

Italy, he taught in the University of Naples. In 1876 he became a senator of the kingdom of Italy.

Settembrini was the author of the autobiographical *Ricordanze della mia vita* and many other works, including *Lezioni di letteratura italiana* and a translation of the works of **Lucian** of Samosata from the Greek, which is still used.

His homosexual side was first revealed in 1977, with the unexpected publication of a novella, *I neoplatonici*, a homoerotic fantasy set in ancient Greece. Written in 1858–59 while he was in prison, just after he completed the Lucian translation, he sent the manuscript to his wife in the guise of a translation of an ancient Greek text. Remaining in his unpublished papers at the time of his death, the text was examined by Benedetto Croce, who counseled against publication.

I neoplatonici is a short work, but one that conveys the author's intimate fantasies. Devoid of any real plot, it follows the experiences of two boys who fall in love with one another and become lovers, concluding with a double (heterosexual) wedding. The story includes descriptions of sexual acts (anal) which have no parallel in Italian literature of Settembrini's time. Although the modest ambitions of the work place it outside the canon of the author's major works, it is nonetheless a dignified and serious text, written in a fresh, lively style, and endowed with a certain elegance.

Also noteworthy is the wholly positive and serene picture presented of homosexual relations. The author deliberately returned to a pre-Christian concept of (homo)sexuality, presenting same-sex love as an element of human life that is capable of giving joy and satisfaction. Moreover, the novella treats the link as both emotional and erotic—a rare accomplishment for the period.

When the book was published a hundred years after the author's death, some hailed it as a "revelation" that Settembrini had homosexual relations while

in prison. This suggestion remains a hypothesis, which as yet has no documentary support.

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Giovanni Dall'Orto

SEXISM

Sexism is the assumption that the members of one sex collectively are superior to those of the other, together with the resultant differentiation practiced against members of the supposed inferior sex, especially by men against women. The term is also used to designate conformity with the traditional **stereotyping** of social roles on the basis of sex (social sex roles).

Conceptual Foundations. Modeled on racism and racist, the terms sexism and sexist do not seem to have been used before the mid 1960s. Unlike racists, some sexist males profess to cherish and admire members of the other sex, with whom they have intimate and family relations. However, such admiration—the "pedestal theory"—is not incompatible with **discrimination**, as when it is held that women must be barred from certain occupations "for their own protection." The purported admiration of women by sexist men is also linked to **sexual objectification**—the reductive vision of women as simply bodies which are the object of lust rather than as full human beings. Although the matter remains controversial, some hold that overarching biological differences require difference of treatment in a few areas between men and women. Pregnancy leave is one example. More problematic is the question of differences in temperament, and even in styles of thought, between women and men. In any event, an increasing body of opinion in Western industrial society holds that women deserve equality of respect, to-

gether with full access to positions of economic and political strength.

In the view of many feminists, sexism is rooted in an age-old system of patriarchy, the institution and ideology of male domination. Usually couched in the form of a blanket condemnation, this discourse fails to allow sufficiently for gradations, which may be all-important to the situation of the individual. Because most positions of power are held by men in Sweden as well as Iran, we may conclude that both are subject to patriarchy, yet few would deny that the situation of women today in the first country is far better than in the second.

The spread of the term sexism has fostered the coinage of *ageism*, *classism*, and even *looksism*, alongside the well-established *elitism*. Despite their seeming usefulness, all these terms have the quality of epithets. In the usage of some they reveal a certain smugness, a confidence that "we" are superior to "them." Another term that has had some circulation is *heterosexism*, defined as the assumption that heterosexuality and its institutional forms are the only valid and socially beneficial arrangement, and that heterosexual values must prevail, without modification. Unfortunately, in the political practice of gay advocacy organizations the term tends to be divisive, alienating potential allies in the civil rights struggle who happen to be heterosexual. It ill behooves a group seeking pluralistic tolerance of its values and lifeways to appear to defame those of the majority.

Effects on Lesbians and Gay Men.

Be this as it may, a good case can be made for the point that **prejudice** against male homosexuals and lesbians is rooted in the sense that they are not behaving in accordance with the norm appointed for their sex, and that they are in fact inverting this norm. Victorian society and its twentieth-century prolongation had a strong interest in promoting gender-role conformity and in censuring "sissies" and "tomboys."

