

SEPIA

A full-length play

By Tom Jacobson

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

CESARE ACROSSO, 41, Podesta of Taormina, handsome, clean-shaven,
also plays:

WILHELM VON GLOEDEN, 41, photographer, bearded

FRANCESCO MAFFIOTTI, 43, Italian Fascist official, also plays:

SEBASTIAN MELMOTH, 43, English poet

PANCRAZIO BUCIUNI, 57, Sicilian photographer, wears mustache and
glasses, also plays:

PANCRAZIO BUCIUNI, 18, model, dark and beautiful

The action takes place in various locations in Taormina in 1936 and 1897,
including a photography studio, a private piazza, a courtroom and the slopes
of Mount Ziretto and Mount Etna.

SETTING: The setting is fluid and defined primarily by lighting. Some Greek
set pieces, like a broken column or amphorae. Warm and sensual in 1897, cold
and authoritarian in 1936.

Projection: 1936. Lights up on
CESARE ACROSSO, 41, Fascist
Podesta of Taormina, Sicily. He
is handsome and clean-shaven,
clearly reveling in his uniform
and role.

CESARE

Individuality is a myth. Each of us is the product of a lifetime of biological and sociological influences. When you take a delectable bite of arancini, it's not your decision: biology and culture compel you. Nor is art personal--an expression of individual genius--but instead represents an entire society, the passion of a people, the cultural culmination of decades, centuries, millennia--a moment captured like a photograph. An instant becomes an eternity. The statues of the Foro Mussolini exemplify the traits of eternal Rome: chastely nude, muscular warriors, discus-throwers, swimmers, tennis players and boxers--

FRANCESCO

(revealed in light)

--All male.

FRANCESCO MAFFIOTTI, 41, is an Italian Fascist officer from Rome, also uniformed, with an impressive mustache and clearly higher rank than CESARE.

CESARE

Of course, the masculine ideal, each a picture of Hellenic beauty, my point exactly--

FRANCESCO

As interpreted by Enrico del Debbio.

CESARE

Who?

FRANCESCO

The sculptor, the individual artist.

CESARE

The sculptor is immaterial, I'm sure you agree. As they stream into the stadium, the people see the best of themselves, heroes serving Italy with glory--

FRANCESCO

Virility.

CESARE

Absolutely, Signore Maffiotti! Robust procreative energy building a healthy and prosperous Italy for the future!

(displays a glass negative)

The opposite of this degenerate perversion of masculinity, the effete torpor of these feminized *castrati* draped about each other in limpid luxury, weak and waiting, inviting, seducing--

FRANCESCO

Signore Acrosso, you're getting us aroused--

CESARE

Precisely!

CESARE shatters the negative. A sob from PANCRAZIO BUCIUNI, who suddenly appears in light. PANCRAZIO is 57, dressed roughly as a peasant, wears a hat, glasses and a mustache and has tears on his face. He is darker than the other two.

CESARE

Precisely why this pornography must be destroyed! It embodies no artistic ideals, not strength, nor beauty, neither aesthetic glory nor philosophical rigor--

PANCRAZIO

(weeping)

But love!

CESARE

Love?

PANCRAZIO

Pardon me, Cesarino--

CESARE

Signore Buciuni, do me the courtesy of addressing me by my proper title.

PANCRAZIO

Apologies--Podesta--but there must be a place in art for love.

CESARE

This unnatural *tableau vivant* is the antithesis of love! An abuse of these--probably innocent--boys for your prurient pleasure!

PANCRAZIO

I didn't take the photograph, Podesta.

FRANCESCO

That negative was from the last century--

CESARE

But you're the photographer!

PANCRAZIO

I'm the photographer now. Then I was one of the innocent boys.

(re: a fragment of the negative)

This is my face.

(weeps)

Was my face.

CESARE

(to FRANCESCO)

Typical Sicilian sentimentality, Signore. I'm so often ashamed of my people, but what can you do?

(shrugs)

We are yet primitives, peasants and fishermen. Not everyone understands how Fascism has liberated Sicily from the Cosa Nostra--

FRANCESCO

Not entirely at this point--

CESARE

Not that we ever had a problem in Taormina--

FRANCESCO

Not as bad as Palermo, but my investigations between here and Catania appear stalled by *umirta*--

CESARE

Our murder rate has plummeted, and we're forever grateful!

FRANCESCO

In any case, there's no need to smash more plates just to impress me.

PANCRAZIO

Please, no!

CESARE

It would take me all day to make a dent in the mountain of monstrosity Buciuni's accumulated here.

FRANCESCO

How many?

CESARE

We confiscated hundreds three years ago, but I understand there are still several thousand negative plates on premises and twice as many prints.

PANCRAZIO

Cesarino--Podesta--it's forty years of work!

CESARE

Forty years of degradation! As Podesta, it's my duty to prevent Sicily from becoming an isle of infamy like Capri. Until Il Duce, the sodomites raped both Capri and Anacapri for generations.

FRANCESCO

All the way back to Tiberius, I believe.

CESARE

Roman, not Sicilian. No offense, Signore.

FRANCESCO

If any crime's been committed, it was decades ago.

CESARE

Possession of pornography is an offense to public morality and counter to the objectives of Fascism.

FRANCESCO

Despite our efforts, Sicily still has an unfortunate reputation as the least Fascist region of Italy.

CESARE

We're all Fascists here in Taormina. As soon as I heard you were coming, I wanted you to see how we're cleaning things up.

FRANCESCO

Signore Buciuni, you were the subject of these photographs in your youth?

PANCRAZIO

Yes, your grace.

FRANCESCO

Signore is sufficient respect. The same respect we owe you, Signore Buciuni. You're merely the owner of these photographs, is that correct, or are you also the photographer?

PANCRAZIO

Some of the photographs I took.

FRANCESCO

Of young boys?

PANCRAZIO

Boys, men--old enough to know what they're doing. And I pay them.

CESARE

Pornography *and* prostitution!

PANCRAZIO

A modeling fee, Podesta. It's fun for them.

CESARE

(to FRANCESCO)

I saw five or six lurking about when we drove up.

Sound of boys giggling off.
FRANCESCO is briefly startled,
CESARE looks irritated, and
PANCRAZIO doesn't react at all.

FRANCESCO

Who took the photographs of you?

PANCRAZIO

The Baron.

FRANCESCO

A baron, really?

PANCRAZIO

Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden.

CESARE

A German! A predatory foreigner. Our enemy during the last war!

PANCRAZIO

He's buried here. We called him Guglielmo. My dear friend.

FRANCESCO

And he left you the photographs when he died?

PANCRAZIO

The whole photography business. But it's not the same without him.

CESARE

No one to bugger you!

FRANCESCO

Podesta, if you insist on bullying Signore Buciuni, we'll never get to the truth.

CESARE

The truth is Pancrazio was the Baron's catamite for years. Everybody in Taormina knows it.

PANCRAZIO

Catamite?

CESARE

I hear you're arresting catamites and perverts on the mainland. Here in Sicily we've been too lax.

PANCRAZIO

Don't arrest me, Cesarino, please. You were such a nice boy!

FRANCESCO

The kind of boy who posed for photographs?

Sound of boys giggling off.

PANCRAZIO glares in the direction
of the sound.

CESARE

Signore, such a rough and ready sense of humor! Pancrazio presumes upon our relationship--everyone in Taormina's your cousin.

Sound of scrambling or a door
slamming off.

FRANCESCO

If we're to consider arresting Signore Buciuni--

PANCRAZIO

No!

FRANCESCO

--And destroying these thousands of photographs and negatives--
-

PANCRAZIO

Please, no! They're all I
have!

FRANCESCO

--We need to determine
whether--

FRANCESCO

--In fact--a crime has been committed. Mussolini is sometimes rough, but always fair. Justice must be served or we're not doing our jobs, just settling scores. A new Italy means also a new Sicily.

CESARE

Understood.

FRANCESCO

I suspect that if a crime was committed, Signore Buciuni was more victim than perpetrator.

PANCRAZIO

Oh, no, not a victim--!

CESARE

Everyone knows Pancrazio did the Baron's dirty work, seeking out peasant boys with the most developed--uh--members--

PANCRAZIO

They're very proud--

FRANCESCO

Tell us about the Baron, Signore Buciuni. I know he was your friend, but if he committed crimes he can't be punished posthumously--

CESARE

Except in the fires of hell--

FRANCESCO

Did the Baron exploit you and other boys?

PANCRAZIO

No, he always paid. Generously! But--

CESARE

That kind of generosity is still exploitation!

FRANCESCO

But what, Signore?

PANCRAZIO

It wasn't always--I didn't necessarily--
(can't speak)

FRANCESCO

Despite the unfortunate circumstances of our meeting, Signore Buciuni, I'm naturally sympathetic to the struggle of the artist. My own grandfather was known for his paintings of peasants--

CESARE

You're named for him!

FRANCESCO

Indeed, Podesta. Although I'm slightly alarmed you have that information--

CESARE

Francesco Paolo Maffiotti was a famous painter, and your father a war hero!

PANCRAZIO

Really, Signore?

CESARE

Giorgio Maffiotti, the pilot!

FRANCESCO

Who taught me that even men in uniform can have hearts. Steady your nerves, Signore Buciuni, tell the truth, and we'll work this out properly.

CESARE

Your grandfather painted peasants, but this is not how to speak to them--

FRANCESCO

Podesta, your avidity is interfering with the investigation.

CESARE

Apologies, Signore.

FRANCESCO

Signore Buciuni, you were beginning a story, I believe, before the Podesta interrupted you.

(hands him a glass)

Grappa will give you courage.

CESARE

Alcohol, at an interrogation?

FRANCESCO

This isn't yet an interrogation. I only wish Signore Buciuni to be comfortable telling the truth.

PANCRAZIO

(unsure)

Thank you, Signore.

(sips hesitantly)

FRANCESCO

(smiles)

You were saying...?

PANCRAZIO

I did do...one thing of which I am ashamed.

CESARE

Now we're getting somewhere!

FRANCESCO

When are you talking about, Signore? How long ago?

PANCRAZIO

Just before the century turned, 1897. December, I think.

CESARE

What did the Baron do to you?

PANCRAZIO

It wasn't the Baron! We had...a visitor.

Lighting shift gradually focuses on
PANCRAZIO, leaving CESARE and
FRANCESCO in darkness.

CESARE

A foreigner?

