

# Rewriting Gender? (De)constructions of Masculinities between Scientific Discourse and Literary Practice

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## 1. Introduction

Facts were put on the table and promptly challenged when feminist journalist Alice Schwarzer and anti-feminist essayist Esther Vilar met for a TV debate on WDR in February 1975.<sup>1</sup> An exchange of views over the topical issue of whether women in West Germany were actually oppressed by men or vice versa had failed due to the vehement rejection of the opposing arguments and had shown the incompatibility of their respective standpoints right from the start. Subsequently, reference was made to scientific data, in order to seek a fact-based way out of the dilemma. Schwarzer and Vilar tried to let the facts speak for themselves,<sup>2</sup> but it turned out that these facts – as common scientific denominators – allowed for opposing interpretations. Both opponents relied on the same surveys, such as the recently published *Die Wirklichkeit der Hausfrau (The Reality of Being a Housewife)* by sociologist Helge Pross. However, Vilar interpreted Pross's finding that housewives – in despite of objective disadvantages – were subjectively satisfied with their lives<sup>3</sup> as a mere validation of her thesis<sup>4</sup> that women led *de facto* a better life than men, while Schwarzer proposed to question the private notion of 'life satisfaction' politically.<sup>5</sup> This

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1 Cf. Schwarzer/Vilar 1975.

2 Cf.: "Now let's be very concrete, let's leave the metaphysical level, let's talk in facts and figures." (Ibid.: 10:36–10:41) All translations by R.S.. Page numbers in the running text always refer to the original texts.

3 Cf. Pross 1975: 169–200.

4 Cf. Vilar 1973 [1971]: 117–128.

5 Cf. Schwarzer 1975: 214–219.

deconstructive approach would also soon characterize Schwarzer's book *Der 'kleine Unterschied' und seine große Folgen* (*The 'Little Difference' and Its Big Consequences*), in which she tried – in analogy to numerous writers of the time – to rewrite the facts in women's lives.

During the same September days in 1975 when Schwarzer's main text was first available in West German bookstores, a similar debate was sparked in Italy. *Effe*, Italy's first and most widespread feminist magazine, published an article that due to its critique of the leading media's portrayal of feminisms can also be read as a renegotiation of previously valid notions about gender relations. In her opinion piece "Il femminismo secondo 'Il Corriere della Sera'" ("Feminism According to 'Il Corriere della Sera'"),<sup>6</sup> essayist Carmela Paloschi deconstructed a few clauses from the column "Non è femminista la donna bandito" ("The Woman Bandit Is Not a Feminist"),<sup>7</sup> recently published in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* by Gabriella Parca – a feminist journalist herself, who had become known in the 1960s for the earliest science-oriented surveys of the behavior of Italian women and men.<sup>8</sup> In the Italy of the 1970s, marked by terrorisms and the abortion debate, Parca had now tried to show with figures and data that no factual link between emerging feminisms and terrorisms could be proven.<sup>9</sup> Paloschi was by no means concerned with refuting this thesis, but she did want to make the premises visible that had moved Parca to her query in the first place. Thus, the 'old' feminist assumption that 'new' feminisms posed a threat to men could hide a new fact – that more and more feminists were not aiming at a war against men but rather at a collaborative rewriting of gender and, thus, at "the invention of a world without power."<sup>10</sup>

The abovementioned debates are emblematic of the processes of validating, challenging, and negotiating traditionally accepted gender notions and

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6 Cf. Paloschi 1975: 9.

7 Cf. Parca 1975: 5.

8 Cf. Parca 1965 and 1959. Parca's surveys are quite comparable to those later published by Pross (cf. in addition to the aforementioned study on housewives, the one on men, which appeared three years later). With regard to the science-orientation, see especially the subtitle of Parca 1965: "A rigorous investigation carried out throughout Italy using scientific criteria".

