assistance. See Virgil, *Aeneidos,* ed. R. D. Williamson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 250–57; Ovid, *Metamorphoses: Liber 9–16,* Latin text with English trans. by Frank Justus Miller, ed. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 155–61.

amores). Phronimo refers to Ganymede's abductions as one of the earliest cases in which demons violated boys' virginal chastity in ancient times. In the end of his discussion of sodomy, Pico argues that the devil promises different rewards to those he attempts to seduce, like Ganymede, who was granted eternal life in reward for his sexual liaison with Jupiter.[27]

The line of argument relying on the myth of Jupiter and Ganymede in *Strix* is not the outcome of any demonological or theological tradition that could have inspired Pico to use it in his tract. The interpretation of Ganymede's abduction by Jupiter as a case of homosexual desire of the elderly god for the good-looking Trojan youth was, in itself, hardly a novelty. As John Boswell has shown, the word "Ganymede" was used in the Middle Ages as both an adjective and a noun denoting men who pursued sexual relations with other men. The word was also sometimes used specifically for designating a male concubine.[28] Never before, however, had the myth of Ganymede's abduction been treated as a concrete historical event that took place before the Christian era, but for which the devil of the Christian theological tradition is held responsible. In the medieval theological tradition a very different view was usually expressed when referring to the myth of Ganymede. For instance, when Natura, who represents nature in Alain de Lille's mid-twelfth-century *The Plaint of Nature (De planctu naturae),* mentions the tale, she strongly refutes the argument that the sexual relations of Jupiter and Ganymede prove that sodomy between two men cannot be a sin "against nature." Sodomy cannot be tolerated on the basis of this mythic precedence, argues Natura, because we cannot rely on pagan mythology as concrete historical evidence. Alain, a renowned poet and theologian, argues that the ancient poets in whose writings we find the tale of Ganymede presented their readers or listeners sheer lies in order to make their literary works more attractive. Alain leads his readers to the conclusion that they should dismiss the tale of Ganymede as a fictitious poetic description.[29]

Medieval theologians such as Alain de Lille and later demonologists such as Nider or Krämer had, of course, all relied on certain authoritative classical works (those of Plato or Aristotle, for example) to prove various points in arguments pertaining to Christian theology. However, they did not regard the literary works of pagan antiquity as a valid source of knowledge about the past. Pico himself was rather critical of his contemporaries who looked for such knowledge in pagan texts, but still supported his arguments in *Strix* with many mythical examples concerning the reality of diabolic witchcraft. Since he directed his work to learned readers, Pico

[27]"Phronimo: 'Enimvero no[n] solum co[n]cubitu alliciebat foeminas; sed masculam attentabat Venerem, unde facile posset in animum incidere obscaenos puerorum amores exemplo Daemonum tentatos ab iis, qui sese florem eorum carpere dicerent ... Nam raptus Ganimedis in Troia nulli dubium apud gentes antiquissimum existimatum...'" (*Strix*, 142); "'... Aliis pollicebatur daemon aevum perpetuum, ut Ganymedi, quem non minus impie quam impudenter vana vetustas retulit in coelum...'" (*Strix*, 143).

[28]John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 253.

[29]Alain de Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 138–39.

could not ignore the centrality of a belief, called *Prisca theologia* (the ancient theology) in Renaissance thought. The ancient theology was popular especially among the humanists of Medicean Florence, where Pico resided for some years in the late quattrocento; both his uncle, Giovanni Pico, and his friend Marsilio Ficino had contributed significantly to its elaboration.[30]

Ficino believed that allusions to the Christian truth, as well as prefigurations of its central themes and major events, may be found in texts that originated long before Christ's birth; not only in the Jewish Scriptures, but also in the works of ancient pagan philosophers. These works should, therefore, sometimes be interpreted in a specific manner in order to arrive at their hidden Christian message. Giovanni Pico carried Ficino's notion of *Prisca theologia* a step further, adding the poetry and epic works of classical antiquity to the synthesis of the ancient philosophers and Christian sources that Ficino had started. Giovanni Pico argued that references to the truths of Christianity could be traced in the Greek philosophers' interpretation of the ancient Greek poets' myths as well as in the mythic tales themselves.[31]

