

conservative goals, were termed Arcadians. It has been claimed that a high proportion of the actual membership consisted of priests and ex-priests.

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ARETINO, PIETRO (1492-1556)

Italian writer. Known as the "scourge of princes," Aretino occupies a place all his own in Italian literature, both for his erotic writings (which were for centuries considered among the most "outrageous") and for his extraordinary rapport with the powerful. He made use of his journalistic flair to sell his benevolence in exchange for monetary gifts. Of humble origins (though not bereft of education), he in fact succeeded in becoming rich and famous thanks to his literary works which oscillated between adulation of notables and libel. Among his best known works—apart from such erotic classics as the *Sei giornate* (Dialogues of the Courtesans) and the *Sonetti lussuriosi*—are comedies and six volumes of *Letters* addressed to major figures of the period.

Despite the grave charges leveled by Niccolò Franco (1515-1570)—who in his *Priapea* and *Rime contro Pietro Aretino* (1541) treats him simply as a prostitute—and by the libelous *Vita di Pietro Aretino* of 1537, there is no doubt that Aretino's erotic interest was gallantly directed toward women. Domenico Fusco, who analyzed the accusations of homosexuality directed against the writer by his contemporaries, concluded that they amounted to unfounded gossip of a type common at the time.

Nonetheless, Aretino seems to have made some forays into the realm of homosexuality. Alessandro Luzio has published two curious letters of Federico Gonzaga (of February 1528) who writes from Mantua to Aretino of having failed to convince a certain Roberto "son of Bianchino" to accept the advances of his correspondent.

In "L'Aretino e il Franco" (*Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 29 [1897], 252) Luzio published a 1524 letter to Giovanni de' Medici, in which Aretino playfully declared that he had decided to give up sodomy, because the ardent love he was experiencing for a lady had made him change his tastes.

As these instances show, Aretino's attitude toward homosexuality was one of amused complacency, similar to that of many contemporaries. This fact explains the presence in his work of many homosexual allusions and double entendres.

The work of Aretino in which homosexuality is most prominent is the comedy *Il marescalco* (1533). The protagonist, the duke of Mantua's farrier, dislikes women. To tease him the duke decides to force him to take a wife, which very much upsets the poor fellow. At the marriage, however, he learns that his "bride" is a beardless page dressed in women's attire, and he cannot contain his happiness. Nowhere in the play is the farrier's homosexuality openly stated, but the double entendres and various indirect references aptly serve to convey that the reason why he hates women is that he prefers boys.

The work entitled *La puttana errante* (1531), long attributed to Aretino, depicts both male and female homosexual conduct, but it is now attributed to Lorenzo Veniero.

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