FRANCESCO

German?

PANCRAZIO

English, I think.

CESARE

Aha!

PANCRAZIO

Or Scottish? Irish? What's the difference?

CESARE

The type who used to flock to Capri!

PANCRAZIO

(removes his glasses)

In any case, we had to speak English, which I could barely understand, out of courtesy to our guest.

FRANCESCO

How old were you?

FRANCESCO and CESARE have
disappeared in the darkness.

PANCRAZIO

(removes his mustache)

Eighteen. He came just as the Baron was posing me for a
photograph--

WILHELM

(from the darkness, German
accent)

Remove the hat, *bitte*.

PANCRAZIO removes his hat,
revealing a head of wild, black
youthful hair.

WILHELM

And your shirt, *per favore*, Pancrazio.

PANCRAZIO takes off his shirt,
revealing a beautiful torso. He
has become the 18 year-old YOUNG
PANCRAZIO.

SEBASTIAN

(from the darkness, English
accent)

Surely he's not just going to stand there shirtless, Herr
Gloeden?

WILHELM

Of course not, Signore Melmoth. Every photograph is
meticulously posed. The chemicals are very--how do you say
in English--dear?

SEBASTIAN

Expensive--dear--either way. I understand. So how will you
pose him?

Lights slowly come up on WILHELM,
41, bearded and German, played by
the same actor as CESARE.

At the same time, lights come up on SEBASTIAN, 43, clean-shaven and English, played by the same actor as FRANCESCO. SEBASTIAN nurses a glass of wine. Projection: 1897.

WILHELM

Pancrazio, lean on that column--

(YOUNG PANCRAZIO leans)

Your elbow on top, please.

(YOUNG PANCRAZIO uses his elbow)

Mille grazie. Look away a bit, not directly at the camera. *Wunderbar.*

SEBASTIAN

But what is he looking at?

WILHELM

What is it you see, Pancrazio?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Vedo un albero... [I see a tree]

WILHELM

In Inglese, per favore. Il nostro ospite non parla italiano.
[In English, please. Our guest doesn't speak Italian.]

SEBASTIAN

I do, actually, speak *un po' d'Italiano. Und ich spreche fließend Deutsch.* [a little Italian. And I speak fluent German.]

WILHELM

Pancrazio and I speak Italian and German with each other, but it's good for both of us to practice our English.

SEBASTIAN

I appreciate the courtesy, Baron, although I may wish to learn a bit of Italian from you, even Sicilian.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I see--a tree!

SEBASTIAN

Could he be more specific? His eyes can tell us whether he sees a plane tree--

(makes bored eyes)

--A cypress--

(looks higher)

--Or a pine--

(looks impressed)

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(imitating SEBASTIAN with great exaggeration)

I see--*un cipresso!*

WILHELM

English.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

A...cypress!

SEBASTIAN

Yes, you see? The eyes paint us a cypress, tall and dark green. But the rest of him's just lounging--there's no tension, no drama.

WILHELM

What do you suggest?

SEBASTIAN

I know you have costumes. So many of your photographs look like you came to Sicily with Odysseus--

WILHELM produces a "Greek" costume.

SEBASTIAN

Yes! Oh, yes, perfect!

WILHELM throws the costume to YOUNG PANCRAZIO, who starts putting it on. SEBASTIAN pours himself more wine.

SEBASTIAN

But traditional Arcadian attire did not include trousers.

WILHELM

(after a moment)

Togliti i pantaloni. [take off your pants]

(YOUNG PANCRAZIO glares)

Don't be shy.

SEBASTIAN

He's very dark, isn't he?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO glares at SEBASTIAN
as he takes off his pants and dons
the "Greek" costume.

WILHELM

His nickname is Il Moro.

SEBASTIAN

How very clever. I certainly see the stamp of Arabia, even
Africa on his...features.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO poses, but with
attitude.

SEBASTIAN

But now he just looks irritated, like a Carthaginian
fishmonger out-haggled in the souk.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I be not--a fish!

SEBASTIAN

No, no, fishmonger, a seller of fish! *Un pescivendolo, si?*
I apologize--I always forget to simplify my vocabulary when
traveling, almost impossible.

WILHELM

No, no, I apologize. Il Moro's been...chafing--is that the
English?--under our schedule of so many poses--

SEBASTIAN

The pose is the problem, I think. It's vaguely Greek, but
doesn't tell enough of a story. It lacks tragedy.

WILHELM

Have you something in mind?

SEBASTIAN

Ever photographed him as Antinous?

WILHELM

No.

SEBASTIAN

Pancrazio, would you like to be a famous Greek lover?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO looks from
SEBASTIAN to WILHELM, confused.

WILHELM

He doesn't know the story.

SEBASTIAN

I am, of course, more than willing to tell it--
(steps eagerly toward YOUNG
PANCRAZIO)

--If you'd be open to that particular classical pose.

WILHELM

(gestures)

Of course.

SEBASTIAN manipulates a skeptical
YOUNG PANCRAZIO as he speaks,
pushing him into a reclining
position.

SEBASTIAN

Antinous was a beautiful boy from Bithynia with an ivory body and a pomegranate mouth. The Roman Emperor Hadrian took him as his lover for three years as they traveled throughout the Mediterranean. In Egypt they paid homage to the sarcophagus of Alexander the Great. Very soon after, Antinous fell into the Nile and drowned. Hadrian wept like a woman but mourned like an emperor, named a city for Antinous and declared the exquisite ephebe a god.

SEBASTIAN has arranged YOUNG
PANCRAZIO as if he's just been
hauled out of the Nile. SEBASTIAN
returns to his wine glass, which he
raises to YOUNG PANCRAZIO.

SEBASTIAN

There you are, Il Moro! A veritable god!

(to WILHELM)

I give you The Drowned Antinous. You may capture him in your camera for posterity.

WILHELM

Eyes closed, please.

SEBASTIAN

Yes, they would have closed his eyes. Oh, wait! He's absurdly dry for a drowned boy!

SEBASTIAN finds a pitcher of water and throws it on YOUNG PANCRAZIO, who is shocked.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Succhiami il cazzo! [Suck my dick!]

SEBASTIAN

Such useful Italian to know!

WILHELM

Sdraiati e stai fermo. [Lie down and hold still.]

SEBASTIAN

Also useful.

WILHELM triggers the camera and takes the photograph.

WILHELM

I will need to take more than one shot to be sure.

SEBASTIAN

(staring at YOUNG PANCRAZIO)

I would be delighted, Pancrazio, to return the favor and tutor you in English.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I study English book!

WILHELM

Silenzio!

SEBASTIAN

Only the most esteemed and sophisticated Greek poets fell in love with young men, as did the greatest heroes: Achilles with Patroclus, Alexander the Great with Hephaestion. Even the gods: Apollo loved Hyacinthus so much a flower grew from the youth's blood. The Greeks and Italians so much more sophisticated than the philistines of England.

WILHELM

Or Germany.

SEBASTIAN

Were you driven out as well?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO has opened his eyes to watch SEBASTIAN as he tells his stories.

WILHELM

Eyes closed, please.

SEBASTIAN

What's your favorite romance of antiquity, Herr Gloeden?

WILHELM

Please call me Wilhelm.

SEBASTIAN

And of course you must call me Sebastian.

WILHELM

(after a moment)

Of course.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

San Sebastiano!

WILHELM

Eyes closed!

SEBASTIAN is pleased YOUNG PANCRAZIO was peeking. Lights out on SEBASTIAN and WILHELM as YOUNG PANCRAZIO stands up to narrate.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I couldn't tell exactly what was going on between the Baron and our visitor, but I understood neither of them were telling me the whole truth. Nor were they entirely truthful with each other.

Lights up on WILHELM. YOUNG PANCRAZIO changes into a different Greek costume.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

There's something wrong with him.

WILHELM

He's a poet.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

And he drinks too much wine.

WILHELM

What happened to him in England is the worst that can happen to anyone.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I don't care what happened to him! It doesn't give him the right to treat me like a dog, a plate of fish, like I'm not even there!

WILHELM

Perhaps if you'd be more polite to him.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Kiss his ass like you do?

WILHELM

You remember when the Prince of Wales visited Taormina? Eleonora Duse, Richard Strauss, Kaiser Wilhelm? What happened after each of them came to see us?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Increased sales.

WILHELM

Sebastian Melmoth is more famous than any of them.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

More famous than the Prince of Wales?

WILHELM

Yes, actually.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

What's he famous for?

WILHELM

His...poems.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Famous for poetry?!

Lights reveal SEBASTIAN, who begins posing YOUNG PANCRAZIO in a kneeling position. WILHELM prepares his camera.

SEBASTIAN

We had a terrible rodent problem in Naples. But my friend hired a local sorceress who burned odors and uttered incantations, and within a day the rats were gone. She also told our futures.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(possibly teasing or
flirting)

What is *la tua fortuna*, San Sebastiano?

SEBASTIAN

As much as I'd like to believe in sorcery, I'm rather certain it's just a metaphor, rats or no.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Le streghe sono reali! [Witches are real!]

WILHELM

English!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

The sister of my mother is witch.

SEBASTIAN

Thank you, but I've no need of her ministrations presently. I'm rather averse to the future, actually.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Even--how you say?--romance?

SEBASTIAN

Romance is for me ancient history these days.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

But you have the history?

SEBASTIAN

Once I knew the greatest love, the perfect love, and to make love even more perfect, he betrayed me. For 200 pounds a year.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Scusi, but no sound like love.

WILHELM

Pancrazio--

SEBASTIAN

He was a Narcissus, so beautiful he could only love himself.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

What is Narcissus?

SEBASTIAN

Ameinias declared his love for Narcissus, who handed him a sword. With it, Ameinias killed himself.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Molto freddo! [Very cold!]

SEBASTIAN

(adjusting YOUNG PANCRAZIO'S
pose to match his words)

Very cold indeed. But Fate punished Narcissus. He saw his reflection in a pool and literally fell in love. Leaning over to kiss himself, he toppled into the water and drowned.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Very much drowning in the ancient days!

SEBASTIAN

Lean over--see your reflection--water the purest looking
glass--isn't he perfect?

YOUNG PANCAZIO poses as Narcissus
at the pool, entranced.

SEBASTIAN

Like a dream. Of youth. Of you.

WILHELM shoots the photograph.
YOUNG PANCAZIO shakes himself out
of the reverie and laughs.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Is no love!

