

“The Hidden Responsibility”

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Abstract

How relevant is women's function in human relationships to understand the origins of gender-based violence? To what extent has women's responsibility led to the increasing phenomenon of violence against women?

This paper addresses key issues involved in making such an assessment, with the aim to identify the women's choice of being faithful to their own project, both as authentic protagonists of their own life and as “creators” of social progress.

The first half of the paper provides a wide historical panorama of the “feminine choices” that have given a considerable contribution to humanity; the second half tries to identify the free, intentional act to achieve power, the element that distinguishes leaders from victims.

The final section suggests future educational proposals for young generations who should “cultivate the right” to train and express their “uniqueness” beyond social stereotypes.

Key words: power, gender-based violence, social progress.

Résumé

Quelle est la pertinence de la fonction des femmes dans les relations humaines pour comprendre les origines de la violence à l'encontre des femmes? Dans quelle mesure la responsabilité des femmes ont conduit à ce phénomène croissant de la violence à l'encontre des femmes?

Le présent document aborde des questions clés impliquées dans cette évaluation, visant à identifier le choix des femmes d'être fidèles à ses propres projets, à la fois come véritable protagonistes de ses propres vies et come “créateurs” du progrès social.

La première moitié du document fourni un large panorama historique des “choix féminines” qui ont apporte une contribution considérable à l'humanité; la deuxième moitié tente de déterminer la libre et intentionnelle activité pour parvenir au pouvoir, un élément qui fait la distinction entre les chefs et les victimes.

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La dernière partie fournit des futures propositions pour la jeune génération qui doit “cultiver le juste”, pour entraîner et exprimer leur “unicité”, au-delà des stéréotypes sociaux.

Mots-clés: pouvoir, violence sexiste, progrès social.

Rezumat

Cât de relevantă este funcția femeii în relațiile umane pentru a înțelege originile violenței bazate pe gen?

În ce măsură responsabilitatea femeii a dus la creșterea fenomenului de violență împotriva femeii?

Această lucrare abordează o serie de aspecte esențiale care au dus la o astfel de evaluare, în scopul identificării alegerii femeii de a fi fidelă propriilor sale proiecte, atât ca protagonistă autentică a propriei vieți cât și în calitate de „creatoare” de progres social.

Prima jumătate a acestei lucrări oferă o cuprinzătoare panoramă istorică de „alegeri feminine” care au adus o contribuție considerabilă umanității; a doua jumătate încearcă să identifice actele libere și intenționate de a obține puterea, element care deosebește conducătorii de victime. În finalul lucrării se regăsesc sugestii pentru eventuale activități educaționale dedicate noilor generații care ar trebui să „cultive dreptatea”, să se pregătească și să-și exprime propria „unicitate” dincolo de stereotipurile sociale.

Cuvinte cheie: putere, violență bazată pe gen, progres social.

1. The inferiority of women is not given in nature

Since the 60's in the United States of America, and, taking into account the most important milestones on the international level for the prevention of violence against women, individual countries have organized efforts (legally, politically, socially) in order to prevent, reduce and punish violence against women. The definition of gender-based (Istanbul convention, Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women 2018) violence is most used interchangeably with violence against women, and some articles of Violence Against Women reiterate these conceptions by suggesting that men are the main perpetrators of this violence..

The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (the first international instrument to explicitly define VAW at the United General Assembly) supported the idea that violence is rooted in the inequality between men and women when the term violence is used together with the term gender-based.

There is no scientific literature about the history of violence against women because of the lack of reliable and continuous data; violent acts are under-reported due to social norms, taboos and stigmas, cultural traditions, local customs, social and religious expectations. All the above have interfered in defining the real meaning of violence.

There has been increased activity on both national and international levels

to research, however debates, controversies and analyses have always focused their attention on the different forms of violence and on the role of men in the man-woman relationship.

Our paper provides several analyses with the aim to overturn the research, starting from the feminine point of view and avoiding the stereotyped idea of the inferiority of women and their inability to overcome the role of subservience to achieve power. We do not share this assumption since the inferiority of women is not given in nature and it has always been the real alibi that has justified male violence.