After Giovanni's death, his nephew rejected the "ancient theology" in favor of what D. P. Walker characterizes as a more "fideistic approach," which regarded solely the Scriptures, and not pagan literature and philosophy, as a valid source of knowledge. He never hesitated, however, to employ his classical erudition when finding it helpful for proving a certain disputable theological point. Pico, unlike Alain de Lille, chose not to dismiss the tale of Ganymede's abduction as a fictitious lie. Since he wanted to convince his learned readers—most of whom adhered to the notion of "ancient theology"—of the reality of demonic sodomy, he used the tale of Ganymede as a case of the devil's attempts to seduce men to have same-sex liaisons with him.[32] In using the myth of Ganymede, Pico came up with a line of argument that incorporated Christian theological arguments with the new literary and philosophical approaches of Renaissance Florence. This, however, was just a rhetorical device, used to make his demonological tract more palatable to Italian readers. The reasons for challenging the traditional view of the demons' reaction to sodomy are more complex. Having presented the medieval theological view earlier on, we shall now examine a few possible motives for Pico's rejection of it.

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[30]Pico was very close to his uncle, who was only six years his elder, during the latter's lifetime. After Giovanni's death in 1494, his nephew composed his biography, arranged the publication of his collected works, and finished his last project of writing a treatise against astrology; see Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola,* 12–14.

[31]Before his death, Giovanni Pico expressed his intention to compose a treatise on poetic theology, in order to point out the hidden Christian truths implicit in different tales of Greek mythology. On the contribution of Ficino and Pico the elder to the notion of *Prisca theologia* see *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 215–21; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 59–65.

[32]Walker, *The Ancient Theology,* 42–62. On Pico's selective use of classical literature in *Strix* see Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study of Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 77.

We might find a clue for Pico's preoccupation with sodomy and sodomites, expressed in the context of a demonological discussion, if we consider the unique cultural and religious climate of quattrocento Florence. Michael Rocke shows that "at no time in the history of the Florentine Republic were the social, political, and moral divergences over sodomy in this community more strident, or disputed more publicly, than during the last decade of the fifteenth century."[33] At this very time Pico, then in his twenties, was spending some of his formative years in Florence.

Even though the entire Italian peninsula was considered by other Europeans of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance as defiled by sodomy, the notoriety of Florence far surpassed that of all the other Italian cities. Florentine citizens were concerned about their reputation, and they were constantly warned by Bernardino of Siena and other charismatic preachers about the divine vengeance awaiting a city that tolerates the practice of the abominable sin within its territory. The infamy associated with Florentine sodomites weighed negatively on its citizens' sense of civic pride and reputation during the trecento and the early quattrocento until finally, in 1432, the Florentines instituted a special magistracy to pursue and prosecute the city's sodomites. During the next seventy years, until their magistracy was suppressed in 1502, the Officers of the Night (*Ufficiali di notte*) were responsible for eradicating sodomy in Florence.

As Rocke points out, however, the Night Officers represented, during the early years of their existence, an "accommodating strategy of social control and discipline, aimed less at repressing homosexual activity rigorously than at containing it within tolerable bounds." Rocke traces a significant shift in the policing of sodomy from lax to energetic control in the early 1490s, during the last years of the Medicean regime. The changes in policing sodomy resulted from the demise of Lorenzo de' Medici and the insecurity of the passage of power to his son Piero, as well as from Savonarola's continuous demands for the repression of sodomy. The flight of Piero de' Medici in November 1494 and the establishment of a new regime, inspired by Savonarola's campaign for moral reform, paved the way for the friar's attempts to impose a monastic-like rule in the city. The repression of sodomy was one of the major goals of Fra Girolamo's reform.[34]

This is the same Savonarola who had become the most dominant source of influence on the young Gianfrancesco Pico, especially after the death of Giovanni Pico, himself an enthusiastic follower of the Dominican friar in the early 1490s. Gianfrancesco dedicated one of his tracts to the abbot of San Marco, published a few apologetic works concerning Fra Girolamo, and eventually composed one of his important biographies. He continued to defend the principles of the Savonarolan reform movement after the friar's burning at the stake in 1498. Modern scholars have already noted that Pico's later works—*Strix* included—were marked by the

[33]Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 195.