SEBASTIAN

How charming to possess no vanity!

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Love be--

(clasps hands)

Insieme. Non da solo! [Together. Not alone!]

WILHELM

English!

SEBASTIAN

Together, *si*.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

But also--too--free--

(flings hands apart)

No selfish thoughts of just me. *Ascoltare!* Listen and hear,
no just wait to talk, hear--*verita--*

(looks to WILHELM)

WILHELM AND SEBASTIAN

Truth.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Hear truth! Love feel good only is no real love. Feel *tutto*
quanto--good, bad, everything! Questo è il vero amore!
[that's true love!].

SEBASTIAN

Love always sounds warmer in Italian.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

No give sword.

SEBASTIAN

No, no suicide, of course not! Never! *Mai!*

YOUNG PANCAZIO

You Italian more badder than *mi Inglese!*

SEBASTIAN

As sad as it is to grow old and horrible and dreadful, no *suicidio!* I fully expect to be murdered one day, but haven't the courage to do it myself. Long life is a life sentence, and I've already been to prison. The body falls apart--*il corpo degenera*--my ear sometimes aches like it might explode--

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Mia zia [my aunt]. She cure you!

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps. It's better today.

WILHELM

Pancrazio, second shot!

YOUNG PANCAZIO instantly resumes the Narcissus pose, perhaps with greater intensity, and WILHELM takes the photograph. Lighting change isolates YOUNG PANCAZIO in light as WILHELM and SEBASTIAN disappear in darkness. YOUNG PANCAZIO leaps up to narrate as he turns on a cylinder phonograph.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

In following the Baron's advice that I be friendlier with our guest, I may have gone too far, because he was soon asking very personal questions.

"The Streets of Cairo" emanates from the phonograph. Lighting reveals SEBASTIAN.

YOUNG PANCAZIO starts putting on a traditional Sicilian dress and veil, dancing a bit to the music.

SEBASTIAN

When did you begin modeling for Herr Gloeden?

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Many year.

SEBASTIAN

How old were you?

YOUNG PANCAZIO

I am now eighteen--

(counting on fingers)

--Seventeen, sixteen, fifteen, fourteen--four year *del tutto!*

SEBASTIAN

Fourteen! Very young!

YOUNG PANCAZIO

No so young! Older than other boy who model: Pasqualino, Virgilio, Carafasso, thirteen maybe or--*dodici*--

SEBASTIAN

Twelve?!

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Twelve is *dodici*?

SEBASTIAN

Yes, that's right, but so young--

YOUNG PANCAZIO

No many way to make the money in Sicilia. Baron always pay, *molto generoso!* And big sale, big share!

SEBASTIAN

What do your parents say?

YOUNG PANCAZIO

They say go make money!

SEBASTIAN

You'd be quite popular in London or Paris.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You go to Paris?

SEBASTIAN

Would you like to see the city of light?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(smiles)

Maybe. So--

(displays drag costume)

I am--how you say?--gorgeous, yes?

SEBASTIAN

You have jasmine in your hair, obscenity in your eyes. But what are you supposed to be, exactly?

Lights up on WILHELM with the camera.

WILHELM

A Turkish odalisque.

SEBASTIAN

Ah.

WILHELM

Will you lend your artistry to the pose?

SEBASTIAN

If you insist.

(gestures)

Recline, Scheherazade--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Che? [What?]

SEBASTIAN

(positioning YOUNG PANCRAZIO)

Scheherazade was offered as a concubine to the Sultan, who murdered every woman he deflowered. But she entertained him with stories that never end, so she stayed for a thousand and one nights.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I have story!

SEBASTIAN

Then you must tell it immediately to bring the sparkle of Scheherazade to your eyes.

WILHELM

Just don't move.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Father Giuseppe and Father Manuele--

WILHELM

Oh, don't tell that!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Is true story!

(WILHELM rolls his eyes)

Holy Fathers find out pious goatherd take body and blood every Sunday, but also making-love-how you say?--

(gestures)

WILHELM

Fornicating.

SEBASTIAN

Sodomizing.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Fanculo--with his little goats and never think to confess. Holy Fathers ask Baron what to do, and he say--

WILHELM

Nothing.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Say nothing! No turn his sacrament with goats into shame. It help him live and give him love. Is any pope more saint than this holy goatherd? So say the Protestant photographer!

WILHELM takes the photograph.

SEBASTIAN

A most excellent story! I must steal it!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

And my English better, yes?

SEBASTIAN

Much improved!

WILHELM

Regrettably.

SEBASTIAN

I take full responsibility.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(holds up book)

And book!

SEBASTIAN

My dear Wilhelm, did you actually say that to the priests?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I was embarrass!

WILHELM

I was quite unpopular at St. Pancras until I paid to repair the stained glass.

SEBASTIAN

I've had neither your nerve nor your good fortune in standing up to bullying prudes.

WILHELM

It's easier here than in London, I'm sure.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

London!

SEBASTIAN

You've never been arrested?

WILHELM

Not here.

SEBASTIAN

Ah.

(changing tone)

You capture stories in your photographs, but need words like Il Moro's to bring them so roughly but vividly to life. Is your art in fact a kind of cheat, a shortcut to a painted image without the mess?

WILHELM

There is plenty of mess.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO begins removing the Odalisque costume as he's isolated in light while WILHELM and SEBASTIAN disappear in darkness.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(narrating)

I realized a politely brutal competition was brewing between the Baron and the poet. I was lost in the literature but suspected I was also the prize.

Lights up on WILHELM preparing to shoot another photograph.

WILHELM

If you'd like to sleep with him, please feel free.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I would not like to!

WILHELM

I believe he's falling in love with you.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

He is not!

WILHELM

And you're flirting with him shamelessly.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I am not! You're offering me to him like a tasty little rabbit!

WILHELM

You're free to do as you wish. He's much more famous than I am.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

That doesn't matter to me.

WILHELM

Famous patrons beget more patrons.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

You said he was a famous poet, but he hasn't written anything since he got here.

WILHELM

Now he's actually more famous for his, uh, personal life.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

For fucking?

WILHELM

Yes.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Famous for fucking boys?

(WILHELM shrugs)

Then he must be very good at it.

WILHELM

Just don't kiss him.

Lighting change. SEBASTIAN joins them and starts posing YOUNG PANCAZIO.

WILHELM

In Naples did you visit the Gabinetto Segreto?

SEBASTIAN

I saw the rest of the Museo Archeologico, but was barred entry to the Gabinetto Segreto.

WILHELM

Barred?

SEBASTIAN

Apparently only gentleman scholars of a certain age and moral standing are admitted.

WILHELM

Surely you're sufficiently mature and eminent to qualify.

SEBASTIAN

My legal history was known even in Naples and carried a moral taint.

SEBASTIAN removes some of YOUNG
PANCRAZIO'S clothing.

WILHELM

You would have enjoyed the ancient erotic sculpture of
Pompeii.

SEBASTIAN becomes increasingly
tactile in his manipulation of
YOUNG PANCRAZIO, who is amused.

SEBASTIAN

The ancient Romans so much more enlightened than the modern
Victorians, alas. I don't suppose you have a large eagle
handy?

WILHELM

I'm afraid not.

SEBASTIAN

How else may we depict Ganymede with Zeus as his eagle avatar
carrying the boy aloft?

WILHELM

(posing YOUNG PANCRAZIO)

A heavenward gesture--

SEBASTIAN

Or perhaps with Zeus in his human aspect. I'd volunteer to
pose, but Zeus is never depicted clean-shaven.

WILHELM

(after a moment)

I never photograph myself.

SEBASTIAN

If you set it up, I can open the shutter as easily as you.

(offers Greek costume)

This might be a bit small, but that will only make you look
more godlike.

Silence for a moment.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Pose with me, Guglielmo!

SEBASTIAN

Your aristocratic lineage shows in your face. A Teutonic Zeus!

WILHELM

Very well.

WILHELM begins disrobing to change into the Greek costume.

SEBASTIAN

I don't mean to presume your pedigree, but you are a baron.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Of the Mecklenburg line!

WILHELM glares at YOUNG PANCAZIO.

SEBASTIAN

I was under the impression that barony went extinct in 1885 with the passing of Baron Falko von Gloeden.

No response from WILHELM, who is briefly naked, and clearly in much better shape than SEBASTIAN.

SEBASTIAN

Nobility is a gift of nature in any case.
(still no response)

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Who is Ganymede?

WILHELM gestures to SEBASTIAN to explain.

SEBASTIAN

The cupbearer of Zeus, kidnapped as a child by the king of gods in the form of a mighty eagle. When the sculptor Cellini was accused of sodomy, his retort was that emperors and kings made it their noble practice, as well as Zeus with Ganymede.

WILHELM

(posing with YOUNG PANCAZIO)

A somewhat strained rationalization.

SEBASTIAN

Have you read *A Problem in Modern Ethics*?

WILHELM

No.

SEBASTIAN

By John Addington Symonds.

WILHELM

The camera is ready.

(points)

Here you may trip the shutter.

(returns to pose with YOUNG
PANCAZIO)

SEBASTIAN

He links Walt Whitman to Theocritus and other Greek poets then points out the hypocrisy of British law in prohibiting male love in a system of boys schools founded on Greek and Latin literature.

WILHELM

Trip the shutter, if you please.

SEBASTIAN

Who's your favorite Uranian poet?

WILHELM

You, of course.

SEBASTIAN shoots the photograph.
WILHELM leaps up to reset the
camera.

SEBASTIAN

That's all there is to it?

WILHELM

You are perhaps familiar with Adolf von Wilbrandt's novel
Fridolins heimliche Ehe?

(SEBASTIAN shrugs)

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Es endet glücklich!

WILHELM
(smiles)

English!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
It has a happy ending!

WILHELM
Paul Heyse, who later won the Nobel Prize, also wrote a novel with Uranian themes.

SEBASTIAN
It seems the English and Germans have much to teach each other about Greece.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
And Sicily!

WILHELM suddenly rips off his beard, becoming CESARE. Lights out on SEBASTIAN and YOUNG PANCRAZIO.

CESARE
Enough! We don't need northern Europeans to tell us who we are!

CESARE sheds the Greek costume and dons his uniform. Projection: 1936.

CESARE
All you've demonstrated thus far, Signore Buciuni, is that English and German degenerates fled their colder climes, came south and abandoned their clothing along with their morals.