2. Has matriarchy ever existed?

The historian Eva Cantarella, Professor of Roman and Greek law at the University of Milan ends her analysis showing that, as far back as research has gone in the Mediterranean culture, no matriarchy existed, with one exception. In the Minoan society, religion recognised a divine female being and women were expected to have priesthood and social functions, but no political power has been outlined.

In “The descent of women in preindustrial societies” (While, 1978), the author underlines how the early anthropological studies by philosophers, anthropologists and activists such as Bachofen, Morgan and Engels, who tended to note kin groups in primitive societies based on relationship with a matrilineal descent, were demolished by the later scholars, denying both the notions that there was a universal evolutionary sequence (from societies with a matrilineal descent to a patrilineal descent) and the notion that in matrilineal societies women have a particularly lofty status. They supported that in simpler peoples is not matriarchy but matrilineal descent and that there is no available evidence to suggest that matrilineal descent or myths dealing with powerful women or female gods indicate a present or past period of female supremacy.

3. Middle Age and Renaissance: evolution of one-sided male conception of love

In the Middle ages, in Europe, the role of women was connected to the Church, a system which contented the political power and assumed moral regulation. The general rule was that women were respected only in monogamy. Marriage and virginity were the fundamentals of Catholic morality. The Clergy protected women, entrusting them with the patronage of literature or giving them the possibility to escape from violence, by entering the ecclesiastical structure, the cloister. Nuns were often noble women, skilled in the needlework and trained in book-learning. Since the Chivalry Culture, women were the most worshipped with the greatest devotion of gentlemen, whose pleasure depended on male submission to women; elevating women to a God state should not be over-estimated. In Courtly literature, the lord-subject relationship reflected man-woman

relationships; women lost their function of devilish vehicles to become sublime and angelical creatures, inspiring noble arts and conveying divine messages. What Courtly culture seems to have forgotten was the double effect that the spiritual image of women produced; platonic love turned into an unsatisfactory and limited experience and left the male lover in a never ending condition of a childish man, for ever in love and without his natural satisfaction. Moreover, idealizing the female image did not grant a historical possibility for women to express themselves as creators, since the literary production continued to be a male expression. As a consequence, we are still observing the evolution of the male conception of love but not the natural evolution of man-woman relationship.

The Renaissance stood out as a period of great changes. Humanists overcame the medieval scholasticism and the physical extent of the known world was expanded by voyages of discovery.

The breaking down of the Christian Church into Protestant and Catholic radically changed personal and public life. Authors, such as Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare were affected by the Protestant debate about human sinfulness and gave their personal solutions. Sidney accepted Petrarch's desio for what it was from a Protestant perspective. Spenser supported Christian marriage in which Petrarch's fusion of eroticism and spirituality was legitimated. Shakespeare inverted the female image from the angelical and charming woman, to a lady with black hair, black eyes and an unattractive face. The new element, artists seem to confess, is the real fact that they could not deny their feelings and freely wrote about it. We should notice that, apart from some isolated figures, the image of women the poets showed, actually, is the artistic result of men's debate, which no female voice joins in.

4. Did the 17th century mark a real evolution?

In the 17th century, with the difficult transition from the Renaissance to the modern age, the stability and self-confidence of early Elizabethan times were replaced by uncertainty, mistrust and the intellectual and spiritual debate reflected this sense of uneasiness and anxiety.

John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets presented a very confusing and shadowy image of women. They wrote when the vogue for sonnets on Petrarchan themes and Platonic idealization on the subject of love were at their height. John Donne deliberately refused their ideals, amusing his restricted groups of friends by his cleverly analytical, sensuous, intellectual lines. Women emerged as paradox of seductresses and innocents, wicked temptresses and divine perfection. The poet was not particularly interested in understanding the woman; it was the love relationship and the state of being in love that mattered. It seems that the poet did not solve the ancient dichotomy between spiritual and carnal love represented by a double image of women. Intellectuals have continued talking about women,

comparing their own points of view; we can assume that this debate is still living today.