[34]My discussion of the policing of homosexuality in Renaissance Florence is based on Rocke's study (esp. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships,* 3, 36–47, 196–205). According to Rocke, the shift in the policing of sodomy did not occur with the establishment of Savonarola's theocracy, but actually predated it.

influence of Savonarola's moral and religious views: a condemnation of astrology and other types of magic and a critique of the corruption of the Catholic church.[35] Pico's preoccupation with sodomy, and especially with the engagement of adolescents in same-sex relations, possibly attests to the same source of influence on his moral and religious thought.

Unlike Bernardino of Siena or Antoninus of Florence, Savonarola did not limit his campaign against sodomites to the pulpit or to theological writings; he was involved actively in the Florentine government's approval of a harsh antisodomy law soon after the establishment of the new republic.[36] Since the predominant social form of same-sex relations in Florence (and in Italy in general) at the time was that of an adult male and an adolescent, Savonarola also attempted to recruit many adolescents from the ages of twelve to twenty to his self-governing companies of reformed boys, thus removing them from the sexual market. According to Rocke, the friar's *fanciulli* played an organized, militant role in policing morals, backed by their spiritual leader and the government's assent. Their troops attacked sodomites, spread a climate of terror, and eventually became the protagonists of the campaign against sodomy by showing an aggressive militancy against male suitors.[37]

The discussion of the demons' engagement in sodomy in *Strix* is reminiscent of Savonarola's concern with the sexual purity of boys. Pico, like Savonarola, was troubled by men's desire for young boys and by older sodomites' corruption of adolescents.[38] However, this preoccupation with sodomy, and with boys' engagement in it, still does not fully account for the new approach toward demonic sodomy that is expounded in *Strix*. Pico could have composed another work, concerned with the problem of same-sex liaisons, instead of pursuing a line of argument that challenged the traditional theological view regarding the nature of demons. Why did he insist on discussing the problem of sodomy in his demonological work and include same-sex relations with the devil in his descriptions of the witches' sins? To answer this question, his discussion of sodomy should be placed in the more general context of sixteenth-century demonological views of the witches' sexual relations with the devil.

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The growing emphasis on witchs' sexual relations with the devil in the early modern period was first widely evident in the *Malleus*, but this still was a

[35]Gian Carlo Garfagnini, "*La Vita Savonarolae* di Gianfrancesco Pico," *Rinascimento* 36 (1996): 49–72. Pico's biography of Savonarola was recently published in a modern edition: G. F. Pico, *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae*, ed. Elisabetta Schisto (Florence: Olschki, 1999). On Pico's oration on the corruption of the church, which echoed Savonarola's call for church reform, see Schmitt, "Gianfrancesco Pico and the Fifth Lateran Council," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 61 (1970): 163–64.

[36]For his sermons against sodomites, see Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Florence: A. Belardetti, 1974), 124–25, 168–70.

[37]Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 209–12. On Savonarola's *fanciulli* see Richard C. Trexler, "Ritual in Florence: Adolescence and Salvation in the Renaissance," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 253–64.

[38]See the emphasis on men's "obscaenos puerorum amores" in *Strix*, 142.

transitional text: Its author strove to introduce new arguments concerning witches' intercourse with the devil, while maintaining the old theological views of the demons' noble nature. When the emphasis on the witch's ritual intercourse with the devil as the central part of her demonic pact increased in later decades, demons were "reembodied." As Elliott puts it, "while the earlier emphasis on demonic disembodiment advanced the mutual dependence between the devil and the witch, the later move toward 'reembodiment' could be construed as both reifying and multiplying the possibilities for illicit and shameful congress."[39]