FRANCESCO
(appearing in light)
But isn't at least part of the point that they came here because of the Sicilian reputation for permissiveness?

CESARE
I am honored, Signore Maffiotti, to welcome you to the new Sicily, the new Taormina, where we actively combat the many-headed Hydra of vice. The past matters little as we gaze into a bright future by the side of Il Duce.

FRANCESCO

The past matters a great deal, Podesta--

CESARE

You have other cases to investigate, and we're wasting a great deal of time reviewing the events of four decades ago-- not to mention feculent cascades of pseudo-literary history-- when we could make short work of this isolated local matter.

FRANCESCO

The new Italy stands on the shoulders of ancient Rome.

CESARE

Signore Buciuni is trying to dignify pornography with both poetry and prose, using specious words to legitimize pictures!

FRANCESCO

He is merely a simple man sharing with us a complicated truth.

CESARE

It's not lost on me, Signore, that by interrogating Buciuni, you're also investigating me, questioning my commitment to Fascism in my role as Podesta.

FRANCESCO

Nothing could be further from my mind, Podesta. My commitment is to the truth.

CESARE

Muddled by grappa!

FRANCESCO

Revealed by grappa.

CESARE

Buciuni trusts you more than he ought.

FRANCESCO

Exactly. But you can trust me, Podesta.

CESARE

Signore, is it not true that in the 1920s the original Rocco code criminalized--

(consults note)

--Libidinous acts on a person of the same sex--?

FRANCESCO

The article was removed in a later draft--

CESARE

Because--as one commissioner commented--

(consults note)

"With certain things, the less one speaks of them, the better." But the Scuola Dipolizia Scientifica has registered more than a thousand Roman homosexual offenders since 1927 in order to protect the moral health of the stock.

PANCRAZIO

(revealed in light)

You know a lot about it, Podesta!

FRANCESCO

I was about to note the same.

CESARE

Further debate is unnecessary. I shall deal promptly and severely with this catalogue of pornography.

FRANCESCO

Signore Acrosso, I've made a long and difficult journey from Rome and despite my other obligations, I don't wish to give the investigation short shrift. Mussolini himself is interested in what happens in Sicily--that's why I was sent. Rather than rushing to judgment and arresting Signore Buciuni on a possession charge--

PANCRAZIO

I beg you, no--!

FRANCESCO

On one hand, there may be no arrest at all. On the other, we may uncover evidence of even greater criminality. I remain unsatisfied that we've heard the entire truth--

PANCRAZIO

It is so much worse, Signore!

CESARE

What could be worse than what you've told us already? Von Gloeden and Melmoth used you like a prostitute and documented it in glass, light and photochemicals.

PANCRAZIO

The real sin was mine, Podesta.

CESARE

For not destroying the prints and plates the moment the Baron died!

FRANCESCO

Podesta Acrosso, if you'd truly listened to his tale rather than citing statistics and codes, you would have registered more than a few inconsistencies. For instance, Von Gloeden mentioned in 1897 that Paul Heyse won the Nobel Prize, which did not occur until 1910. I have other questions that may be answered simply by letting Signore Buciuni continue. After this, I'm following up on a much more substantial investigation from last year--

CESARE

In Nicolosi--

FRANCESCO

Yes...how did you know?

CESARE

I can arrange for a driver--

FRANCESCO

In Nicolosi patience led me to the culprit, and a year later, I'm finally arresting him. Patience is warranted in this case, too. More grappa, Signore Buciuni?

PANCRAZIO

(accepting glass)

Yes, thank you.

CESARE

Very well, Signore. But after you leave Taormina, I'm the one who must live with the consequences.

PANCRAZIO

Me, too, Cesarino--Podesta!

FRANCESCO

I'm intrigued by the intersection of your tale with the actual physical evidence of the photographs in your archive. Are there any other particular photographs you feel may be pertinent to our investigation?

PANCRAZIO

Only a handful, Signore, but very important, I think. The Baron, as I mentioned, rarely photographed himself, but our visitor's strange influence persuaded him to do much he'd never done before.

(hands a costume to CESARE)

Religious photographs, for instance.

CESARE

Blasphemous, I'm quite sure!

Lights fade on PANCRAZIO and CESARE
as FRANCESCO begins turning himself
into SEBASTIAN.

FRANCESCO

Podesta, I'm perceiving a tendency to jump to conclusions. Signore Buciuni's freedom and perhaps even his life are at stake--

PANCRAZIO

My life?!

FRANCESCO

--So we must proceed carefully, weighing all evidence and testimony. The regime's partnership with the church is crucial to our future, so we of course wouldn't do anything to jeopardize our friendship with the Pope, including missteps related to Christian imagery. In Germany, Chancellor Hitler has alienated the Pope in his persecution of Catholicism, which plays well in a predominantly Lutheran country, but would be disastrous in Rome.

FRANCESCO has become SEBASTIAN.
Lights up on CESARE who has become
WILHELM dressed as Jesus. Lights
begin to come up YOUNG PANCRAZIO as
well. SEBASTIAN has a glass of
wine. Projection: 1897.

WILHELM

I was raised Lutheran myself but so much Catholic touches my heart. Living in Sicily, of course I consider converting, especially when I see the priest praying at the altar surrounded by children--many of them his own--but I believe I am truly pagan at heart.

SEBASTIAN

Only a pagan would make such a handsome Christ.

WILHELM

A reluctant one, certainly.

SEBASTIAN

Your photographs already break boundaries--what's one more?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(glaring)

I no approve. Is--how you say?--blasphemy!

SEBASTIAN

Today's blasphemy is tomorrow's orthodoxy. And as we are neither Mohammedans nor iconoclasts, an image of the Son of God celebrates rather than violates the faith. But I believe Christianity--and especially the Church of England--underestimates the charisma of the Word Made Flesh.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You call down curse of God!

They prepare for the photograph,
WILHELM going back and forth
between his pose and the camera,
YOUNG PANCRAZIO assisting,
grudgingly.

SEBASTIAN

On the contrary, I, too, have been thinking about becoming Catholic.

WILHELM

I assumed as an Irishman you already were.

SEBASTIAN

Not that kind of Irishman.

(drains wineglass)

But as islands, Ireland and Sicily share a Catholic and mystical past very different from Germany, isn't that so, Pancrazio?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Sicilia make together the priest and the witch.

WILHELM

Often in the same person.

WILHELM adjusts the lighting,
either by moving a curtain or a
lighting instrument.

WILHELM

Lighting is everything.

SEBASTIAN

(refills wineglass)

In photography as on the stage, I quite agree. You must manipulate reality in order to document it scientifically.

WILHELM

A photograph is as much art as a play or a poem or a painting. Myself as Gesu Cristo is certainly more art than science!

SEBASTIAN

But you've had to learn a lot of chemistry and even physics to create your art.

WILHELM

When I first photographed, I used collodion wet plate negatives, very messy. Now with silver gelatin dry plates, they are not so heavy, emulsion is more even. And I'm starting to prefer sepiatone.

SEBASTIAN

Why is that?

WILHELM

It's warmer. Rose brown like cuttlefish ink.

SEBASTIAN

Yes, flesh has more vigor in sepia. Warmer. Especially these dark Sicilian boys.

WILHELM

Most importantly the image is preserved longer because silver sulfide is more stable than metallic silver. Trip the shutter, please.

SEBASTIAN

As commanded, my sepia Lord and Savior!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO makes a disapproving sound while SEBASTIAN takes the photograph.

SEBASTIAN

Captured!

WILHELM changes out of the biblical costume and YOUNG PANCRAZIO busies himself with the camera.

WILHELM

It occurs to me, Signore Melmoth, that you have suffered as Christ himself.

SEBASTIAN

I've certainly been crucified--quite publicly!

WILHELM

Now you must resurrect.

(indicates costume)

Would you like to--

SEBASTIAN

Oh, no, apotheosis in gelatin emulsion? I couldn't!

(oh, yes, he could)

Nowadays no one wants a photograph of an old blasphemer!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

No one! Will bring curse!

WILHELM

You're a martyr, of a kind.

SEBASTIAN

I live up to my name. A saint to some, I suppose.

(drinks)

Some very few.

WILHELM

Are you familiar with Guido Reni's St. Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

The most exquisite painting in the world!

WILHELM

A pose that is--what do you say in English--evocative?

SEBASTIAN

That's one word for it.

WILHELM

There's a marvelous stained glass Sebastian in the transept of St. Pancras.

SEBASTIAN

I would very much enjoy seeing it. But first, another English lesson. Pancrazio, what is your English word of the day?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Vampire!

SEBASTIAN

Vampire! Where in the world did you learn that?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(gives book to SEBASTIAN)

In English book.

SEBASTIAN

Good Lord!

(scanning the book)

Where did you get this?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Left by English--

WILHELM

We don't know who--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Yes, Signore Bertie--

WILHELM

Silenzio!

SEBASTIAN

He broke his word! He wrote this--!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(proudly)

Bram Stoker!

SEBASTIAN

That preposterous bastard! He wrote it down!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Is very frighten! Some night no sleep!

WILHELM

You know the author?

SEBASTIAN

I thought I did. But I am once again betrayed. Is this the story of a vampire come to Ireland?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

England...yes...

SEBASTIAN

Utterly beyond belief!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Vampires be true?

WILHELM

Of course not! Shall we go to St. Pancras?

SEBASTIAN

We promised never to speak of it.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(signs "silence")

Umirta.

SEBASTIAN

What?

WILHELM

A Sicilian code of silence.

(signs "silence")

The light through the St. Sebastian window will be perfect--

SEBASTIAN

Now this imbecile blissfully free of literary talent--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Tell me vampires are no true!

SEBASTIAN

--Is published!

WILHELM

But we should go now--

SEBASTIAN

Published when I can't get--

SEBASTIAN

--Even the yellowest of American tabloids to serialize my exquisite poem!

(tears the book in half)

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

My Dracula!

Lighting change on WILHELM and
SEBASTIAN, vivid colors. YOUNG
PANCRAZIO narrates.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Guglielmo and I feared our esteemed guest was losing his mind. Vampires, saints and Gesu Cristo all at once! I'd never met anyone like him--cascades of words and emotions--he both horrified and fascinated me. After much cajoling and more *nero d'avila*, we persuaded him to walk with us to see St. Sebastian. Which is where I also began to behave as I never had before--in the church of my own saint! Signore Melmoth had a great deal of wine, but wanted just a little bit more.