9 Cf. "The figure of the female bandit therefore has nothing to do with the emancipation of women [...]. [...] it is certainly not by shooting, that we can delude ourselves that we have achieved gender equality." (Parca 1975)

10 Paloschi 1975, 9.

the legitimacy of feminisms in the early 1970s. Declaring something as fact or fact-based served to either affirm or undermine traditional or innovative gender conceptions. In these processes, facts – that is, notions concerning gender considered to be universally true and stable, but paradoxically used selectively and for incompatible arguments – gained a powerful and challenging role. At that time, a (de)construction of gender-related facts promoted the scientification and circulation of feminist discourses, as well as several legislative changes and introductions.<sup>11</sup> But it also posed a male dilemma that oscillated between an uncertainty in light of the deconstruction of traditional masculinity and the need for a pro-feminist collaboration.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, writings positioned towards feminisms commonly dealt with gender-related facts, in order to propagate, discuss or counteract the “normative power of ‘facts’”<sup>13</sup> in a phase of journalistic, scientific, and literary boom. To better understand these processes, I will examine two literary and two science-oriented texts published between 1973 and 1975 in German-speaking countries as well as in Italy: *Montauk* by Max Frisch and *Caro Michele* by Natalia Ginzburg, as well as *Der Untergang des Mannes* by Volker E. Pilgrim and *Maschio per obbligo* by Carla Ravaioli. By comparing these texts, I would like to stress that the powerful and challenging role of gender-related facts becomes understandable by looking at the interrelations between scientific discourse and literary practice. Accordingly, an analysis of the textual interrelations can be particularly suitable to illuminate the affirming, refuting, or subversive functions of facts. If the early 1970s are regarded as a first peak of the intensifying debate on gender issues after 1968,<sup>14</sup> this trend can also be seen as a consequence of manifold relations between European and US-American feminist discourses. By participating in these discursive relations, the selected texts show fundamentally different ways of dealing with the same gender dilemmas. In this respect, the comparison of texts from different cultural areas is meant to emphasize the diversity inherent to processes of validation and representation of facts. Since it is precisely at this time that masculinity increasingly came

11 Cf. Kahlert 2003: 87, and Bock 1988: 54. Cf., e.g., the introduction of the divorce law in Italy in 1970, the introduction of the right to abortion in the German Democratic Republic in 1972 and in Austria in 1975, and the reform of family law in Italy in 1975 and in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1976.

12 Cf. Krammer 2018: 135–136, Bellassai 2011: 126–137, and Schneider 1974: 113–116.

13 Daniel 2001: 18.

14 Cf. Bojar 2022: 28–38.

into the focus of feminist renegotiations as a construct in need of explanation and change, in this paper I will shed light on the (de)construction of masculinity-related facts and propose this as a complementary perspective to grasp the rewriting of gender in the early 1970s. Specifically, I will show that the two science-oriented texts, i.e. Ravaioli's and Pilgrim's, aim at affirming the feminist (de)construction of masculinity and supplementing it with new perspectives, while the two literary texts, i.e. Ginzburg's and Frisch's reflect and problematize an uncertainty that accompanies such groundbreaking processes.

## 2. Natalia Ginzburg and Carla Ravaioli: Rewriting the Facts of Male Dis-/Reorientation

Il mondo ora è pieno di questi ragazzi, che girano senza scopo da un posto all'altro. Non si riesce a capire come invecchieranno. Sembra che non debbano invecchiare mai. Sembra che debbano restare sempre così, senza casa, senza famiglie, senza orari di lavoro, senza niente.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of her 1973 essay "La condizione femminile" ("The Female Condition"), the Italian writer Natalia Ginzburg wrote that she did not love feminism, although she shared all of its practical demands.<sup>16</sup> What she rejected was essentially the deconstructive approach advocated by Schwarzer and Paloschi – especially since she believed to recognize in feminism an "attitude of the mind" (182) that challenged stable notions of gender. In this regard, she spoke of "a vision of the world that, in the end, does not reflect reality" (183) and attributed it to a tendency towards abstraction that would produce a loss of facts. This abstraction would supposedly replace the true/false

<sup>15</sup> "The world is now full of these young people, wandering aimlessly from one place to another. There is no telling how they will grow old. It seems like they should never grow old. It seems like they should always stay this way, with no home, no families, no work schedule, no nothing." (Ginzburg 1973: 71–72)