Still, the effects of the practice of sexism are different for lesbians from what they are for gay men. Traditionally, lesbians (who are often not perceived as such) have suffered discrimination as women. This existence of this pattern leads lesbians to make common cause with heterosexual women in the feminist movement. On the other hand, insofar as there are benefits to women from sexist discrimination these benefits may be endangered by the recasting of existing assumptions. Until recently, it has been assumed that, unless she is clearly unfit, the mother should receive custody of the children in divorce cases. Yet the questioning of this piece of traditional wisdom has been one of the legal strategies used, in many cases surely hypocritically, to deny lesbian mothers their children. On the whole, however, lesbians are willing to risk any complications that might ensue from dismantling discrimination against women, which affects them more severely. This is the case with lesbian couples, where both typically have low-paying jobs, as contrasted with heterosexual couples, where the man at least receives the salary which in his profession is deemed adequate for the male head of a household.

Gay men hold that they too are victims of sexism inasmuch as they are regarded as womanish and not deserving of the same privileges as "true men." Yet discrimination in hiring and housing usually takes the form of outright barring of homosexuals; that is to say, a gay man might be refused a job or an apartment that a woman would receive. Conversely, in an all male social club, gay men would be admitted. In both situations gay men and women are not equated. In promotions, however, gay men may be passed over because they are held to be wimpish, unstable, and unfitted for executive jobs. Here their situation approximates to that of women, whose "flightiness" and "susceptibility to emotional moodswings" ostensibly bar them from positions in the

upper echelons of business and government. According to some feminists, such complaints on the part of gay men are trivial, inasmuch as gay men benefit qua men from the privileges accorded to a whole gender class. However, these benefits are differently apportioned, as the category of race shows, for black men do not benefit (if at all) to the same degree as white men. These are only a few of the complexities involved, and they suggest that, as an analytical tool, "sexism" is rather blunt.

Modern industrial society is undergoing rapid technological and social change, and in the course of this transition it is impossible to foresee what the ultimate arrangements will be. While the discussion of sexism has often been heated and rhetorical, thoughtful observers of social policy must remain indebted to it for raising essential questions of human dignity and power.

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Wayne R. Dynes

SEX NEGATIVE, SEX POSITIVE

This polarity owes its inception to Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), who sought to synthesize Freud and Marx in a style acceptable to the leftist intelligentsia in Central Europe of the 1920s. The basic hypothesis is that some societies accept the inherent value of sexual expression and indeed insist on it as a prerequisite of mental health, while other human groups despise sexuality and are ceaselessly inventive in devising austerities and prohibitions as a means of social control.

Despite its seeming radicalism, the exaltation of "sex positivism" perpetuated the sentimental idealism of some eighteenth-century explorers and ethnographers who contrasted the supposed sexual paradise of the South Seas (for ex-

ample, the Tamoeé of the Marquis de Sade's *Aline et Valcour* [1791]) with the ascetic regimes of pre-Enlightenment Europe, in which Catholic and Protestant vied in cultivating stringent codes of sexual morality. In our own day, some homophile writers such as Wainwright Churchill characteristically see ancient Greece as a "sex positive" culture because it tolerated and even fostered pederastic relationships among males of the upper classes. The situation of Greek women these writers pass by in silence. Popular authors of books on "the sexual history of mankind" have reveled in depicting the joys of life in temporally and spatially remote but uninhibited societies where the burdens of chastity are unknown and sexual bliss is the lot of one and all. Such golden-age fantasies are part of the the discourse of utopianism.

In truth, all cultures regulate sexual behavior in one way or another. No human society allows its members, whatever their age, sex, or social status, to interact sexually with one another without restriction. Indeed, there are not a few in which heterosexual intercourse, even with the full consent of the adult participants, can be punished by ostracism, mutilation, or even death if it involves, say, a liaison between a male of a lower caste and a female of a higher one. Also, the concern with the legitimacy of one's offspring causes the sexual freedom of the nubile or married female to be severely restricted in nearly all cultures, as no society wants a horde of children with no assignable father deposited "on its doorstep."

If the myth of complete sexual freedom, however appealing it may be to critics of Western sexual mores, is unfounded, what factors promoted its acceptance? One is the greater licence accorded by many cultures to the foreigner—the tourist or anthropologist—for a variety of psychological and economic reasons, including the undeniable appeal of the exotic partner and the practical demand in