5. The first step forward

Let's take into account the 18th century: Locke in England, Rousseau in France, Cesare Beccaria in Italy criticized the idea of a society as a union of families and not as “union of men”. The concept of female inferiority weakened but the break of the medieval family did not succeed in freeing women. In *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1972), the author believed that no difference existed between men and women and suggested some examples of women who had not been subjected to men: the Amazons, women warriors in Anatolia. We can underline that Hobbes gave a great contribution in breaking the stereotyped image of women but the analysis was still produced by a man. We should not forget that, in England, at the beginning of pre-industrialization, the 18th century society with its materialistic, pragmatic and responsive to economic pressure vision, favoured opportunities in the economy. In fact, it provided initiatives, enterprises and enrichment. Women started to read newspapers, to work and to live a freer sexuality dissociated from the Calvinist idea of sin and shame, although a lady had to preserve the appearance of virtue. One of the protagonists in the literary production was a prostitute like Moll Flanders (Defoe, 2015), who succeeded in accumulating capital even if accepting to be a prostitute, a thief and having five husbands. Her aims were self-assertion and material benefit: she responded to the 18th century canons.

6. The 19th century: women's consciousness still lacking the logic of power

The 19th century stood out as a turning point in the history of women for two reasons: ethnologists and anthropologist assumed that not only in primitive societies, but also in the different phases of human evolution existed social and political conditions in which women got the power. Although they pointed out the difference between matriarchy and matrilineal descent, their theories were accepted. The second reason was that women entered the century exploiting the power of “words”: the wide range of literary works was a concrete reality in this century.

We do not share anthropologists' theories, since the isolated examples confirm women's ability to achieve power, but they do not show women's awareness and will to do it. There are exceptions to every rule and the rule is still present in our society. We do not emphasize female victimism, on the contrary, we point out that male power has never been substituted, because men have always shown to master power and to produce social order. Women should learn the logic of power if they really wanted it and now time is ripe to put it into practise.

We need to examine different elements: women were admitted to higher education that increased exponentially during the 18th century and the growth of

market economies, cities and life expectancies changed how women in Europe and in the United States were expected to conform to new social pressures. This made many women more conscious of their imposed social, political and legal inequality. Male power set up a new path to women, men realized that the growing and relevant presence of women acting in both economic and social sectors, had been underestimated. Men understood that they should have interacted with the female world. On the other hand, women took part in this process without a deep awareness.

If we take into account both female roles as protagonists in literary male expressions and as women writers in primis, we will find that the price they paid was too high. Heroines presented in novels written by writers, Anna Karenina (Tolstoy, 2013), Madame Bovary (Flaubert, 2014) are described as unsuccessful heroines, following the standard code in which love and death coincided as the Greek mythology had already discovered between Eros and Thanatos. As regards women writers, since the late 18th century, women artists emerged as expert observers of both economic and social changes, as well as the psychological process of human souls. Jane Austen published her work "Sense and sensibility" in 1811 anonymously, mastering the description of the market marriage in the small villages in England and getting into details concerning the relationship between love and sexual attraction. What is interesting is that her awareness of how love dynamics worked, did not guarantee a personal and autonomous position. Accepting the control and balance of strong impulses with emotional states, made her accept the social code which encouraged marriages for money and social standing. Once again, female subjection as well as the lack of female proposals.

Another relevant English woman writer, George Eliot has been deeply appreciated, not only for her deep psychological analyses, but also for her knowledge of political crises in small towns in England with their social persecutions and the stories of social outsiders. She witnesses again the unlucky destinies of women who had to renounce their ambitions and to adopt unhappy choices in order to live great feelings and believe universal faiths that in the end turned out as illusions. Dorothea Brooke, the protagonist of the novel married a very old man who showed no interest in involving her in his social goals. She had to give up her husband's fortune to live her love for Ladislaw, shocking and disappointing her family.

In the passage from the 18th to the 19th century Mary Shelley offered the cleverest elaboration of the most relevant themes and ideas of the two centuries. She shared the rational culture of the Enlightenment with its faith in social and political progress and new scientific discoveries in the field of chemistry, evolutionism and electricity. Her sensibility and her acute observation grasped the romantic cultural awareness of the negative aspects of the process of industrialization and the existential need to recover that ancestral relationship with nature. But who was Mary Shelley? She was a woman who could live in a

very educated environment managed by men, her parents were philosophers and writers who lived in a house visited by some of the most famous intellectuals of the century, her mother was also a feminist. There, she met her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary was a childless woman, a status that many other women writers have shared. Has it been a coincidence? How relevant was the environment in her evolution both as a woman and an artist?