Music.

SEBASTIAN

St. Pancras was beheaded for his beliefs at the age of 14. Even at your young age you've outlived your namesake, Pancrazio. Where is the Sebastian window?

WILHELM

(points)

We'll have to wait until Mass has concluded.

SEBASTIAN

In the meantime, I'm parched. I could use some wine--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(stopping SEBASTIAN,
whispers)

Oh, no, Signore! You are not Catholic!

SEBASTIAN

Catholic means universal, for everyone.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Fucking English.

SEBASTIAN

That is not the Catholic
table or the Pope's table--

WILHELM

It's a fine morning--let us
go to Mount Etna--

SEBASTIAN

--It's God's table!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You are not confessed!

SEBASTIAN

I've confessed before the whole world!

WILHELM

Please, Sebastian--you do not live here--!

SEBASTIAN

I am here now!

SEBASTIAN marches toward the altar
as WILHELM stares in horror and
YOUNG PANCRAZIO narrates.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Father Giuseppe of course refused him communion, but Signore Sebastian pushed into the chancel and grabbed the sacraments. He was like a madman! Father Manuele swung the censer at his head--smoke and ashes everywhere!

SEBASTIAN

(nursing head wound, blood on
his hands)

Stigmata! Summon the vampire!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(whispers)

Signore, we must go!

SEBASTIAN

Does everybody know my shame?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You bring more shame!

WILHELM

You're very famous and
Taormina is very small.

SEBASTIAN

Where's that bloody San Sebastiano?

WILHELM

(points)

In the side chapel, so after Mass--

SEBASTIAN

I am famous! I can go where I want!

WILHELM

Signore!

SEBASTIAN runs off, WILHELM after
him.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Signore Sebastian rushed to the chapel and confronted the
stained glass martyr.

SEBASTIAN

Not a mark on him!

WILHELM

Arrow wounds--

SEBASTIAN

But not a drop of blood! This isn't martyrdom!

SEBASTIAN
This isn't suffering!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
Signore, I beg of you!

WILHELM
Sebastian, *bitte!*

They try to hold him back, but he
pulls free.

SEBASTIAN
Nothing sacred happens without blood!

SEBASTIAN lunges at the stained
glass window, smearing it with his
own blood. WILHELM and YOUNG
PANCRAZIO pull him back.

WILHELM
Come away!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
You make sacrilege!

SEBASTIAN
He must have blood!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
I curse you! You shame us before all Taormina. I curse!

SEBASTIAN
What curse could be worse than what I've endured? I'm
infamous!

WILHELM
(as they pull SEBASTIAN away)
Ja, you have the curse of famous name. But with your famous
name comes responsibility! You can use your famous name!

SEBASTIAN
Use it for what? My name has destroyed me!

SEBASTIAN suddenly becomes
FRANCESCO. Lights out on WILHELM
and YOUNG PANCRAZIO. Projection:
1936.

FRANCESCO

(cleaning his hands)

I know who he is. I suspected, and now I know. It's so obvious!

PANCRAZIO

(appearing)

Sebastian Melmoth is a famous English poet.

FRANCESCO

He is not.

PANCRAZIO

Not a poet?

FRANCESCO

Not Sebastian Melmoth.

CESARE

(appearing)

Then who is he?

FRANCESCO

Melmoth the Wanderer is a fictional character, but I thought for a while he might be a real person with a similar name.

CESARE

Who is Melmoth the Wanderer?

FRANCESCO

The eponymous character from a gothic novel a hundred years old.

PANCRAZIO

What is eponymous?

FRANCESCO

Sebastian Melmoth is a pseudonym. Did you say the Baron kept a guest book?

PANCRAZIO

It's right here!

(produces an old book)

CESARE

Actual evidence!

FRANCESCO

(flipping through the book)

Not of crime, but of character. We'll see what kind of people associated with the Baron--1894, 1895, 1896 November, Axel Munthe--

CESARE

The Swedish quack of Capri!

FRANCESCO

1897 February, May, June--Somerset Maugham--December, 1897. Ah! As I suspected, he couldn't stand being completely anonymous.

CESARE

Oscar Wilde!

PANCRAZIO

Who is Oscar Wilde?

FRANCESCO

You, my friend, were visited by the most famous homosexual in history.

CESARE

Oscar Wilde was sent to prison in England for sodomizing many young men!

PANCRAZIO

How many?

CESARE

He was a famous poet before he was a famous homosexual.

FRANCESCO

So you know about him, Podesta?

CESARE

Everyone in the world--except Signore Buciuni--knows of his crimes.

PANCRAZIO

The crime was mine!

FRANCESCO

Signore Buciuni, do you understand we are giving you the opportunity to exonerate yourself?

CESARE

He's confessed. We're done.

FRANCESCO

Confessed to what?

PANCRAZIO

Taking photographs is not a crime.

CESARE

It is in this case.

PANCRAZIO

Sexual relations is not a crime.

CESARE

It is with minors.

PANCRAZIO

But what I did was both a sin and a crime.

CESARE

What did you do?!

PANCRAZIO

That's what I'm trying to tell you!

FRANCESCO

Podesta, patience. We want the whole truth. Signore Buciuni, what were the circumstances of your error?

PANCRAZIO

More grappa, please?

FRANCESCO

(pouring)

Of course.

PANCRAZIO

(drinks)

Signore Melmoth--

CESARE

Oscar Wilde!

PANCRAZIO

--Drank a lot and was often very sad.

PANCRAZIO is isolated in light as
FRANCESCO and CESARE gradually
disappear in darkness.

PANCRAZIO

He spoke frequently of suicide, rejecting the idea, but
always returning to it. He seemed to envy St. Sebastian.
And his sudden obsession with vampires! I began to feel
sorry for him and wondered if there was a way I could help.
Then he told the story of Johan Winckelmann who--Signore
Melmoth said--invented art history, which confused me very
much--how can anyone invent history?

Lights out on PANCRAZIO and up on
SEBASTIAN. Projection: 1897.

SEBASTIAN

(sipping a glass of wine)

Until Winckelmann, no one thought to study the history of art
apart from individual artists or patrons. He taught us the
difference between Greek art, Roman art and Greco-Roman art.

WILHELM

(appearing, preparing camera)

Ja, and he was German.

SEBASTIAN changes into slightly
antique "German" clothes.

SEBASTIAN

He posited--the Germans are always positing--that Italian men
were created for the purpose of sculpture, superb and
vigorously designed forms, fine development, most often seen--
he noted--in the half-naked sailors, fishermen and boys who
make their living by the sea.

Lights up on YOUNG PANCRAZIO in
street clothes, not a Greek
costume.

SEBASTIAN

Boys like Il Moro. Burnished by the sun to a radiant bronze.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I am not burnish!

WILHELM

And it was one of those burnished boys who murdered him.

SEBASTIAN

Come here, Pancrazio. You've posed as a drowned lover and an odalisque. How would you like to be an unemployed cook and a murderer?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I would not like.

SEBASTIAN

You've already cursed me.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Is very bad curse.

SEBASTIAN

Now you can bring your vengeance down upon me.

WILHELM

Pancrazio, *per favore*.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO shrugs and submits
to SEBASTIAN posing him.

SEBASTIAN

On his way to Rome, Johan Winckelmann stopped in Trieste in the spring of 1768 and took a room at a local inn under an assumed name. There he met Francesco Arcangeli, who was 31 years old and fascinated by the worldly and sophisticated German. They dined alone together every evening for a week. Who knows what else went on between them?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I think you know.

SEBASTIAN

(proffering a rope and a
knife)

Would you prefer stiletto or garrote?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

To kill you?

SEBASTIAN

Arcangeli used both when he attacked Winckelmann.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Which work better?

SEBASTIAN

Both methods are Italian.

WILHELM

Where did you get those?

SEBASTIAN

The local Cosa Nostra is very accommodating of tourists.

WILHELM

The garrote.

SEBASTIAN

I believe that's the most artistic choice.

(positions himself and YOUNG
PANCRAZIO)

The knife symbolizes penetration, but strangulation has a strong auto-erotic connotation, and I'm rather certain Winckelmann brought on his own demise, perhaps deliberately provoking Arcangeli.

WILHELM

More tension, *bitte*.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO pulls the garrote tight.

SEBASTIAN

(gasping)

Oh, very good!

WILHELM

Tighter.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO pulls so tight
SEBASTIAN can't speak and struggles
a bit.

WILHELM

Hold still!

SEBASTIAN might be panicking. Or
having an orgasm.

WILHELM

Just a moment longer.

(another moment)

Wunderbar!

SEBASTIAN tries to relax, but YOUNG
PANCRAZIO maintains tension.

WILHELM

Pancrazio! *Lasciarsi andare!* [Let go!]

YOUNG PANCRAZIO relaxes the
tension, and SEBASTIAN makes a
sound of relief as his body
collapses.

WILHELM

Sebastian, can you breathe?

SEBASTIAN gasps and signs but can't
yet talk.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

First time no talk since he come!

SEBASTIAN

(barely able to speak)

Why--?

WILHELM

Fetch him some water.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO throws water on
SEBASTIAN.

WILHELM

Basta! [Enough!]

SEBASTIAN

Why--?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Why what?

SEBASTIAN

Why...did you let go?

Lights out on SEBASTIAN and
WILHELM.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Had he come to Sicily to be murdered? He spent several days in his hotel, writing--he said--a new play about vampires. Guglielmo worried about Sebastian and recommended I be even more...hospitable.

WILHELM

(appearing in light with a
walking stick)

Perhaps an excursion in the open air.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Will you go, too?

WILHELM

I don't have to. Then you'll have all the time you want to hear his tales of Naples, Paris, London.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You never talk of Germany.

WILHELM

It's cold and nasty. They eat rotten cabbage with every meal.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Take me.

WILHELM

Why, when everything we want is here?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Not everything I want.

WILHELM

(after a moment, shrugs)

He loves you very much.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

As much as you love me?

WILHELM

It's obvious.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You never ask me to kill you!

WILHELM

To him, that's love. You saw he was aroused.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

He was not.

WILHELM

You were, too.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

What is love to you?

(silence)

What? You never say! At least he says!

Lights up on SEBASTIAN with a
walking stick, a bit out of breath.
YOUNG PANCRAZIO picks up a pack.

