

genital apparatus: males ejaculate, females menstruate, gestate, and lactate. Other criteria of sexual dimorphism either derive from these irreducible four, or are functions of time and place—as can be learned from economic history and cultural anthropology. The optional (and optimal) content of male and female roles is changing and will change further with the evolution of technology and society. Ideally, both parents will agree on the role suitable for each child, even if the goal is not always easy to achieve. Also, the child's family will ideally not be isolated and stigmatized for the role definition it has chosen, since this societal reaction would mark a child negatively among his age-mates, and could force him to choose between his parents and his peer group.

*Ludic (Playful) Variations on Gender.* In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, members of Europe's aristocracy enjoyed dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex. From the Chevalier d'Eon (Charles d'Eon de Beaumont; 1728–1810), who adopted women's dress during a diplomatic mission to Russia, stems the name that Havelock Ellis invented for **transvestism**: Eonism. In the nineteenth-century these practices trickled down to a larger public through the popular stage productions employing female and male impersonators. These performers in turn were imitated by people of working-class origin, giving rise to the modern drag queen and the mannish dyke. In the period after the **Stonewall Rebellion** (1969+), drag queens were prominent in activist circles, combining a defiance of society's gender norms with opposition to sexual conformity. This old tradition in a new guise, sometimes known as *gender bending* or *gender fuck*, is notable not only for its political awareness, but also for the fact that the illusion of assuming the opposite sex need not be convincing—indeed it is often deliberately not. Such behavior reflects an intuitive awareness of the sophisticated contemporary concept of gender. Social psychology and social activism meet.

*Gender Studies.* Along with women's studies, gender studies have since the early 1970s become a focus of attention in the academic world. Articles, monographs, and books are devoted to the problem of gender, and to such questions as how it can be measured by standardized tests, how it is socially defined in different historical epochs, and how it affects the functionality and the psychic health of the individual in various occupations and life stages. Crossing as they do the boundaries of conventional disciplines, gender studies and women's studies utilize a multidimensional approach to arrive at a deeper understanding of the forces that shape and maintain sexual identity in human beings. Gender studies also intersect with a reexamination of the legal status of men and women, and the effort to correct **discrimination** against women by legal enactments and their enforcement. In 1988 the University of Texas Press began to publish a journal, *Genders*, with a primarily cultural emphasis.

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## GENDER DYSPHORIA

See *Dysphoria*, *Gender*.

## GENET, JEAN (1910–1986)

French poet, novelist, and playwright. The son of an unknown father, abandoned by his mother shortly after his birth, Genet was brought up by a country couple. At a very early age, Genet began to think that there was no clear-cut distinction between parent, master, and judge—a conflation that was to become the cornerstone of his philosophy. At the age of 16 he was convicted of theft and sent to a reform

school. Four years later he escaped and joined the Foreign Legion but deserted after a few days. Rebellious against society, he became a drifter who lived by begging, dealing in narcotics, and prostitution. Crime became for him a ritual with religious overtones, but he was unlucky enough to be caught and sentenced several times to prison, where he wrote poems, novels, and plays.

With the encouragement and financial support of friends, Genet wrote the novels that were to launch his fame, *Notre-Dame des Fleurs* (Our Lady of the Flowers; 1944) and *Miracle de la rose* (Miracle of the Rose; 1946). In 1948, on the verge of being sentenced to prison for life, he was pardoned by president Vincent Auriol at the behest of such influential literary figures as Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre. (The latter was to devote a huge, but not always factually accurate book to the writer, *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* [1952].) Set free, Genet concentrated on his literary work and soon became a writer of international renown, yet still without a fixed domicile and using his publisher's address for purposes of contact.

An autobiographical work, *Le Journal du voleur* (The Thief's Journal; 1949), gave an account of the writer's earlier vicissitudes in the purlieus of the French criminal underworld and of prison. Genet also wrote a number of plays that—unlike the novels—have no overt homosexual theme. In the novels, the clarity and purity of the style contrasts with the sordidness of the content. It is the world of prisons and brothels that forms the backdrop to the plot. These settings are waiting rooms for violent death, either by assassination or by legal execution, and they provoke almost insufferable scenes of passionate hatred or love—often homosexual—among the inmates. In the microcosm inhabited by Genet's characters everything comes at a high price, either in money, or in loss of ideals, of liberty, or of life. The burdensome daily routine of the

prison is metamorphosed into the ceremonies of a cathedral within whose walls miracles occur. The inmates deliberately flout the rules of a society that has rejected and condemned them, and within the walls of their jail they create a new hierarchy. The reader is made to sense that any concept can yield to its opposite, that if vice is not virtue, it may equal virtue.