The demons' "reembodiment" enabled later demonologists to elaborate the concept of the witches' sabbath, which is mentioned only in passing in the *Malleus*. Whereas Krämer focused on devil worship as the main ritual performed by the witches in their assemblies, later demonologists tended to focus on the assemblies' sexual and orgiastic character. The demonologists' emphasis on the sexual aspect of the diabolic meetings entailed their discussion of the demons' active participation in perverse sexual practices. By the end of the sixteenth century, and especially during the seventeenth century, demonologists referred to all kinds of nonorthodox practices when describing the witches' assemblies. As the theory of diabolic witchcraft was further elaborated, the stereotype of the witches' assemblies began to encompass not only heterosexual intercourse with demons *contra naturam*, but also homosexual relations with the devil as well as the practices of incest, bestiality, and same-sex relations among members of the diabolic sect. [40]

The final stages of this process took place many years after Pico had completed his *Strix*. Around the time of its composition, however, we find the first moves toward the "reembodiment" of demons in their copulation with witches. In 1521 Prierias published his *De strigimagarum daemonumque mirandis*, in which he defended the theory of diabolic witchcraft. One of Prierias's controversial arguments is that demons are not repelled by every sin "against nature." Prierias certainly was aware that this view challenged the traditional characterization of the demons' nature; he even cited Antoninus of Florence's argument regarding the devil's abhorrence of sodomy and other sins "against nature" and explicitly refuted it. Prierias assures his readers that Antoninus's assertion is not true in all the cases of sins "against nature," and that it has no scriptural basis. Furthermore, he argues, Antoninus's view contradicts the confessions of many witches, who admitted their engagement in heterosexual anal intercourse with demons having "bifurcated penises" (*membro genitali bifurcato*), so that the demons had corrupted them anally and vaginally simultaneously. Prierias agrees that the demons' nature was originally noble, but argues that, since their fall, they have been motivated by envy of the human race and are

[39]Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, 155–56.

[40]Krämer's discussion of the witches' assemblies are mere repetitions of the *Formicarius* (Krämer, *Malleus*, 95–98), which the writer explicitly mentions in these pages. On later demonologists' growing emphasis on nonorthodox sexual practices in their descriptions of the witches' assemblies see Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), 25; Quaife, *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage*, 99; Robert Rowland, "'Fantasticall and Devilishe Persons': European Witch-Beliefs in Comparative Perspective," in *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 166.

willing to commit even acts "against nature," as long as these assure the sinning of human witches.[41] This argument is certainly closer to the one found in *Strix* than to the traditional view. In his willingness to prove the witches' engagement in copulation with demons Prierias goes a few steps further than Krämer in establishing what will eventually result in the "reembodiment" of demons in early modern demonology.

Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio, an Italian jurist who favored leniency in the prosecution of witches, attacked the arguments outlined in *De strigimagarum* shortly after its publication. In his *Tractatus de lamiis et excellentia iuris utriusque*, written in the early 1520s,[42] Ponzinibio argued against the theory of diabolic witchcraft as it was presented in the *Malleus* and repeated by Prierias. Among other things, Ponzinibio reasserts the medieval view regarding the demons' noble origin, which makes them abhor sins "against nature" and refrain from committing them. Ponzinibio supports Antoninus's view and reassures his readers of its validity, Prierias's objection notwithstanding. He argues that witches' confessions cannot prove Antoninus wrong, because the witches' alleged intercourse with the devil is no more than a female illusion.[43]

Pico probably was aware of the attacks made on Prierias and on other demonologists who accepted the authority of the *Malleus* by "defenders of witches" like Ponzinibio. Throughout his dialogue, Pico challenges Ponzinibio's view of witches' confessions and argues that those should be taken seriously and not be regarded as fantasies or illusions. Pico uses the witch-figure, Strix, as an honest witness who attests to the hideous deeds of the witches' sect in the dialogue. Whenever Apisitio is not convinced by Phronimo's or Dicasto's theoretical views regarding diabolic witchcraft, the three turn to Strix and ask her to convey her personal experience of the matter to them.[44] Prierias's argument about the demons' engagement in sexual relations "against nature" is implicitly expressed in the dialogue when Strix

[41]Prierias, *De Strigimagarum daemonumque mirandis, libri tres* (Rome, 1592), 150. This paragraph is discussed in Elliott, *Fallen Bodies,* 264–65 n. 159. Even though he refuted Antoninus's argument, Prierias did not mention that Krämer repeated it in the *Malleus;* perhaps Prierias did not want to undermine Krämer's authority, since most of the arguments in his own book echo the German tract.