In the 19th century, the Victorian Age, the Queen provided a long period of economic and political stability in England because of her ability to make political choices motivating them with a moral and philosophical system of values and rules which would have met the social and economic needs of all classes that would avoid revolutions and any form of rebellion. The aristocratic Whig politicians succeeded in making laws which kept them in power (all the social and economic reforms); the lowest classes were protected by laws which guaranteed medical care, acceptable work conditions, educational system; families were protected with the establishment of workhouses, the middle classes improved their lives by both political and economic means. Victoria's success turned into a perfect compromise, in which social welfare was paid by the subtle exploitation of human forces. The Queen needed labour to transform raw materials, coming from the colonies, into manufactured goods. However, the progress of the Industrial Revolution which should have guaranteed the rising wealth of all social classes, and the expanding power of England, produced poverty, disease and deprivation.

The strict Puritan morality with its emphasis on hard-working. Utilitarianism based on Jeremy Bentham's principles in which an action is morally right if it has consequences leading to happiness, suited the false philanthropy of the middle class. In this contradictory system of values women did not succeed in guaranteeing their identity, since they could enter the economic system but accepting to be exploited in the coalmines, gaining respectability only as subservient elements to patriarchal figures in the fixed structure of the family and living a repressed sexuality.

In a variety of literary production women kept on writing, demonstrating to be harsh portraitists of the growing industrial civilization or women writers of novels of formation and education. Nearly all of them, responded to the Victorian literature, conceived as a didactic and pedagogic vehicle to correct the vices and the weaknesses of the age. The heroines in Elisabeth Gaskell's stories are unmarried and all her production reflected the complexity of her family ties. Jane Eyre succeeded in achieving her social status after overcoming cruel experiences: she was an orphan bullied by her cousins and mistreated by her aunt. She worked hard, studied and became a teacher. She got her independence finding a job but her real dream was to marry Mr Rochester.

We cannot deny that a great number of the novels published during the middle period of Victorianism up to 1870-80, were written by women in a period of subjection, but writers such as Robert Stevenson, Bram Stoker and Rudyard

Kipling captured the illogical, contradictory aspects of life and the double nature of Victorian society.

7. “Synthesis as harmony”

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the woman became “the dark object of desire”. In one of her works (Di Stefano) the woman writer states that the new image of the woman possessed the public and private fantasy of European intellectuals and entered the new century with her dark or flaming red hair, pale like a vampire, and as an evil and harmful creature. The author pointed out how the awareness to be managed by the changeable rhythm of the economy and the process of modernization would have weakened the human ability to control the historical events. She suggested that distrust in progress transformed the nostalgia for the mother's womb into an “anxious vertigo”, conveying the power of that ancient female instinct, that primitive energy that reminded the myths of the past such as Pandora, Lilith, Medusa, Circe, Elena, Medea and Iside.

On the other hand, the Victorian inheritance had left a double morality. The respectable and day universe should not discover its opposite, the night, immoral and dissolute universe that granted men what was forbidden to women. In this sense, Freud, with his theory, supporting the idea that our acting is ruled by repressed impulses that could be wasteful and could destroy spiritual energy, contributed to define the male visionary image of the “Femme fatale”.

E. Stefano states that the massive low classes female entrance to the market corresponded with the women demands of the first feminist movements. The 20th century has marked a period where women's struggle for equality has achieved a record of success, reaching the climax in the protest of 1968. In 1963 feminist author Betty Friedan challenged traditional roles of women.

A wide literature has deeply studied the different phases of feminism, discovering its ancient roots and classifying the different waves of it.

