

## *Open letter to the Italian newspaper “Espresso”*

Dear Director,

Dear editorial staff,

Dear Mrs. Codacci-Pisanelli,

After having read and appreciated the beautifully written article (published on February 4, 2020 in the Italian newspaper *Espresso*) concerning the *Accademia Vivarium Novum*, the college based in Frascati, which proclaimed itself the new campus of humanism, we are moved to some serious considerations that we feel obliged to share with readers.

We always approve with great joy when attentions of the media are directed towards the world of education and culture, mostly the ones that share stories about happy experiences of teaching classical languages. The Ancients’ heredity is not just a burden of tradition. It is not the source of an opaque cultural identity. In our life, it is an essential heritage of humanity and intellectual richness: it is a pivotal moment in the construction of a free mind, of a critique attitude and of a sound soul.

For these reasons, and rightly, many powerful voices have raised in defence of classical studies, i.e. literature, philosophy, history. Without that process of construction of a good man, the *polis* is reduced to a brutal mechanism of power and abuse and it annihilates the essence of human nature: freedom and reason.

Up to this point, just words that everyone will promptly declare ready to agree on: very often, in the course of history, many human beings, moved by power and egoism, have treated on and violated human freedom and reason.

But even when these people were working for oppression, they proclaimed themselves to be the righteous and upright tutors and guardians of freedom, of a superior kind of moral life.

Therefore, the first ethical and rational duty of everyone of us is to unveil the illusion and to condemn the deceit. It is an essential task for those who want to guarantee justice for the mankind and for our societies.

Here, mostly and foremost, the task of authentic journalism finds its accomplishment: it is indeed grounded on a serious description of facts, in a clever attitude and in an honest search for what lays behind the appearances.

What appears on the Tusculan hills is a place for the soul, magnificent and moving; what appears in the bright rooms and in the sunbathed gardens of Villa Falconieri is a school of high level, a laical *coenobium* of brotherhood, where young men, inspired by the love for *humanitas* and for the *otium litterarum*, live together in friendship with their young teachers and their putative father: these men have renounced to all the lures of the world at the cost of the heaviest sacrifices, privations and

refusals, in the sake of a virtuous and sage life. As the reader may understand, it is easy to get ignited and to burn of good, sometimes abstracted, resolutions in front of such a moving and extraordinary sight, even for the most careful and guarded of us. Enthusiastically and spontaneously we want to believe to this magnificent sight, we want to trust this great idea, without knowing what lies behind the appearance, without thinking to the ancient roots which regulate this sight and rule that idea.

The far away reasons are rooted in another magnificent scenario: this majestic project, which leads to Frascati, passing through Montella and stopping in Castel di Guido, was born on the deserted island of Vivara, in the wonderful bay of Naples, from the will of a very learned man, who was educated to Latin and Greek following the ancient *ratio studiorum*<sup>1</sup>.

This man is Giorgio Punzo, master of Luigi Miraglia, dean of *Vivarium Novum*, who was his pupil since adolescence and continuator of the work started over 40 years ago. The master was not just a biologist as you have correctly written, but a thinker who left traces of his doctrine in some books published in Naples at the beginning of 1960s: we mention here the *Prolegomeni erotologici*, that may still be consulted in the National Library of Rome, classified under the subject “sexual perversions”. Punzo was a philosopher who explored, with a sharpness comparable to the uniqueness and eccentricity of his conclusions, the depth of human soul and the dynamics through which love arises in it.

After the Dantean studies on Brunetto Latini, who is admired by the Poet as a father, despite his condemn to the Hell for sodomy, Punzo comes to the formulation of his pivotal theory, which he communicated orally to his closest pupils: the *holarrenism*.

This is a term unknown to the most important vocabularies of philosophy, as it appears to be an original minting of Punzo himself. The *aporia* is easily unravelled through an elementary etymological analysis: *holos* (all/whole) + *arren* (male) are greek terms from which the new lemma is derived, explained by Punzo as the “entirely virile”. According to the author, the *holarrenism* is the sublime form of love, the noblest one, because it excludes the libido and the oppression, i.e. the use of the other as a mere object or instrument of satisfaction of an egoistic pleasure.

There is another reason why the *holarrenism* is the sublimated kind of love: it doesn't degrade the human being to bestiality, to mere animal lust, to predatory sexual instincts.