[42]The exact composition and publication dates of the *Tractatus* are unknown, but Ponzinibio must have written it between 1521, when Prierias's book (that he attacked in it) was published, and 1525, when Spina composed his demonological treatise; see Henry Charles Lea, *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, ed. Arthur C. Howland (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 1:161, 377.

[43]See Gianfrancesco Ponzinibio, "De lamiis et excellentia iuris utriusque," in *Tractatus duo: Unus de sortilegiis d. Pauli Grillandi Castellionis ... Alter de lamiis et excellentia iuris utriusque d. Ioannis Francisci Ponzinibii Florentini ... Olim quidem in lucem editi...* (Frankfurt am Main, 1592), 280. The last word on the demons' engagement in heterosexual intercourse *contra naturam* had, however, still not been said. Bartolommeo Spina, a former student of Prierias, published his *Quadruplex apologia de lamiis contra Ponzinibium* in 1525, and did not fail to argue against Ponzinibio's attacks on his master. Spina does not present a new argument, and treats the matter only in passing, when discussing the reliability of witches' confessions about their sexual relations with demons. After repeating the argument made by Prierias (and dismissing that of Antoninus), Spina reasserts the validity of witches' confessions; see Spina, *Quaestio de strigibus* (Rome, 1576), 178–79.

[44]On Strix's role in the dialogue see pp. 59–60 above. On Pico's acquaintance with Ponzinibio's views see Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 40–41.

describes the witches' nocturnal meetings, in which they enjoy copulating with their demonic lovers. Strix emphasizes that each witch enjoys sexual "delights" with a demonic lover in the most obscene manner, according to his or her particular "foul" desire, an assertion that reminds us of Prierias's argument that the devil attracts witches to him by gratifying their peculiar sexual desires.[45]

Pico and Prierias shared similar demonological perceptions, and their arguments regarding the demons' unorthodox sexual relations with witches eventually served to undermine the traditional view concerning the noble nature of demons. The discussion of demons' engagement in sexual acts "against nature" is, however, much more radical in *Strix* than it is in *De strigimagarum,* because Prierias does not discuss the possibility of the demons' engagement in same-sex relations with witches. In fact, Prierias and Ponzinibio both assumed that witches are, in most cases, women. Ponzinibio's attack on Prierias is (at least in part) made possible by this common presumption, since Prierias argues that female witches confess to their simultaneous anal and vaginal "corruption" by demons, and Ponzinibio dismisses this argument by saying that such confessions originate in female illusions.[46]

Unlike Prierias and Ponzinibio, Pico did not regard the modern witches' sect as a feminine sect, but as one composed of both men and women. Pico *does* accept the *Malleus*'s view regarding the crucial role of sexual desire in recruiting members to the diabolic sect and in persuading them to fulfill the devil's cruelest wishes. He *does not,* however, adopt Krämer's entire argument, which explains women's overwhelming majority among the members of the witches' sect by the insatiable female lust that supposedly attracts witches to their demon lovers. Whereas an entire *quaestio* in the *Malleus* is devoted to the argument that witchcraft is essentially a feminine crime, Pico points out men's sexual lust for their demon lovers, and argues that both men and women join the diabolic sect because of their attraction to good-looking demons, be they succubi or incubi.[47]

We can only guess at the reasons for Pico's presentation of the diabolic sect as heterogeneous in gender. One reason may be the high percentage of men among the accused witches, and especially among the convicted witches in the trials held in Mirandola in 1522 and 1523. The records from these witchcraft trials were not

[45]*Strix*, 111; cf. Prierias, *De strigimagarum daemonumque mirandis,* 146, 150. Tavuzzi, *Prierias: The Life and Works*, 127, pointed out the parallels between Pico's characterization of all kinds of magic as diabolism and Prierias's exposition on the matter in his *Summa Silvestrina*, noting that they are too close to be merely coincidental. Whether the two demonologists knew each other in person is difficult to determine, but we know that Gianfrancesco cooperated with some of Prierias's former students in the prosecution of witches.