What our analysis wants to point out is that in women's research for freedom, the achieved goals have turned out to be as temporary or as apparent successes. The entrance of women the world of politics, business, art, science and all sectors of human knowledge, has always been followed by economic, social and cultural conditions where women have never overcome the state of subjugation. They accepted the function to be the mirror of male behaviour and their ideals: women did not create new contents. The periods witnessing economic, social and cultural prosperity have welcomed women's positive contribution in terms of social participation and economic labour force. However, as soon as they have become stronger and consequently demanding, more freedom has been granted but in frustrating conditions and nourishing rage, resentment and violence. We should propose some questions: Why was the Suffragettes' movement born at the end of the Victorian age? Why was the image of the woman presented as a devilish being

in the passage from the 19th century to the 20th one, when industrialization had reached its highest level? Why did Keats report the story of “La belle dame some merci” written after French Revolution? Why was Italian prosperity of the 60' followed by the protest of 1968? and in Italy why do northern areas welcome a concept of the family open to new form of organization while the southern ones keep the traditional idea of the family? We can cite different countries where rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, reproductive coercion, female infanticide, prenatal selection, female genital mutilation, forced abortion, forced sterilization, forced prostitution, trafficking in women still constitute the forms of violence carried out by both individuals as well as states.

It is necessary to think over the difference between the way progress, with its research in every fields of human knowledge, is formulated, stated and the way it is undertaken and assumed. In this gap men have succeeded in finding out the balanced way to manage power. The few women, who have found solutions and have left their signs in human history, are those who have chosen and defended their originality and value of their research. Men have trained their abilities since the beginning of human history, they have had the management of power. Has it been a wrong power? No, it has not. It has been the power we have had and it has given guaranty and order in any case. In this process women have adopted, learnt men's language, assuming men's ideals, and their perception of reality.

Women and men have missed the opportunity to communicate in an authentic dialogue, meant as the interaction of two different intelligences that produces a new synthesis. In reality, we have had a male monologue recited by both men and women.

Another point we would like to underline is the difference between an individual supremacy and a social one. If we are successful by ourselves, we will show our intelligence but we will not give the right contribution to social evolution. A real historical evolution can be rooted only if great ideas are then carried out and put into practice in the social structure. The first step is being genial, the second one is ruling. Women have not experienced this phase, apart from some examples that we will list later. In particular in the last two centuries, women have succeeded in witnessing their talents but according to men's strategy. We strongly believe that human beings should develop a new dialogue where the individual solutions will “flow” in a shared harmony. Women are genial but they should enter a social, political and dialectic interaction, otherwise there will be the risk to be the exceptions to the rule and to express themselves only protesting against what men have already gained. What makes men happy does not coincide with what makes women happy: that is why we need a synthesis to “harmonize” individual choices.

The following list of feminine leaders represent different categories involving the principal means of gaining success: Saffo, Elisabeth I and Waris Dirie.

Saffo was one of the highest poetic voice in Greece at the end of 7th century until the middle of 6th century B.C. She was a girls' governess in her Tiseo where she thought music, singing, the art of being beautiful, of well dressing and being pleasant. The girls should have gotten married important men and have made authoritative men happy, since powerful men needed worthy women who responded to the social order that women were inevitably destined to follow. She succeeded in carrying out her project in a fixed, political and social system already designed by men. She did not fight against it, on the contrary, her idea was functional to it.

The second example shows another way to gain success: Queen Elisabeth I (1533-1603). She stood out as the most preeminent protagonist of European Renaissance, providing wealth and granting independence to her country. How much was her victory due to her secretary Sir Francis Walsingham? Sir Francis guaranteed the supremacy of his Queen and his country because he knew the logic of power. He was conscious of the political attacks Elisabeth I would have received and he cleverly, protected her from death.

The story of Waris Dirie, a famous Somalian fashion model, woman author, actress and social activist, shows the third example of winning femininity. Much of her life has been spent overcoming cruel and difficult experiences. She belongs to a nomadic family in Somalia and suffered genital mutilation as well as many other tragic and brutal experiences. When she was 15, she escaped an arranged marriage to a 60 years old man, she ran away from home crossing the desert on foot (this is the reason why photographers have avoided portraying her deformed feet). Since that moment her life has changed, she has lived as a housemaid and as an assistant at McDonalds, she became one of the first African Supermodels. She received exclusive agreements with the most important brands such as Revlon. She became an actress and after being interviewed by Laura Ziv for the magazine "Marie Claire", she travelled on behalf of the United Nations around the world. She participated in conferences, met Presidents and won a Nobel Prize. She founded her foundation called "Waris Dirie" to support her work as a campaigner against Female Genital Mutilation-World Health Organization. Today she is fighting as United Nations Ambassador against female genital mutilation. According to FMG: "Procedures are mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and adolescence, and occasionally on adult women. More than 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk for FGM annually. More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been cut in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is concentrated."