In the last decades of his life Genet became involved in political causes, including the defense of the Black Panthers in the United States in the early 1970s. He declined any affiliation with the gay liberation movement that had emerged as part of the radical upheaval of the Vietnam War era, saying that he considered homosexuality a personal rather than a political matter. His own interpretation of the homosexual experience strayed far from the precepts of a movement that set its face against much of the role-playing prescribed by the criminal and inmate milieu that forms the background of his tales. For Genet the sexual relationship is always one of power asymmetry, yet the line between promiscuity and fidelity is also effaced. The novelist remained a rebel, not a revolutionary inspired by a dream of a new sexual morality.

The homosexuality of Genet's characters is explicit, and the scenes of lovemaking attain the limit of physical and psychological detail, recounted in the argot of the French criminal underworld (which largely defies English translation) and in a style once possible only in pornographic novels sold "under the counter." If the homosexuality of the heroes of Genet's novels has a strong sado-masochistic component, their love is depicted with honesty and tenderness. The plot construction borders on free association, while the sordid and brutal aspects of male love are not suppressed or denied. Criminality and homosexuality are two sides of the personality of Genet's heroes. The novels are suffused with a poetry studded with a striking imagery in which memories, desires, and fantasies are interwoven by a

creative writer who freely transmutes experience into art. The frankness of Genet's handling of the homoerotic caused no little embarrassment to the critics and literary scholars who even managed to write articles in which the homosexual component of his work went totally unmentioned. But the novels in their realism defied all conventions and shattered the last barriers against the treatment of homosexuality in literature. Since French writing shapes literary trends throughout the world, the influence of Genet on future depictions of homosexual experience is likely to mount.

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## GEOGRAPHY, SOCIAL

Geographical distribution of homosexuals in Western industrial societies is not random. Gay men and lesbians are more likely to live in urban areas than in the countryside, in large cities rather than towns, and (in the United States) on or near the two coasts rather than in the hinterland. In many countries, regions noted for their religious conservatism are not favored by homosexuals. In North America, where mobility is common, the single homosexual is more mobile than most, and will seek new locales based not only on the expectation of tolerance, but on climate and the availability of good cultural and recreational facilities. Many gay men and lesbians deliberately move far from their home areas to escape family constraints as well as peer pressure from people with whom they grew up.

The diminished visibility that most homosexuals find it expedient to adopt (and the absence of any usable census or survey statistics) hinder an accurate estimation of these clustering patterns. On the one hand, naive observers miss almost all the identifying signals; finding homosexuals nowhere, these people assume that they must be everywhere. Others, more alert to the gay presence, register it only in such areas of concentration as those mentioned, concluding that the concentration is absolute. It is not. There are many homosexuals living isolated lives in remote and unexpected places. Just as there are village atheists, there are village gays—though most small-town homosexuals choose to maintain a low profile. In any event, this article is concerned with the concentrations, and with the social semiotic that allows the inhabitants therein to establish group identity and community.

### *High-Visibility Concentrations.*

In the United States media attention has spotlighted certain urban quarters in which homosexuals are highly visible, and even predominate, such as New York's Greenwich Village, San Francisco's Polk Street and Castro Street areas, and Houston's Montrose. These quarters are often termed "gay ghettos," a problematic expression, though one that would be difficult to eradicate. The word ghetto originally served to designate sections of Italian cities of the sixteenth century in which Jews were compelled to live under conditions of strict segregation. The ghettos were surrounded by walls behind which all Jews were required to withdraw at night—to prevent them from having sexual relations with Christians. In the 1920s the meaning of the term ghetto was significantly extended by sociologists of the Chicago School, who used it to refer not only to the urban enclaves favored by various immigrant groups—the Little Italys, Little Warsaws, and Chinatowns—but also to sections populated by bohemians, hobos, and prostitutes. Since the 1960s