WILHELM

We're almost to the summit.

SEBASTIAN

You Germans and your hiking! I'll be too exhausted to write!

WILHELM

(gestures)

Mount Etna! The most active volcano in all of Europe.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(pointing)

Hot lava! My uncle chase a goat too close and fall in!

SEBASTIAN

With roiling clouds of pitch, and lightning flash,
And tongues of fire that lick the farthest stars.
From the bowels of the mountain ripped,
Great boulders hurl, and melted stones heap up,
A furious flood of flame.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Virgil.

SEBASTIAN

(impressed)

You know the classic text?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

It's about our mountain! Everyone in Taormina can recite!

WILHELM

With tours and trinkets, Etna's been a cottage industry for two thousand years.

SEBASTIAN

The hike was quite cool, with sea breezes, but that maw is hot.

(reaches toward the volcano)

I can feel it--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(pulling him back)

No so close! Become *arrostuta* like Zio Paolo—and his goat just laugh!

(makes a goat laugh)

SEBASTIAN

It's truly a hellscape! Have you ever photographed it?

WILHELM

Never before, but the conditions are excellent today, as I hoped!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Only little wind.

WILHELM

And the smoke blows away. I will get the camera.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I will get!

WILHELM

No, Pancrazio. Look after Signore Melmoth and see that the goat doesn't laugh at him. The cart is not far.

WILHELM disappears. After a moment, SEBASTIAN takes a step toward the crater. YOUNG PANCRAZIO does a goat laugh and SEBASTIAN steps back.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You write vampire play?

SEBASTIAN

Yes, since it actually happened, it's flowing freshets of gore. Almost as exhilarating as the edge of Etna.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Dracula is true? You kill vampire?

SEBASTIAN

You want me to give away the ending?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You alive. *Dracula* die. I know ending.

SEBASTIAN

All true art is autobiography. Especially at my age.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You are no so old.

SEBASTIAN

I'm forty-three. That must seem ancient to you.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Guglielmo is *quarantuno*.

SEBASTIAN

English.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Forty-one.

SEBASTIAN

Did he leave us alone here on purpose?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO just stares at SEBASTIAN. Sound of wind. The volcano rumbles.

SEBASTIAN

So many Englishmen and Germans come to Italy, Sicily, Taormina.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Sometime French, Swiss.

SEBASTIAN

They come for the Baron's photographs.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Si, molto famoso.

SEBASTIAN

English.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I practice English. You practice Sicilian.

SEBASTIAN

They don't just come for the photographs.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(shrugs)

We make big party. Boys from Taormina, Castelmola, Petralia. Sometime go all night to *le rosee dita dell'alba*. [The rosy fingers of dawn].

SEBASTIAN

The rosy fingers of dawn. Now you're quoting Homer.

(YOUNG PANCRAZIO smiles)

The Baron's given you a classical education.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO takes a few steps toward SEBASTIAN.

SEBASTIAN

No, no. You don't have to--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You no want?

SEBASTIAN stares at YOUNG PANCRAZIO for a moment then bursts into tears.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

No cry! Be happy! Guglielmo wishes you be happy!

SEBASTIAN

But what do you wish?

They stare at each other a moment,
then SEBASTIAN lurches toward the
cliff edge.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

San Sebastiano!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO grabs SEBASTIAN and
they struggle. Their eyes meet and
they freeze. A louder rumble from
the volcano. Sound of wind for a
long moment.

CESARE

(from the darkness)

And then what?!

Lights out on YOUNG PANCRAZIO and
SEBASTIAN and up on CESARE.

CESARE

Did the pederast put his loathsome mouth on yours? Did he
fondle your genitalia? Did you fling him into the crater of
Etna? Or did he finally register the decency of shame and
throw himself into the volcano?

FRANCESCO

(from the darkness)

Oscar Wilde died in Paris three years later.

CESARE

So he wasn't cremated in lava, but what happened?

PANCRAZIO

(from the darkness)

How kind of you, Podesta, to take such interest.

FRANCESCO

(appearing in light)

Such a passionate interest.

CESARE

I'm seeking the resolution of this case. Which I presume is also of interest to you, Signore.

FRANCESCO

There is clearly more to the story. Isn't that so, Signore Buciuni?

PANCRAZIO

(appearing in light)

Thank you for understanding, Signore.

FRANCESCO

Criminal investigation requires patience.

CESARE

I've run out.

FRANCESCO

We still don't know what crime Signore Buciuni has committed.

CESARE

The crime of drunken tales for half the morning. We have the photographs and negatives themselves as evidence. What we lack is formal interrogation.

FRANCESCO

That would require an arrest.

CESARE

My thought exactly, Signore Maffiotti.

PANCRAZIO

No, Cesarino!

CESARE

And the confiscation of evidence so it can be properly catalogued.

PANCRAZIO

Please, Podesta, the negatives are terribly fragile.

CESARE

All evidence will be handled professionally. Although I have no doubt some negatives will shatter in transit due to age.

PANCRAZIO

I may very well shatter due to age!

CESARE

Pancrazio Buciuni, you are under arrest for possession of pornographic photographs.

PANCRAZIO

They are not pornographic!

CESARE

You're not educated in art and only say that out of sentimental attachment. My inclination is to order the destruction of all photographs and negatives not in keeping with the goals of Fascism. But to be absolutely sure, at the police station we will carefully examine each image for prurient content.

FRANCESCO

I rather suspect you'll enjoy that, Podesta.

END OF ACT ONE

Lights up on CESARE, FRANCESCO and PANCRAZIO amidst an array of photographic negatives laid out. They are in the Taormina police station.

CESARE

This is only a small fraction of the confiscated negatives, but as you can see it's huge. We've arranged them in order of salaciousness.

FRANCESCO

How in the world have you made that determination?

CESARE

Purely preliminary. The final judgment will be Signore Buciuni's.

PANCRAZIO

Mine, Podesta?

CESARE

(points)

These photographs are less offensive--landscapes, ruins, women.

(points)

These grow more disgusting--men, boys, nudity, suggestiveness, swollen members--the further you go that direction.

FRANCESCO

And you're proposing Signore Buciuni judge which ones merit salvation--

CESARE

Yes--

FRANCESCO

--Or destruction?

PANCRAZIO

No!

CESARE

Precisely.

PANCRAZIO

I cannot choose. I love them all.

CESARE

You needn't pass judgment on every single negative. Simply determine where the line should be drawn: everything to the acceptable side will be returned to you. Everything on this side of the line will be destroyed.

PANCRAZIO looks anguished, but slowly walks past all the photographs to the "unacceptable" side.

PANCRAZIO

I draw the line here.

CESARE

"All" is not a decision. Try again.

FRANCESCO

Podesta, this is cruel. You're asking him murder his children.

CESARE

I'm giving him the opportunity to save some of them. If he does, we won't even need to go to trial. Signore Buciuni goes free and takes his photographs home. Some of them. That's kindness, isn't it?

PANCRAZIO

Put me on trial. If I am guilty, then I will choose.

CESARE

That's not what we're offering. The guilty get no freedom of choice. I'm giving you instead the choice of freedom.

PANCRAZIO

And if I'm innocent, the answer is "all."

CESARE

Of course. But acquittal is unlikely.

FRANCESCO

Another impossible choice!

CESARE

Il Duce demands tough choices. To strengthen us.

PANCRAZIO

I choose the trial.

CESARE

Pancrazio, that's a mistake!

FRANCESCO

But it does mean we'll hear what happened on the lip of the volcano. And I still don't understand what you did that was so terrible. Was it the curse?

PANCRAZIO

I'll tell at the trial.

CESARE

No, you'll tell during the official interrogation. As much as I didn't want to take that step.

Lights fade on PANCRAZIO and
FRANCESCO.

CESARE

You've forced us to do this, Signore Buciuni. An interrogation isn't the casual telling of tales--Signore Maffiotti and I have very specific questions we'll want to ask, and we won't accept a rambling reminiscence as answers. Your freedom, your photographs and possibly--as Signore Maffiotti has noted--your life are at risk. This is Il Duce's modern Italy, not the nineteenth-century Sicily of the Cosa Nostra!

Lights out on CESARE and up on
YOUNG PANCRAZIO and SEBASTIAN
clinging to each other as they were
at the end of Act One. Projection:
1897. After a moment, SEBASTIAN
leans in to kiss YOUNG PANCRAZIO
who pulls away.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I don't kiss.

SEBASTIAN

What do you know of love if you don't kiss?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I only kiss for love. I fuck for money.

SEBASTIAN

(laughs)

I have no money!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Guglielmo pay for you.

SEBASTIAN

He did?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

He will.

SEBASTIAN

This man who barterers your love--do you kiss him?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO shrugs.

SEBASTIAN

He peddles your youth.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(defensive)

And give me food, bed, art: Life.

SEBASTIAN

A kind of vampire, sucking the life from you.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I suck him, too.

SEBASTIAN

I'm very nearly finished with my vampire play.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Same as *Dracula*.

SEBASTIAN

But true.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

If true, you are vampire for writing it.

SEBASTIAN

And the audience vampires for watching it, living off the art, taking their emotions and ideas from me. Like Wilhelm vampirizing you.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You and Guglielmo read play to me.

SEBASTIAN

Out loud? What a charming idea.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Then maybe I love you, too.

SEBASTIAN

You love the Baron for his art, for the photography?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

We love each other *in* it. I am in camera, in his mind, in--
(gestures to heart)

SEBASTIAN

Il cuore.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Si. In heart.

SEBASTIAN

Images are superficial. Words reveal the heart.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I live forever in photograph. When I am old, photograph always be young.

SEBASTIAN

Your soul has beauty. And beauty is a form of genius--is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. I can paint you in words that live forever.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Like vampire.

SEBASTIAN

Are you certain Wilhelm has no other loves?
 (YOUNG PANCRAZIO shrugs,
 unsure)
 And he receives your sweetest kiss?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Many kiss!

SEBASTIAN

He must be very good at it.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Molto bene!

SEBASTIAN

Have you ever had an Irish kiss?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Is better than English kiss?

SEBASTIAN

Better than a German kiss, certainly.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

What is best kiss? Sicilian?

SEBASTIAN

The Greeks at Megara held an annual kissing contest to celebrate the memory of Diocles, who died defending his lover in battle. Young men competed for a garland of flowers.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Flowers grow wild by road!