<sup>16</sup> Cf.: "I don't love feminism. I do, however, share everything the women's movements demand. I share all or almost all of their practical demands." (Ginzburg 1974: 182–183)

dichotomy with moral claims,<sup>17</sup> and thus produce unstable, unsettling, and incorrect gender conceptions. Moreover, by favoring women, this feminist tendency would disregard the “fatto, noto e indiscutibile” (“noted and indisputable fact”) (182) that there are no qualitative but only mutual differences between men and women<sup>18</sup> – a fact becoming more glaring than ever in the early 1970s, as she pointed out. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Ginzburg’s position concerning gender differences was rather ambivalent, since she had already criticized ‘female’ writing in previous decades: She deemed it too abstract and emotional, whereas she wanted to approach ‘male’ writing, which she believed to be more sober and fact-based, as she stated in a 1963 interview with essayist Oriana Fallaci.<sup>19</sup> This ambivalence can also be observed in light of her 1949 essay “Il mio mestiere” (“My Craft”), in which Ginzburg wrote that she has been terrorized by the idea of being recognized as a female writer,<sup>20</sup> while in 1963 she claimed that a woman should write ‘like a woman’ but again strive for the abovementioned ‘masculine’ qualities.<sup>21</sup>

This is arguably the reason why a similarly plain writing style still characterizes *Caro Michele* (*Dear Michele*). In this epistolary novel, published in 1973, Ginzburg deals with the issue of a radical loss of facts in an era of feminist and terrorist uncertainty. Here, the time after 1968 appears to be shaped by the difficulty of assigning clear meanings to increasingly isolated, contradictory, and fragmentary facts. Indeed, the fictional facts regarding the central figure of Michele can be summarized quickly: At the age of 21, he leaves his dying father, his lonely mother and a pregnant girlfriend in Rome and moves to England – a few months later he is killed during a student protest in Belgium. However, the letters that relatives and friends write to and about him feature perspectives that are incompatible with one another and therefore

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17 Cf.: “In feminism, at the center are not [...] the false and the true, but [...] revenge, vindication, humiliation and pride.” (*Ibid.*: 184)

18 Cf.: “Feminism assumes that women [...] are better than men. [...] Qualitatively, they are equal. The difference between man and woman is the same as the difference between the sun and the moon, or between day and night.” (*Ibid.*)

19 Cf.: “To write like a man means to write with the detachment, the coldness of a man. Something women are rarely capable of.” (Fallaci 2015 [1963]: 321)

20 Cf.: “I terribly wanted to write like a man back then, I was terrified that somebody could tell I was a woman from the things I wrote.” (Ginzburg 1962: 80)

21 Cf.: “A woman must write like a woman but with the qualities of a man.” (Fallaci 2015 [1963]: 321)

do not allow a definitive interpretation of these few facts. It remains uncertain, for instance, whether Michele fled from entanglements with family or with terrorism, whether he is really the father of the child, and why he is finally stabbed in Bruges.<sup>22</sup> In *Caro Michele*, the possibility of knowing, saying or thinking anything with absolute certainty is largely prevented. The resulting discomfort is stressed by Ginzburg, showing the need for facts as more urgent than ever for the post-1968 era. As a prime example, it was also hitherto necessarily the case that “to know if one is the child of another [man], there are no safe systems” (167) – nevertheless, that the scientific proof of paternity is considered indispensable for family cohesion appears as a novel phenomenon here. Michele’s obscure destiny appears in the novel not as an individual example but rather as representative of an entire generation that is devoid of home, family, and memory, wandering the world “aimlessly from one place to another” (71), eventually dying for abstract ideals.<sup>23</sup> This conflict between the facts of life and the pursuit of fictional ideals particularly affects young men. In contrast to the more practical and active female figures, all young men are unsuccessful artists or writers and are depicted as being out of touch with reality, as well as weak in decision-making, and sexually indecisive.<sup>24</sup> The failed painter Michele, described in the letters alternately as homosexual and as “ambidextrous,” (107) i.e. bisexual, is neither able nor willing to fulfill his parents’ expectations of him as the “only male child.” (7) He lacks the pragmatism of his sisters and cares as little for his potential offspring as he does for his terminally ill father. When his father eventually dies, Michele explains neither his absence at the funeral nor his renunciation of the inheritance. Therefore, the apparently fact-based masculinity is replaced by an “absence of man”<sup>25</sup> and a gender-related void, the filling of which Ginzburg will reflect in later essays and novels.<sup>26</sup> In this context, Michele’s indifference towards a ruinous tower left to him by his father, which neither the sisters nor other characters want to preserve, appears as symbolic<sup>27</sup> in view of a renunciation of supposedly stable orientations to masculinity: “[...] you never