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<sup>1</sup> The Academy locates its roots in the highly formative experience that some of its members lived in the 1980's on the green and uninhabited isle of Vivara in the Bay of Naples, today a nature reserve of the state. There an elderly scholar of natural sciences, an accomplished connoisseur of the various liberal arts, exhorted the adolescents under his tutelage to free themselves from the mainstream mindset, from individualistic consumerism and from the thirst for recognition and financial gain, that they might reawaken the dormant moral conscience within and seek to better both themselves and others by encountering the noble and the beautiful that the human spirit has produced and discovered over the centuries. (<https://vivariumnovum.net/it/academy/history>)

At this point, we have not yet explained the *holarrenism*, but his general meaning which could be consistent with the definition of love *sic et simpliciter*. In order to determine the specific difference between *holarrenism* and Love, it is necessary to identify the characteristic that distinguishes the first one: we need to identify the element that explains why it is the *holarrenic* love, the perfect, noble, sublime one, and not another form of love. In short, why the conjugal love or another kind of love is imperfect while the *holarrenic* love is perfect?

Because the *holarrenic* love excludes the female element and the female characteristic<sup>2</sup>. At this point, we need to establish the role of women in Punzo's *holarrenic* theory.

The woman is not an agent that can give, but a patient that must suffer; the woman is a "being for", she is always and necessarily, i.e. ontologically and metaphysically, ordered to the man<sup>3</sup>. She is an instrument of physical pleasure of man<sup>4</sup>, she degrades his intellect, she is an object of sexual appetite, which is a kind of oppression<sup>5</sup>. Because of her natural condition, i.e. because of her inferiority, women make men violent sexual abusers, they weaken their intellect, degrade men to beasts.

This is the *holarrenism*: it is the perfect kind of love which dignifies men because it is cultivated between two men, two perfect beings, who try to transcend the beastly condition of human life in order to ascend to a state close to the divine, in order to 'eternarsi' (cfr. Dante, *If XV 85*).

We would understand if someone wanted to stigmatize these ideas as misogynistic: they are, nonetheless, equally homophobic. According to Punzo, even the homosexual love is unworthy of man, not only because it enables the same dynamics of oppression and bestiality of the relationship between man and woman, but also because it implies a certain effeminacy and frivolity<sup>6</sup>.

Here then we must take another step in following Punzo and his disciples on the road of their original way of thinking and behaving.

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<sup>2</sup> «Love between male and female in fact is nurtured by the two complementary elements of desire of using and offering: this is the dynamic of every erotic heteropolar impulsion». (*Prolegomeni*, p. 159)

<sup>3</sup> «Female deficiency resides in a deepest essential level and it consists in the fact that, while man simply *is*, woman *is for*: as the sword is and the scabbard is for the sword, inasmuch the sword without the scabbard has a meaning, but the scabbard without the sword does not mean a thing». (*Prolegomeni*, pp. 155-6)

<sup>4</sup> Thus Punzo writes that «the woman is attracted to the man as towards what she has been made for and shows a love/offer directed to the man's satisfaction». (*Prolegomeni*, p. 153)

<sup>5</sup> Punzo explains that the male role in the sexual relationship can be described as "use", while typically feminine is an "offer of use" that man can enjoy. (cfr. *Prolegomeni*, pp. 151-2).

<sup>6</sup> For example: «already in their gestures the pseudandric individuals show female traits, specifically in their movements, in their gait, in the way they style their dresses and their hair [...] neither they differ from women in their intellectual capacities and in their interests [...] The professional activities that best suit the psychic complexion of pseudandric individuals are, for the less learned classes, that of waitress, barber, tailor, etc...; and for the most evolved classes, the ones in connection with female fashion, scenography, choreography, etc... An incredible mastery is showed then in the pseudandric individuals in what concerns the costumes and home decor. Very often pseudandric individuals satisfy their tendency towards the feminine through dressing up in women's clothes [...] In the "homosexual" cult they represent the central core [...]. They reciprocally call themselves with female names or with the common nicknames of "checche" (i.e. queers) and "zie" (literally "aunties")». (*Prolegomeni*, pp. 105-6)

The *holarrenism*, indeed, does not contemplate the relationship between two male adults, which would be reproachable, but it is essentially the worship towards the young male<sup>7</sup>. According to Punzo, *holarrenic* men must obtain «in a more mature age and in front of their own conscience their real psychological condition of virile erotic enthusiasm for the revitalizing virile youthfulness. On the pillars of this clear vision of intimacy the best part of *holarrenism* may flourish: the worshipping love of the adult towards the young» (*Prolegomeni*, p. 166).