SEBASTIAN

And of course, the honor of being known for the sweetest kiss.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Who judge?

SEBASTIAN

Older men with experience in kissing.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(after a moment)

I pick my own flower.

Lights out on SEBASTIAN and up on
WILHELM.

WILHELM

Read the play aloud? I don't think so.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

It sounds exciting: vampires!

WILHELM

I don't believe it's even finished.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

What if it's wonderful? The best he's ever written! He
speaks such words of love that live forever--!

WILHELM

They're only words!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You speak German, Italian, English, French--but can't speak
of love.

WILHELM

(indicates a photo)

It's here. I can't--! Right before your eyes!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Eyes can only see the outside! Words open the heart!

WILHELM

You can see my heart in every photograph. He hides his heart
behind words.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You sound jealous.

WILHELM

You're free to do as you wish.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

In Paris? London?

WILHELM

He can't go back to London.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You're saying he's a liar?

WILHELM

He...tells stories.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

So do you.

WILHELM

I show. He tells.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Will you refuse to read it if he asks?

WILHELM

So far I've refused him nothing, even offered him you.
Perhaps I'm falling in love, too.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(laughs)

You can't love him!

WILHELM

Because he's too old?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

He's not--

WILHELM

Beautiful? No, but his words are.

Lights up on SEBASTIAN reading from
his manuscript.

SEBASTIAN

Does it give you pleasure, to destroy such beauty? To
desecrate purity?

SEBASTIAN looks at WILHELM expectantly. After glaring at YOUNG PANCRAZIO for a moment longer, WILHELM smiles, sits next to SEBASTIAN and reads.

WILHELM

Yes. It is the most profound pleasure imaginable.

SEBASTIAN

To corrupt the innocent--when there is no reason--

WILHELM

Innocence is reason enough.

(taking SEBASTIAN'S hand)

Now you understand me...Mr. Wilde? The innocent as well as the guilty are mine, but the innocent give me much more satisfaction.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO watches with growing excitement.

SEBASTIAN

(fighting hypnosis as WILHELM draws him closer)

Who gives you this right--?

WILHELM

(caressing SEBASTIAN)

You are very handsome, Mr. Wilde.

SEBASTIAN

No, I'm not at all.

WILHELM

Your soul has beauty. And beauty is a form of genius--is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. But there will come a day when your face will be wrinkled and wizen, your eyes dim and colorless, the grace of your figure broken and deformed.

SEBASTIAN

All men age.

WILHELM

You will degenerate into a hideous puppet, haunted by the memory of passions you feared, and the exquisite temptation you had not the courage to yield to. I offer youth, youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!

As WILHELM gets close to kissing
SEBASTIAN, YOUNG PANCAZIO is
getting agitated.

WILHELM

Not one blossom of your loveliness will fade. Not one pulse of your life will ever weaken. We are brothers in blood-- forever bound to one another.

Lights fade on SEBASTIAN and
WILHELM.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

(bursting out)

Basta! [enough!] You steal my life! This words you say to me! Put me in vampire story!

SEBASTIAN

Of course, Pancrazio. I wrote it for you.

Lights out on SEBASTIAN and
WILHELM.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

It is dangerous gift! A curse of words!

Lights up on FRANCESCO.
Projection: 1936.

FRANCESCO

Signore Buciuni, I understand this isn't your first arrest.

YOUNG PANCAZIO puts on the hat,
mustache and glasses to become
PANCAZIO.

PANCAZIO

I was arrested during the war.

FRANCESCO

For espionage?

PANCRAZIO

(laughs)

Just a silly misunderstanding. The Baron had to leave in 1915 when the war started--

FRANCESCO

Because as a German he was an enemy of the state?

PANCRAZIO

Yes, but by then he was more Sicilian than German. We wrote to each other about the animals and the models, and the censors thought it was code for military secrets.

CESARE

(appearing)

You spent three months in prison.

PANCRAZIO

I was almost executed before I convinced them of my innocence.

CESARE

I'm still not convinced of your innocence. You have a history of subversion.

PANCRAZIO

I served in an artillery unit at Capotaormina!

FRANCESCO

And you were married by then?

PANCRAZIO

To the Podesta's cousin.

FRANCESCO looks to CESARE, who shrugs.

PANCRAZIO

With five children.

FRANCESCO

And when the Baron returned?

PANCRAZIO

Just as before.

FRANCESCO

But what of your wife and children?

PANCRAZIO

There's no absolute right or wrong in love. Everything depends on circumstances.

Lights begin to fade on CESARE and FRANCESCO as PANCRAZIO slowly removes hat, glasses and mustache to become YOUNG PANCRAZIO.

PANCRAZIO

To love a bad man in a bad way is wrong, but to love a good man in the right way is right. A bad man is vulgar, in love with the body only, not the soul.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

He's inconstant because the beauty he loves is not constant.

In the darkness, WILHELM begins speaking along with YOUNG PANCRAZIO. Projection: 1897.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO AND WILHELM

As soon as the flower of physical beauty fades, he disappears like a dream, and everything he promised comes to nothing.

Lights up on WILHELM readying a camera. Outdoor sounds: birds, insects, cowbells.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO AND WILHELM

But the noble lover stays for life--

WILHELM

Because what he loves is constant.

SEBASTIAN

(appearing)

As true today as when Plato wrote it.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You be constant, San Sebastiano?

They are focusing the camera on an
outdoor scene in the distance.

SEBASTIAN

Not as constant as those cows.

WILHELM

A perfect subject for your first photograph, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

(peering into camera)

Cows are very fond of being photographed, and unlike
architecture, they don't move.

WILHELM

Open the shutter.

SEBASTIAN

(takes the picture)

Click!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Very peaceful cows.

SEBASTIAN

It's generous of you to give me your old camera. My whole
life I've captured moments with words, and now I can with
light. Where shall we go to luncheon?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Oh, no, light is perfect!

SEBASTIAN

For what?

WILHELM

Normally this time of day would be harsh, but there is now a
strange gentleness in the sun.

SEBASTIAN

Gentle illumination of more cows?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

San Sebastiano.

SEBASTIAN looks startled, then
glances at WILHELM, who shrugs.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, no. I couldn't possibly.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(revealing a costume piece)

We make *Gesu Cristo*, now *San Sebastiano martire*.

SEBASTIAN

You are not sticking me full of arrows!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(producing arrows)

Not real arrows!

WILHELM

I have devised a way to give the illusion of penetration--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(producing jar)

With blood!

SEBASTIAN

Brown? What kind of blood is that?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Is ink!

(shows cuttlefish)

From cuttlefish! Will look like blood in sepia!

SEBASTIAN

Whose idea was this?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

My idea!

WILHELM

Il Moro's.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

If you do, I take away curse.

SEBASTIAN

What is the curse, exactly? *Il malocchio*? [the evil eye]

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Very bad curse.

WILHELM

(shrugs)

Sicilians.

SEBASTIAN

Have you cursed this curse before?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Just you.

SEBASTIAN

(after a moment)

My modeling fee is outrageous.

WILHELM

Name it.

SEBASTIAN

It's actually a competition. If I win, Wilhelm models. If I lose, I'll play the martyr.

WILHELM

What is the contest?

SEBASTIAN

Kissing.

WILHELM looks to YOUNG PANCRAZIO,
who looks skeptical.

SEBASTIAN

With Pancrazio as the judge.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I cannot choose.

WILHELM

He is biased.

SEBASTIAN

He'll adhere to the rules of the Festival of Diocles in ancient Megara.

WILHELM

The sweetest kiss wins.

SEBASTIAN

I assumed you were familiar with the tradition.

WILHELM

Pancrazio warned me.

SEBASTIAN

If you desire Guido Reni's painting come to life--

WILHELM

I do, but love is not a contest.

SEBASTIAN

Every time two men meet, it's a contest.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I do it! I am judge!

SEBASTIAN

Wilhelm?

(WILHELM shrugs, unhappy)

Magnifico!

(arranging them)

To be entirely true to tradition, we'd have the music of aulos and cithara, but must make do with songbirds and insects--

WILHELM

We happen to have a cylinder--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Si, Seikulos song!

(disappears)

SEBASTIAN

You happen to have a recording of ancient Greek music?

WILHELM

(shrug)

Sicily.

(calling)

Pancrazio, make it very loud so we can hear outside!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO
(calling, off)

Si, Guglielmo!

Scratchy phonograph lyre music.

SEBASTIAN

Inspiring.

WILHELM pulls off his beard,
becoming CESARE. Lights out on
SEBASTIAN.

CESARE

A kissing contest?!

PANCRAZIO
(appearing)

It's what happened.

CESARE

You always make everything sexual!

PANCRAZIO

Everything *is* sexual.

CESARE

This testimony isn't helping your case. Repulsive
titillation--innocent youth served up like *coniglio in
agrodolce* to ravenous old men--

PANCRAZIO

You were a very willing little rabbit, Cesarino.

CESARE

At the time!

PANCRAZIO

The Baron and I showed you who you were. Is this pornography
investigation your revenge?

CESARE

The investigation was instigated from the mainland--

PANCRAZIO

Are you using me to hide who you are?

CESARE

I'm permanently damaged!

PANCRAZIO

You're a Fascist.

CESARE

You're damaged, too.

PANCRAZIO

I have a wife and five children. But I apologize for leading you astray as a youth.

CESARE

I trusted you, Pancrazio.

PANCRAZIO

And now that you've put me in this position, you must trust me still.

(puts the beard back on
CESARE)

Unless you'd like photographs of naked Cesarino to appear in court.

CESARE

You wouldn't do that!

PANCRAZIO

(removing his mustache)

Let me have my kissing contest. Let me serve myself as a tasty rabbit to these--

(gestures to audience)

--Ravenous old men.

As PANCRAZIO removes his hat and
becomes YOUNG PANCRAZIO, CESARE
becomes WILHELM.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

If you love me, Guglielmo.

SEBASTIAN

(appearing)

Pancrazio, as judge, you must be eminently fair and objective. Much depends on your verdict. Whom do you choose as the first contestant?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

San Sebastiano.

SEBASTIAN

Very well. I'm rather glad we're doing this before lunch.

With great ceremony and some nervousness, SEBASTIAN and YOUNG PANCRAZIO kiss. It lasts at least several seconds and is visibly passionate, especially on the part of YOUNG PANCRAZIO. SEBASTIAN pulls back.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(pausing for drama)

Molto dolce.