[46]Ponzinibio, "De lamiis et excellentia iuris utriusque," 281; Prierias, *De strigimagarum daemonumque mirandis,* 145. Spina, *Quaestio de strigibus*, 179, also shares the same presumption, since he is concerned mainly with challenging Ponzinibio's argument that "has mulieres qua[n]do talia patiuntur, etiam somniare…."

[47]Krämer, *Malleus,* 39–45; cf. *Strix,* 110–14, 138, and esp. 159, in which Phronimo asserts the heterogeneous gender composition of the diabolic sect in the conclusion of the dialogue. I discuss additional allusions to the heterogeneous gender composition of the modern sect of witches (as opposed to the ancient one) in the dialogue in Tamar Herzig, "Diabolic Witchcraft and Gender in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's 'Strix'" ([in Hebrew], M.A. thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000).

preserved, but a list of the accused was included in the *Liber et Catalogus reorum Denuntiatorum et Processatorum in S. Officio Regii*, which was studied and published in the 1980s by Albano Biondi. More than sixty people are listed in the *Catalogus* as being accused of witchcraft in Mirandola in the early 1520s, and most of them are men (including quite a few clergymen and friars). From 1522 to 1525, ten of the convicted were burnt at the stake: seven men and three women.

Pico composed his dialogue as a polemical pamphlet to justify the Mirandolese trials and their gruesome outcome. The criticism of these trials began in summer 1522 when their first victim, the elderly priest Benedetto Berno (or Perno), was convicted and burnt at the stake. The opposition to the persecution grew stronger with the arrest of another male witch, Marco Piva (known as Il Pivetto), since the latter was a resident of San Possidonio, a disputed village over which both Pico, as count of Mirandola, and Francesca Trivulzio, the duchess of Concordia, claimed jurisdiction. Francesca was supported by the powerful duke of Mantua, who tried to secure Piva's release from the Mirandolese jail, arguing that he could not be put to trial in Pico's domain, but to no avail; Piva was convicted and executed in June 1523.[48]

Berno is the only contemporary witch that Pico mentions by name and discusses explicitly in his book. Apart from the elderly priest, Pico also refers to the case of an anonymous male witch who was supposedly tried in Mirandola at the time of the dialogue's composition, and Alberti identifies this man in his 1524 Italian translation of *Strix* as Marco Piva.[49] The characters in Pico's demonological tract do not allude to any "real" female witch who was active in Emilia-Romagna in the early sixteenth century, even though Strix's imaginary figure is depicted as a stereotypical *vetula sortilega,* an old female witch.[50] The reference to contemporary male, and not female, "real" witches, and the rejection of Krämer's characterization of the witches' sect as female, may be explained by the fact that Pico composed his demonological work in the midst of a heated dispute regarding the persecution of witches in his domain. Since the majority of those accused of witchcraft in Mirandola were men, a mere repetition of Krämer's arguments, based on the presumption that witchcraft is a feminine crime, could not suffice; these arguments needed to be modified to suit both male and female members of the witches' sect.

[48]Biondi, "Gianfrancesco Pico e la repressione della stregoneria," 334–49.

[49]After discussing Berno's horrendous crimes, Dicasto refers to the misdoings of another male witch, whose trial is supposedly in progress as the characters in *Strix* converse. Dicasto says that he recently heard this male witch's confession. Alberti, *Libro detto Strega*, ed. Biondi, 128, identifies this witch as Marco Piva, but the 1523 and 1612 Latin editions of the dialogue, as well as Turino Turini's 1555 Italian translation, do not mention his name; see *Strix*, 113; *Strix* (Bologna, 1523), sig. E3r; *Dialogo intitolato la strega overo de gli Inganni de Demoni dell'Illustre Signor Giovanfrancesco Pico Conte de la Mirandola. Tradotto in lingua Toscana per il Signor Abate Turino Turini da Pescia* (Pescia, 1555), 72.