Why did we choose this example? It is interesting to notice that Waris differs from the other women because, first she choose to save herself then she gained success; finally she has undertaken political and social activism. She exercises her power improving the feminine political and social condition all over the world.

The given three examples belong to a wide range of cases of women leaders in the different sectors of human researches: Ipazia (mathematician), Giovanna D’Arco (French national heroine), Anne Boleyn (English Queen), Marie Curie (chemist and physician, two Nobel Prizes in physics), Rita Levi Montalcini (neurologist, Nobel Prize in medicine), Mother Teresa (Nobel Peace Prize), Malala Yousafzai (Pakistani activist, the youngest Nobel Prize laureate), Margherita Hack (astrophysicist), Samantha Cristoforetti (Italian European Space Agency astronaut, the first woman in space), Chanel (founder of the Chanel brand), Dorothy Mary Crowfoot Hodgkin (chemist, Nobel Prize in Chemistry) and many others.

The first question is: why have these women been successful? Why have these women excelled in the feminine world? Because they have chosen. They have believed in being worthy, in being a “value”. They could have lived according to the established canons but they did not.

In the first part of our paper we analysed how the entrance of women the social and political system has been followed by a sort of “historical regression” where the gained social goals have been fought once again as harmful to the establishment. The second question is: Is this phenomenon still happening in our time? Nowadays, women are excelling in different fields, their presence has reached high powerful political, economic, social roles. Why, then, has femicide increased? Why is violence increasing in the different countries of the world? Is there another epilogue? Might women’s hidden responsibility be the answer? Responsibility involves the act of changing, and this choice is hard, uncomfortable and risky. The act of claiming and the choice of accepting is much easier.

Professor Meneghetti Antonio (three PhD, a Doctor Nauk in Psychological Science, a Degree honoris causa in Physics and many other qualifications) supported that “violence has not always been produced by men [...] women have not succeeded in expressing themselves and delineating their own individuality because of their inability and their fears; whenever they have tried to identify themselves with epistemological male roles, they have felt foreign to the roles suggested by men.”

Even though Prof. Menghetti recognised several improvements in the female psychological growth, he was one of the few who succeeded in describing the worthiest characteristics of the inner female universe: grace. In Latin grace means “free action”. Prof. Meneghetti stated: “Grace is participating in the accomplishment of a new way of being, that might appear unbelievable to that specific human being”. And he added: “Grace is the ability of managing our existence with a metaphysical aim [...] reached when men live according to their own “In Sé” and they fulfil it. “In Sé Ontico” is the primitive nature-project that defines the human being”.

Prof. Meneghetti, in his scientific research showed the knowledge of the real feminine leadership, providing a detailed methodology to reach it, having specific steps of responsibility, self-criticism, self-check and a determined will for change.

We would like again to present the example of the poetess Saffo: The Professor underlined Saffo's aesthetic ability to treat, not only the beauty of pleasure, but also the intelligence of it. According to him, she succeeded in conveying female pleasure creating images and expressions of noble purity. He completely denied the negative short-sighted interpretation of Saffo as a homosexual artist.

Conclusion

In our paper we have tried to delineate the wide range of feminine images throughout over centuries; we have tried to grasp the hidden impulses, needs and feelings that have motivated women's choices and two categories have emerged: women who choose to be victims and the ones who choose to become leaders. We have pointed out that women's responsibilities are the turning point of female success. Women should overcome the stereotyped way to reach their goals adopting male roles. Women should respect their natural "project" neither responding to the cruel excesses of feminism nor mirroring the ones of machismo.

In our research we have noticed a recurrent phenomenon: the increasing political and social strategies of strong repression have followed aware feminine victories. We suppose that our times are ripe to create a new humanism, where women should overcome the fulfilment of their personal interests turning them into social and political endeavours. This is the reason why we should pay a close attention to educate the new generations: young people should be prepared to defend their own uniqueness and thanks to a constant training, they should avoid the stereotyped relationships father-patron and victim-persecutor; we strongly believe that this will be the way for them to enter the new humanism as Prometheus.

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