According to the old preceptor, the *holarrenic* relationship that best dignify the man, i.e. that make the man ascend from the bestiality to divinity, cannot be any other than the relationship between the master and the pupil, the one of the adult man who educates the young boy. So, he concludes that the *holarrenism* «cannot assume any other shape if not the one of a generous, demanding and fecund dedication to the moral flourishing of the loved one. It is thus the pedagogy that imposes, from a psychological perspective, a positive evaluation of the holarrenic erotism» (*Prolegomeni*, p. 167).

Therefore, the *holarrenic* relationship between the master and the pupil does not exhaust itself in the worship and dedication of the adult towards the intellectual, moral and spiritual ennoblement of the young but it comprehends the entire personal and physical dimension of the individual. In fact, «the worshipping love implies in its contingent realization the lovers' communion, not excluding the physical one» (*Prolegomeni*, p. 162)<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, Punzo, residing in Vivara, has not just protected the precious natural environment of the island but he guested on his expense and educated to classics many talented young men, who lived there with their old preceptor. Among these young men, Luigi Miraglia stood up for his sharpness and cleverness. As the master turned old, Miraglia, taking the baton, did not allow the spread semen to go wasted and to stay unproductive, but he started a bigger project: the male college *Accademia Vivarium Novum*. There, Miraglia guests and educates, at no charge, deserving young men, without any distinction of classes, culture and ethnicity, provided that they are between 16 and 24 years old, as the call for scholarships of the Accademia states<sup>9</sup>.

In front of this magnificent spectacle and because Miraglia states, as you have written, that the *Vivarium Novum* is an homage to his experience in Vivara, as also testified by the name choice of

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<sup>7</sup> «The holarrenic subject seems to be steadily oriented towards the young boy in his flourishing, so much that when he is a boy, he loves the elder, when he is a young man he loves his peer and when he is an adult he loves the younger as the experience has taught me more than once». (*Prolegomeni*, p. 165)

<sup>8</sup> See also: «despite being close to a pure worship, a love between contingent beings will always necessarily be burdened by moments of desire and satisfaction [...] now, between corporeal beings, the participation is always realized in the image of a contact and of a physical communication; a true need of physical contact and comprehensive communion is not detached from the worshipping love and this brings on this Love by definition the external characteristics of what is commonly called love». (*Prolegomeni*, pp. 161-2)

<sup>9</sup> <https://vivariumnovum.net/it/news/announcement-of-scholarships-2019-20>

the *Accademia*, we do not know, and so we ask perplexed and hesitating to Miraglia, how he managed to overcome the reactionary legacy of contempt and disrespect for women and the heritage of the mature man's worship towards the young boy.

Caught by this doubt and because of that moral task we mentioned above, which everyone of us has, it seems necessary to monitor because that magnificent sight in Frascati would not reveal an illusion for young men that can easily be fascinated by a great idea.

The strict rules of cohabitation and the liberal welcome of the putative father, the isolation from the world and the consecration to a noble ideal could be suddenly, unexpectedly and unwillingly transformed in a mechanism which instills an unconditioned reverence, gratitude and obedience in those who are younger and more fragile, so to weaken their autonomy and independence and to undermine their freedom and intellect.

We dared to write this open letter, because the *Vivarium Novum* seems to be funded, as you have written, by public fundings and it is based on a precious national property<sup>10</sup>.

Cultivating the *humanitas* implies also consistency between words and actions, with clear transparency, without esoteric fictions; cultivating the *humanitas* means guaranteeing reason's freedom, because it is the only way of allowing a rational exercise of freedom itself.

Best regards,

Prof. Alessandro Agus

Scientific Director

Italian Institute of Classical Studies

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/0/1064053/index.html?part=dossier\\_dossier1-sezione\\_sezione12-h2\\_h2157](https://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/17/DOSSIER/0/1064053/index.html?part=dossier_dossier1-sezione_sezione12-h2_h2157) and <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/pdf/D19162c.pdf>