22 Cf.: “[...] these are all hypotheses. In truth we don’t know anything and all we will be able to know will be other hypotheses.” (Ginzburg 1973: 174)

23 Cf.: “Above all I thought that young people were dying, that young people were risking death [...] for political or pseudo-political reasons.” (Ginzburg 1999: 144)

24 Cf. Bazzocchi 2018: 105.

25 Therein, Ginzburg will recognize a motif central to *Caro Michele*. (Cf. 1999: 144)

26 Cf. Minetti 2018: 118.

27 Cf. Niefanger 2021: 663–664.

think about the tower. Viola and Elio wanted to buy it from you, but they went to see it and were disappointed [...]. And then this tower looks like it will fall down if you just touch it." (120–121) These male figures' discomfort with the behavioral patterns expected from them in family and romantic relationships should be considered in light of Ginzburg's above-mentioned essayistic diagnosis about the occurrence of an unsettling loss of facts in the early 1970s. In *Caro Michele*, masculinity is depicted as a normatively transmitted, albeit now blurred relationship between sociocultural meanings and anatomical conditions. Ginzburg's representation aims at illustrating and emphasizing a new cultural discomfort.<sup>28</sup> As she will clarify in a 1990 interview, she attributed this unease to the productive correlations between feminist demands, changing gender roles, and a pervasive cultural, social, and political upheaval in the 1970s:

Ma, io credo che negli anni settanta ho sentito che circolava un disagio, e mi sembrava che derivasse da quest[a] [rottura culturale]. [...] c'è anche qualcosa nel femminismo che non mi piace, voglio dirlo. Io certo che sono femminista [...] però il femminismo ha creato un qualcosa di competitivo che non mi sembra giusto [...]. E questo fa sì che le donne, oggi, sentano molto la solitudine, e gli uomini non sanno che ruolo avere, e le donne sanno che ruolo avere, però sentono la mancanza degli uomini. [...] E penso che se ho raccontato qualcosa, forse, nei miei romanzi, ho cercato di raccontare questo: la solitudine delle donne e la fragilità degli uomini.<sup>29</sup>

With this statement, Ginzburg points out a dilemma that is apparent in both her examined texts: Although feminisms would have reinforced the orientation of women, the former asymmetry of roles that had to be fought against has now been reversed to the detriment of disoriented men. Indeed, it is especially in regard to masculinity that the relationship between facts and established interpretations appears to be undermined by her texts. By doing so,

28 Cf. Solte-Gresser 2014: 73–74.

29 "But I think in the seventies I felt that there was a discomfort circulating, and it seemed to me to derive from that [cultural rupture]. [...] I want to say that there is also something in feminism that I don't like. Of course, I am a feminist [...] but feminism has created something competitive that doesn't seem right to me [...]. And this makes women, today, feel a lot of loneliness, and men do not know what role to assume, and women know what role to assume, but they miss men. [...] And I think that if I have told something, perhaps, in my novels, I have tried to recount this: the loneliness of women and the fragility of men." (Ginzburg 1999: 184–185)

Ginzburg takes a dismissive stance towards the feminist deconstruction of facts. Nevertheless – as she would also partly acknowledge in the following years<sup>30</sup> – she employs a merely provisional knowledge of coeval feminist theories for her writing. It was neither true that all feminist positions advocated a superiority of women, nor that they renounced a fact-based rewriting of gender conceptions.

For it was precisely male disorientation, which Ginzburg depicted as a downside of feminisms and as the painful consequence of a loss of facts, that was considered by feminist essayist Carla Ravaioli to be a symptom of a desired reorientation of men and an indisputable fact. As she argued, the phenomenon was inspired by feminist demands, but in the first place it could point out already existing dilemmas of masculinity. She wrote that in the early 1970s, more and more men began to question the role assigned to them on the basis of biological characteristics: “Symptoms that this may happen, or rather that it is happening with increasing frequency, are not lacking. [...] today young men especially do not seem to agree so much anymore: being a king does not seduce them anymore.”<sup>31</sup> She authenticated this shift as a fact through sociological references and she used it as a starting premise for her science-oriented text *Maschio per obbligo* (*Male Out of Obligation*) in which she argued that most positions within the women’s movement still disregarded the fact that a normative commitment to traditional gender roles was no longer satisfactory for many men either. Therefore, challenging the relationship between gender and role would be necessary for men: “[...] the battle for the liberation of the male from the fictitious role to which he has been condemned is just another face of the liberation of the woman.” (back cover) Ravaioli proposed – perhaps for the first time in Italy – a scientific perspective on masculinity, to foster a rewriting of facts and a pro-feminist rejection of the sex-role concept. What is remarkable about her text is that the traditional relationship between anatomical conditions and sociocultural meanings is viewed as a fiction, resulting in a ‘destiny’ that must be refuted: “[...] the male role is a prefabricated destiny no less than the female one.”