SEBASTIAN

I enjoyed an orange half an hour ago.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

I enjoy, too.

SEBASTIAN

And now, Wilhelm.

WILHELM

I have never kissed Pancrazio in sight of anyone.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(hurt)

You no want kiss?

SEBASTIAN

The Festival of Diocles was a public celebration. Today we are Greek and free.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Sicilian!

SEBASTIAN

Sicilian and free, then.

With some hesitation, WILHELM approaches YOUNG PANCRAZIO.

A tentative touch, a gentle kiss. The kiss is longer and more tender than the one between SEBASTIAN and YOUNG PANCRAZIO, a deeply loving embrace. SEBASTIAN begins to cry quietly. After some time, WILHELM and YOUNG PANCRAZIO part and stand awkwardly, embarrassed.

SEBASTIAN

It appears word is vanquished by the photograph.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Not word. Not photograph.

WILHELM

Love.

SEBASTIAN

Nothing could be clearer.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

But was close!

WILHELM

(also with some tears)

I have photographed love many times. But never my own. I lay my heart before you both.

SEBASTIAN

A different martyrdom entirely!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(starts removing SEBASTIAN'S
clothes)

San Sebastiano, time to die for Gesu!

SEBASTIAN

(resisting)

I believe St. Sebastian actually survived the arrows--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Un miraculo!

SEBASTIAN stops resisting and begins undressing.

WILHELM

Sebastian, you don't have to--

SEBASTIAN

You bested me quite fairly.

WILHELM

I hadn't realized how hard it is to reveal--

SEBASTIAN

If peasant boys can stand it, surely I can.

WILHELM

They are boys--you are a gentleman--

SEBASTIAN

A peasant boy has no less dignity than I. Greater, in fact, as I wallow in humiliation before the world.

SEBASTIAN is briefly nude. YOUNG
PANCRAZIO wraps a white sheet
around him as a loose loincloth.

WILHELM

Do not model to debase yourself.

SEBASTIAN

On the contrary, I model to redeem myself. Give me the
arrows! Slather me with gore!

YOUNG PANCRAZIO positions SEBASTIAN
with the arrows and dabs on the
cuttlefish ink.

WILHELM

Not too much blood!

SEBASTIAN

It will look especially gruesome in sepia.

WILHELM

That is my fear!

SEBASTIANIF

If it's too warmly fleshy, you can adjust in the development
process.

WILHELM

That's how I will fix the arrows as well.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

As you take arrows, I end curse!

SEBASTIAN

Will you now tell me what it was?

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Better you never know.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO steps back to
admire his art direction.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Finish!

WILHELM takes the photograph.
Lights out on SEBASTIAN and
WILHELM.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Perhaps because I'd been reading *Dracula*, I'm afraid I did
use too much blood. Very Sicilian. Sebastian looked less
like a saint than a vampire bloated by his feast of youth.
Wilhelm had his work cut out for him manipulating the
development, but in the end the photograph had a macabre
majesty.

Lights up on WILHELM and SEBASTIAN,
dressed for travel and holding a
print of the photograph. A
suitcase and the borrowed camera
are at SEBASTIAN'S feet.

SEBASTIAN

Saints are rather like vampires, aren't they? Sucking life
from the living. But so are photographers.

WILHELM

And writers.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Everybody is vampire! All infected.

SEBASTIAN

I'll cherish this print always, although I'll only show it to my most intimate friends. What is your price?

WILHELM

It is a gift.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, no. I must--

WILHELM

And a privilege.

SEBASTIAN

May I see the negative?

WILHELM

(handing him the glass
negative)

Of course.

SEBASTIAN

Negatives are more hauntingly beautiful than positives, so mysterious in the ghostly reversal of light and dark. I am the opposite of myself, the opposite of St. Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN shatters the negative.

YOUNG PANCAZIO

Sebastiano, no!

SEBASTIAN

I'm sure you understand.

(indicating print)

This must be the only one.

WILHELM

I understand. A most dangerous photograph.

SEBASTIAN

(gazing at the photograph)

And despite the decrepit subject, perhaps the most brutally beautiful in your entire *oeuvre*. You've captured my heart in the warmest sepia.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You are Narcissus!

SEBASTIAN

It's not a handsome truth.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

You gaze on you in this photograph. You gaze on me in that photograph. But you see you always--like Narcissus! You love me to love you--

WILHELM

Pancrazio, the negative doesn't matter--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Love matter! And he love only himself--Narcissus!

SEBASTIAN

I wish that was still true.

(picks up suitcase and
camera)

Ciao, ragazzi.

WILHELM

Pancrazio, help him--

SEBASTIAN AND YOUNG PANCRAZIO

No.

SEBASTIAN

(starts to leave, then stops)

Pancrazio.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

Si?

SEBASTIAN

About that curse--

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

(grudgingly)

I lift. No more curse.

SEBASTIAN smiles and leaves
whistling "The Streets of Cairo."
Neither WILHELM nor YOUNG PANCRAZIO
move until SEBASTIAN'S whistling is
quite distant.

WILHELM

Non preoccuparti. [Don't worry.]

(picks up fragments of the
negative)

Ho stampato delle copie. [I printed copies.]

(shows prints)

YOUNG PANCRAZIO shows the script of
SEBASTIAN'S play. They both look
after SEBASTIAN, but decide not to
chase him down to give him the
play. YOUNG PANCRAZIO signals
"silence" and WILHELM smiles.
Lights out on WILHELM as YOUNG
PANCRAZIO begins transforming
himself into PANCRAZIO by adding
the mustache, hat and glasses. As
he transforms, sound of a negative
shattering, then another. More and
more negatives shatter, building to
a distant cacophony as YOUNG
PANCRAZIO reacts to the sound,
perhaps flinching or crying.

YOUNG PANCRAZIO

When Guglielmo died in 1931--

(a single negative shatters)

--He left the photography business--

(another)

--And all the negatives and prints--

(two negatives shatter)

--To me.

(several more)

We knew each other for almost 40 years.

(many negatives)

He was friends with my wife, gave presents to my children.

(constant shattering)

Our relationship by then, of course, was business only. We
were old men.

PANCRAZIO

(now fully transformed)

But old men who knew each other very well.

(silence)

Perhaps that is love. Knowing.

(looks around the courtroom)

You do not know. Government officials cannot judge art. The perfection of a boy's body is the same in a photograph or a statue in the Foro Mussolini. Guglielmo's photographs have gone around the world, are treasured in art museums and private collections by experts and aficionados. The work of a lifetime. You are destroying these treasures, this beauty, as important to Sicily as the temples of Agrigento. More important, because each photograph represents a person. I know, because many of them represent me. When I was beautiful forever. A Narcissus who cannot die. Creating these photographs is not a crime. Destroying such beauty is.

Lighting change reveals CESARE.

CESARE

I only shattered the negatives in which I appeared. I'm sure you understand.

PANCRAZIO

(signals "silence")

Most dangerous photographs.

FRANCESCO

(appearing in light)

Congratulations, Signore Buciuini. You've been exonerated.

CESARE

Not guilty!?

FRANCESCO

The judge found nothing obscene in the photographs and was moved by your testimony. As was I.

PANCRAZIO

I am most grateful.

CESARE

The photographs are anti-Fascist! The individual artist doesn't matter!

FRANCESCO

And I've just received word I needn't go to Nicolosi after all. The man I was supposed to interview has disappeared. Also the suspect in Adrano.

CESARE

I worried we would make you late. Sicily is not so efficient.

FRANCESCO

You tried.

CESARE

Thank you for acknowledging that, Signore, but we needn't speak of it.

FRANCESCO

Umirta.

CESARE signs "silence."

FRANCESCO

Signore Pancrazio, you are free to go, but you've withheld evidence.

PANCRAZIO

No, Signore--!

FRANCESCO

What became of Sebastian Melmoth's vampire play?

PANCRAZIO produces the play.

FRANCESCO

He never came back for it?

CESARE

It must be incredibly valuable!

FRANCESCO

Apparently not to the author. And impossible to authenticate. Unless he signed it.

PANCRAZIO shakes his head and shrugs.

FRANCESCO

Is it any good?

PANCRAZIO

(shrugs)

It's in English.

FRANCESCO

I suppose the play might be a kind of apotheosis, a melding of word and image, Signore Melmoth and Baron von Gloeden collaborating on their art.

PANCRAZIO

A play is only words until staged, Signore.

FRANCESCO

Their gift to you.

CESARE

And the prints?

FRANCESCO

Of?

CESARE

San Sebastiano. The picture of Oscar Wilde.

PANCRAZIO

(producing prints)

Guglielmo printed four: one for Signore Melmoth and three--

CESARE

For us.

(off FRANCESCO'S look)

Also valuable.

(signs "silence")

PANCRAZIO gives each of them a print of the photograph.

FRANCESCO

We won't be able to sell them if we can't explain them.

CESARE

Who wants to sell them?

FRANCESCO
 (nods, starts to leave,
 stops)

One last question.

CESARE

Yes, Signore?

FRANCESCO

What was the curse?

PANCRAZIO

A terrible curse. I'm ashamed. It would have been torment for him.

FRANCESCO

But you lifted it.

PANCRAZIO

The curse of long life.

FRANCESCO

Oscar Wilde died less than three years later at the age of 46.

CESARE

And never wrote again.

FRANCESCO

Any longer would have been torture. Was your awful sin the curse, or lifting it?

PANCRAZIO

Both.

FRANCESCO

Ah.

(Fascist salute)

Arrivederci, Signore!

PANCRAZIO and CESARE return the salute with different degrees of awkwardness. CESARE overdoes it.

CESARE

Grazie, Signore!

FRANCESCO gazes at his photograph
as he leaves. After a moment or
two, PANCRAZIO and CESARE lower
their salutes.

PANCRAZIO

You're an unconvincing Fascist, Cesarino.

CESARE

So is Signore Maffiotti. He knows a lot about Oscar Wilde.

PANCRAZIO

So do you.

CESARE

Sicilian and free.

PANCRAZIO

Thank you for tolerating my long story while pretending not
to.

CESARE

I thought your boys would never sneak those plates out of
your house--and all that giggling!

They giggle and stare at the
photographic prints in their hands.

PANCRAZIO

Beautiful.

CESARE

Disturbing.

Lights up on SEBASTIAN staring at
the photograph of himself.

SEBASTIAN

Sepia.

THE END