[50]The figure of Strix—an ugly and poor old woman—embodied all the negative aspects of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century diabolic witchcraft. As shown by Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani, "Savoir médical et anthropologie religieuse: Les représentations et les fonctions de la vetula [13e–15e siècle]," *Annales ESC* 48, no. 5 (September–October 1993): 1282–1303, Pico probably used it as a symbolic device.

There is no way of knowing whether sex with demons featured prominently in the witchcraft trials of Berno or of other male defendants in Mirandola, because the *Liber et Catalogus* only lists the names of the accused, their subsequent exoneration or conviction, and the specific punishment they received, without specifying the charges held against them. When Pico mentions Berno in *Strix*—claiming that his discussion is based on the priest's actual trial records—he focuses on Berno's sexual liaisons with a succubus and judges them with great severity. Dicasto, who as an inquisitor prosecuting witches, knows the details of Berno's trial, accuses him of abusing his sacerdotal office and of causing the illness, and even the death, of certain children. Dicasto argues that Berno's blind desire for Armellina, a demon in the shape of a beautiful woman, made him commit those heinous deeds, and says that the priest confessed that he enjoyed his sexual relations with her more than anything else in the world. Dicasto assures Apistio that Berno is not the only man whose sexual attraction to a demonic lover makes him engage in horrendous crimes, and that he heard other men confess their uncontrollable desire for succubi.[51]

Pico believed that the devil, since the very first days of history, had been striving to tempt as many humans as possible to join his sect in order to bring about their damnation. The characters in his dialogue repeat the view that the devil is very cunning and, therefore, chooses different means to achieve his goal, according to the changing historical circumstances. First, he tempted the ancient pagans to worship him—disguised as their different pagan gods. In Christian times, he has found it more difficult to lead Christians to worship him, but he still keeps coming up with ways to do so;[52] he exploits men's and women's heterosexual attraction to good-looking demons as well as men's "foul love of boys"—notoriously common among sixteenth-century Italians—for recruiting members to his ever-growing sect.

While the abandonment of the traditional theological approach regarding the demons' reaction to sodomy in *Strix* is clear, it is nevertheless difficult to determine the decisive reason for Pico's break with the view expressed in earlier demonological works, and especially in the *Malleus*. One only can assume that Savonarola's influence on his religious thought, the growing emphasis on the witches' sexual relations with the devil in the early sixteenth century, and the practical need to account for men's attraction to the witches' sect might have influenced the nature of his discussion of the subject.

Men's engagement in same-sex relations with incubi is, according to Pico, a severe sin. Those who commit it should be punished like all the other witches who "give their body and soul" to the devil. However, this sin is not categorically different from engaging in heterosexual relations with demons. Earlier demonologists

[51] *Strix*, 113–14, 138. In the dedication of his dialogue's first edition to Giovanni Mainardi, Pico argues that the description of the witches' crimes in his dialogue derives from what he had heard from the defendants themselves and from what he had read in their trial records; see *Strix* (Bologna, 1523), sig. A3v. Dicasto's references to Berno are accordingly presented as if they are indeed based on a reading of the priest's confession. The references to the anonymous male witch in love with a beautiful succubus is likewise presented as if their source is this man's confession, which Dicasto supposedly heard.

[52] *Strix*, 158–59.

argued that demons abhor sodomy to emphasize the perversity of those men who willingly engage in it, which is so great that even the wicked demons cannot stand it. In a way, Pico's very different discussion of sodomy implies that it is not so abominable. Demons are no longer repelled by it. Men's same-sex attraction to demons disguised as good-looking men is sinful, but no more abhorrent than women's attraction to them. Paradoxically, Pico presents his readers with a relatively benign view of homosexual relations, since his discussion of demonic sodomy implies that those relations are not so radically different from heterosexual relations as Bernardino, Antoninus, Nider, or Krämer would have their readers believe.