<sup>30</sup> In 1990, Ginzburg said in an interview that her critique of ‘female’ writing as inherently ‘sticky’ had been based on past beliefs; in the same interview, she also conceded that equality between men and women had, in fact, still not been achieved entirely and everywhere. Nevertheless, she emphasized her conviction that feminisms could only endorse a partial, namely a ‘female’ view of the world. (Cf. *ibid.*: 29–30, 185–187)

<sup>31</sup> Ravaioli 1973: 10.

(9) While Ginzburg deplores the undermining of this relationship as unsettling, Ravaoli sees in male discomfort a discomfort with masculinity itself. By deconstructing the deterministic relationship between biological sex and sociocultural gender, she seems to reinforce an emerging feminist thesis that developed at the same time in other cultural areas too and still appears discursively effective today.<sup>32</sup> Since she believes that the reference to biological knowledge is hiding the danger of an allegedly 'natural' legitimization of traditional masculinity (cf. 21–22), she finds it more effective to deconstruct cultural knowledge and the genesis of gender-related facts and attributions taking place within it. By pointing out the constructiveness of gender, she attempted to open up a conceptual space for the development of new ideas about masculinity: "For women as for men, it is a matter [...] of beginning to modify culture by modifying themselves [...]." (73) Ravaoli argues that male uncertainty was based on the difficulty of living up to the myths and ideals of patriarchal masculinity, and proceeds to validate this through the textual examination of an extensive corpus of advertising material, literary texts, and schoolbooks.

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32 Cf., e.g., Repo 2016: 84, and Schwarzer 1975: 190–194.

### 3. Max Frisch and Volker E. Pilgrim: Rewriting the Facts of Male Lives

Über Liebe, als Beziehung zwischen den Geschlechtern, gebe es nicht Neues mehr zu berichten, das habe die Literatur dargestellt in allen Varianten ein für allemal, das sei für die Literatur, sofern sie diesen Namen verdient, kein Thema mehr – solche Verlautbarungen sind zu lesen; sie erkennen, daß das Verhältnis zwischen den Geschlechtern sich ändert, daß andere Liebesgeschichten stattfinden werden.<sup>33</sup>

The necessity for a reassignment of gender-related facts can concurrently be found in texts by Max Frisch. The Swiss writer firstly positions himself towards feminisms in *Tagebuch (Journal)*, in which he evokes – under the heading “WOMEN’S LIBERATION”<sup>34</sup> – the symbolic image of a facts-demanding woman and a snoring man, who had discussed the naturalness or construction of the differences between women and men without being able to find a common and fact-based way out of the dilemma. Frisch later also steers towards the same topic in his autofictional story *Montauk* (1975). “He is resolutely in favor of it, [...] nothing is more urgent in our society,”<sup>35</sup> he has himself say – under the analogous heading “WOMAN’S LIBERATION” – to his young lover Lynn during an American weekend recounted in *Montauk*. Here, the two days form the starting point for an examination of the “Tatbestände” (“facts of the case”) (122) regarding his destructive love relationships, first and foremost the one with Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann. It is exactly Bachmann whom he quotes at the beginning of the story to explain the truth claims of his ex-

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33 “There is nothing new to report about love as a gender relationship, literature has presented that in all its variants once and for all, it is no longer a topic for literature, if it deserves this name – such statements can be read; they fail to recognize that gender relationships are changing, that other love stories will take place.” (Frisch 1975: 89)

