

Elisár von Kupffer. / Oosterhuis, Harry. Who's who in gay and lesbian history: From antiquity to World War II. ed. / R Alderich; G Wotherspoon. London [etc.]: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2000. p. 248-249.

Kupffer, Elisár von (1872-1942), German poet and painter. This aesthete of Baltic aristocratic ancestry gained popularity in homosexual circles around 1900 with his anthology of homoerotic literature from Antiquity to his own time, *Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur* (1900). Although he primarily included poetry and prose from known, respected authors, Kupffer encountered much resistance to his project in Wilhelmine Germany. Influential friends were able to prevent the first edition of the work from being confiscated, but the second edition fell prey to the censor. With his anthology Kupffer hoped to counterbalance the biomedical and psychiatric explanations of homosexuality, namely those of the influential Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Magnus Hirschfeld. In fact, he rejected the terms 'homosexuality' or 'uranism' because to him these reinforced the stigma of sickly deviation and the effeminacy of men. Instead, he introduced the words *Lieblingminne* and *Freundesliebe* to indicate that same-sex love should be viewed not as a biomedical issue, but as a cultural and historical one.

Kupffer's highly polemical introduction to the anthology was published in Brand's *Der Eigene* and with this essay about the 'ethical-political significance' of homoeroticism Kupffer set the tone for other members of the *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*. His intention was not to explain and justify an inborn homosexual disposition of a minority of men, but to show various cultural forms of male love by using literary sources from classical Greece, the Renaissance and the German Romantic movement. In this way he wanted to demonstrate that several forms of homoeroticism lay hidden under the denominator of friendship, and that male bonding had always been of great cultural and political weight. According to Kupffer, Greek boy love, pedagogical eros and the cult of romantic friendship were discredited as pathological by the medical meddling with same-sex love.

In his anthology, Kupffer glorified masculinity and depicted effeminate homosexual men as decadent monsters. However, later he and his friend, the philosopher Eduard von Mayer, elevated androgyny as the state of human perfection. In his paintings, Kupffer did not portray stout, brawny, blond Aryan heroes, but plump, feminine boys. Together with Mayer, Kupffer contrived an esoteric doctrine called *Klarismus*, for which they built the Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion near Locarno in Switzerland. The centre of this building, designed as temple and museum in one, was a round room, the walls of which showed a monumental painting by Kupffer. Eighty-four strikingly similar naked ephebic youths with faraway expressions – self-images of the narcissistic young Kupffer himself – were portrayed in various positions. Homoerotic aesthetics would enable people to release

themselves from the ugliness of mundane reality, Kupffer and Mayer believed. Eros would bring people together, forge unity between feeling and reason, and thus restore human integrity. Despite their countless publications – a ‘klaristische’ publishing house was even established – Kupffer and Mayer failed to win a substantial following for their esoteric visions. After Kupffer’s death, his Sanctuarium became no more than an artistic curiosity. And after Mayer’s death in 1960 it became dilapidated, signifying that the era of wealthy aesthetes who projected their homosexual desire in fantasy castles was basically over by then.

M. Keilson-Lauritz, ‘Vorwort’, in E. von Kupffer, *Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur: Eine Sammlung mit einer ethisch-politischen Einleitung*. Berlin, 1995.

H. Ekkehard, *Elisár von Kupffer (1872-1942)*. Basel, 1979.