34 Frisch 1972: 373. English original.

35 Frisch 1975: 89. The following heading is English original.

amination: "TRUTH IS REASONABLE TO HUMAN BEINGS." (24)<sup>36</sup> On the same page, Frisch attributes the fact that this claim is to be accompanied by a rewriting of his masculinity to the influence of Philip Roth's recently published novel *My Life as a Man* (1974), which also deals with a destructive love relationship: "Why would I shy away from the German title: Mein Leben als Mann? I want to know what I, writing under the compulsion of art, learn about my life as a man." (24)

This project, which Frisch wants to realize "without inventing anything" (82) and using an objectifying third-person narrative – from which he expects, as he writes in *Tagebuch*,<sup>37</sup> greater knowledge of the truth – takes the form of a confessional writing. The resulting search for facts and meaning aims at resolving the dilemma of whether he should feel guilty for his destructive vice "MALE CHAUVINISM" (94, English in the original) or whether the misery in his love relationships could be explained by an intrinsic misunderstanding between men and women.<sup>38</sup> However, the attempt to assign to the facts of his life new meanings that would also be valid from a feminist standpoint fails because of his belief that cross-gender writing is still impossible in a language that does not implicitly reproduce the existing gender power relations. As initially assumed by the abovementioned snoring man in *Tagebuch*, and later suggested by Frisch as a plausible response to the dilemma of whether gender relations are biologically fixed or culturally constructed, the women's movement itself had so far failed because "women do not have their own grammar for their way of thinking but are dependent on male language"<sup>39</sup> and on "categories of male thinking." (371) Probably for this reason he wrote to Bachmann in the 1950s that "We need the representation of man by woman, the self-representation of woman." (90) In light of this necessity, Frisch's disorientation towards feminist demands could be attributable to the paradoxical fact that *Montauk* contains a representation of women by a man, and the self-representation of a man. For if a male writer inevitably reproduces male supremacy and domination by writing his 'life as a man,' a pro-feminist collaboration of men through writing can only seem futile.

36 Cf. also Bachmann 1959: 2:39–2:42.

37 Cf.: "For the purpose of confessional literature (maximum uprightness towards yourself), the third-person form is more appropriate." (Frisch 1972: 310)

38 Cf. John-Wenndorf 2014: 403.

39 Frisch 1972: 148.

While the belief in an inherently different genesis of facts and meanings in men and women is reminiscent of Ginzburg's ambivalent aspiration for 'male' writing, in Frisch's writing this seems to be accompanied by a tendentially essentialist understanding of gendered writing. On the one hand, Ginzburg's separation of 'female' and 'male' writing still considers the possibility for female writers to approach a writing that traditionally seemed reserved for men – a possibility which recalls the Woolfian ideal of an incandescent-creative "androgynous mind."<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, in Frisch's texts it is precisely this blending of gender categories that seems unthinkable and impossible. As a result, he claims that he can only write about women "my invention, my draft on their nature" (118) and that, in his love relationships, he "always live[s] in ignorance of the situation." (139) Eventually, this finding leads him to invite a deconstructive reading of his own text: "THIS IS AN HONEST BOOK, READER/ AND WHAT DOES IT HIDE AND WHY?" (197) A recounted talk with an American student, who does not ask the usual questions of secondary literature but questions whether the central figure of Frisch's novel *Stiller* really wants his wife to be redeemed or rather wishes to be her redeemer can be considered emblematic of this. (Cf. 18) Since a deconstruction of gender-related facts is occurring in this passage, Frisch's writing can only give a partial answer to this question – as to his initial question of guilt – because, according to him, he can provide merely a 'male' answer, and not one that is valid regardless of gender.

A similar representation of a man thinking "[...] all in opposites and contradictions, not in associations and unions,"<sup>41</sup> and almost unknowingly wielding destructive power, can also be found in one of the earliest German-language texts proposing a science-oriented perspective on masculinity: *Der Untergang des Mannes* (*The Downfall of Man*). Starting with the motto "The man is socially and sexually an idiot" (10), writer and activist Volker E. Pilgrim positioned himself – concurrently with Ravaioli – towards the feminist thesis that there is no deterministic relationship between sex and gender while attempting to validate this as a fact through an often paltry – but symptomatic of earliest men's studies – examination of psychoanalytic and ethnological texts. He argued that feminist scholars have proven Freud's dictum "Anatomy is destiny"<sup>42</sup> to be fiction "wrapped in a scientific construction." (152) Both in

<sup>40</sup> Woolf 1993 [1929]: 52.

<sup>41</sup> Pilgrim 1973: 193–194.

<sup>42</sup> Freud 2000 [1924]: 249.

Pilgrim's and Ravaioli's texts, the importance of Freud's thesis is striking. Being both restrictive and suggestive, its function is remarkably homogeneous: positioning the writer in the ongoing debate about the fixed or fluid quality of gender roles and relations. Thus, in texts such as Vilar's *Der dressierte Mann (The Manipulated Man)* and Wilhelm Bittorf's "Der anatomische Imperativ" ("The Anatomical Imperative"),<sup>43</sup> the deterministic relation between anatomy and destiny is revisited as a kind of pre-scientific fact and seen as foreshadowing affirmation of traditional female roles. Conversely, in both selected texts, Freud's thesis is questioned as an outdated factual relic and taken as an occasion for a re-writing of gender-related facts. Hence, for Pilgrim and for Ravaioli, it became an indisputable fact that neither anatomy determined destiny, nor that nature determined man. Nevertheless, men would continue to destroy nature, women, and themselves.

What is remarkable about *Der Untergang des Mannes* is that in view of a male reorientation, that Pilgrim considered indispensable, he proposed to question the factual relationships of men with women, whereas in Frisch's text a similar approach turned out to be inadequate to answer the question of male guilt. Particularly in light of a pro-feminist collaboration between men and women, Pilgrim suggested that the hitherto tacitly legitimized male domination must now be scrutinized and questioned substantially: "In order to learn fundamental things about the woman, it is not yet possible to ask what *she* wants. Instead, the man must be examined: what does *he* want from the woman, how does *he* relate to her?" (70, original emphases) In such a framework, a rejection of the belief in an incompatibly 'male' or 'female' genesis of facts and meanings seems to come gradually into focus, since both gendered perspectives are first understood as culturally different, but they can then become compatible with each other. On the one hand, the mood of upheaval or even decline prevailing in Pilgrim's text may recall Ginzburg's depiction of feminisms as both the consequence and the source of an unsettling paradigm shift in the early 1970s. On the other hand, in this case we find an attempt not merely to deplore a loss of facts and the rejection of traditional notions of gender but to write new facts in order to motivate cross-gender acknowledgment of feminist discourses.

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43 Bittorf 1975.

#### 4. Conclusions

The texts I have selected have one thing in common: they address a destabilizing dilemma concerning the meaningfulness of gender relations and roles – a dilemma that became topical in the early 1970s.<sup>44</sup> Within feminist discourses, this perspective corresponded to the deconstruction of a deterministic relationship between anatomical conditions and sociocultural meanings, as well as to the construction of new gender conceptions. All the authors I have examined saw the necessity to position themselves towards this paradigm shift and an arising male dilemma through writing. However, the processes of validating, challenging, and negotiating facts taking place in these texts differ fundamentally. In her epistolary novel, Natalia Ginzburg shows that an unambiguous interpretation of plain facts has become problematic in the post-1968 era and diagnoses a disorienting loss of facts that has afflicted masculinity. In his autofictional story, Max Frisch sees irreconcilable gender differences in the genesis of facts and meanings. This is the reason why he is finally denied a rewriting of the facts of his "LIFE AS A MAN" (152, English in the original) and of his relationships with women in a meaning that would also be valid from a cross-gender perspective. In contrast, it is precisely the deconstructive undermining of normative and essentialist gender differences that motivates both Carla Ravaoli and Volker E. Pilgrim to outline a male reorientation through a (de)constructive rewriting of sociocultural facts and meanings. Both science-oriented texts attempt to confirm and alter the gender status quo by advancing a collaborative rewriting of gender-related facts and thus enabling innovative perspectives. Conversely, an altering or rejecting depiction of gender discomfort accompanying these processes and the aesthetic problematization of these perspectives are reserved for the literary texts. Since all the selected texts – like both introductory debates – concern the same gender dilemmas but deliver fundamentally different ways to acknowledge them, the presented comparison highlights the fact that the processes of (de)construction and representation of gender-related facts are diverse, contradictory, and controversial.

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44 Cf., e.g., Rigoletto 2014: 139, and Kosta 2001: 224.

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