

### THIRD SEX

The notion that homosexuals constitute a third sex, *intermediate* between the poles of the heterosexual male and the heterosexual female, became popular in the nineteenth century. Yet it has some interesting forerunners and analogues. In the myth recounted by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, the androgynous double beings are termed the "third race," the irony being that these are presented as the archetypes of heterosexual persons who in their present sundered state are always seeking to reunite with their lost half of the opposite sex. Somewhat more to the point is a usage that may have been influential: according to his biographer in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, the Emperor Alexander Severus (reigned A.D. 222-235) spoke slightly of eunuchs as the *tertium hominum genus* (third class of men). The idea is modeled on Latin grammar which recognizes three genders: masculine, feminine, neuter. There is also a grammatical category called *epicene*, for a noun capable of designating either sex; from this technical usage derives the sexual meaning of that word. A satirical attack on the court of the effeminate Henri III, *L'Île des Hermaphrodites* (1605), states that in the language of that imaginary country only the common gender (*epicene*) is known.

Historical forerunners notwithstanding, the use of the concept of the third sex to designate homosexuals seems to have first taken hold in nineteenth-century France. While for Théophile Gautier in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1836) the expression "troisième sexe à part" refers to a woman with the qualities of a man (but not a lesbian), in *Splendeur et misère des courtisanes* (1847), Balzac equates "le troisième sexe" with the slang term "tante"—homosexual.

The German equivalent, *drittes Geschlecht*, was introduced by the homosexual reformer K. H. Ulrichs (*Vindex*, 1864). At the turn of the century the notion enjoyed a great vogue in Germany,

owing in part to the fact that it accorded well with the *Zwischenstufen* (*intermediate*) theories of Magnus Hirschfeld and his circle, who amassed data ostensibly showing that homosexual subjects on many indices fell halfway between the normal man and the normal woman. Hirschfeld himself wrote a book on the gay subculture of Wilhelmine Berlin under the title *Berlins drittes Geschlecht*, and the Committee prepared for mass distribution a pamphlet *Was soll das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen?* (What Should the People Know About the Third Sex?). However, a considerable number of homosexual men and women deviate from the norm for their gender solely in their sexual orientation, so that even sympathizers of Hirschfeld dismissed the label as untenable. Although the name *The Third Sex* was conferred on the American release of a 1957 West German film about homosexuality, the expression is now relatively uncommon and enjoys no scientific credence.

While the theory under discussion is now obsolete, in other realms of discourse the overarching conceptual process of enlarging an original binary opposition into a trichotomy may be a valid procedure. Anthropologists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, have observed the transformation of dichotomies into trichotomies in the mythology and social organization of tribal societies. In European civilization, the Anglican church has sometimes claimed to occupy a third position between the poles of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The democratic socialism of Sweden has similarly been extolled as a "middle way" between capitalism and communism. In other instances the third element is not an intermediate wedged in the interstice between an original pair, but the last in a series (e.g., Moscow as the "third Rome"; old age as the "third age"). In today's political language the case of the Third World is ambivalent; it may be regarded as intermediate between the other two worlds (neutralism) or set apart from

them by reason of its dependent and colonial status—in which case the trichotomy virtually collapses into a dichotomy. The notion was clearly suggested by the analogy with the Third Estate which at the end of the Old Regime was demanding its share of the political power previously monopolized by the clergy and the nobility.

The French philologist Georges Dumézil has argued that tripartition is an archetypal component of the original institutions and religious ideas of the **Indo-European** peoples, who think in terms of the three functions of sovereignty, power, and fecundity. However this may be, the examples cited support the view that formations in terms of threeness are characteristic of human institutions—or of the cultural interpretation of biological givens—but rarely of the biological world itself. Thus our bodies have either one organ (the heart, the nose) or two (eyes, kidneys, arms); never three. So the “third sex” was in the last analysis a social more than a biological reality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Claude Courouve, *Vocabulaire de l'homosexualité masculine*, Paris: Payot, 1985, pp. 212–16.

Wayne R. Dynes

### TIBULLUS, ALBIUS (50–17 B.C.)

Latin elegiac poet. Apart from his own writings, a poor anonymous biography and references in Horace and Ovid furnish the only data on Tibullus' life. In the tradition of poetic lovers that the Latins borrowed from the Greeks, he complained of poverty and failed to gain Maecenas' patronage. Only the first two of the four books ascribed to Tibullus are actually his. Book One celebrates impartially his love for his mistress Delia and for his boyfriend Marathus. Book Two contains poems to another mistress, Nemesis. Occasional pieces in the two books honor his patron Massalla. The third book contains six brief poems by Sulpicia and poems about her

that are perhaps by Tibullus himself. Quintilian termed Tibullus, who combined deceptive simplicity with refinement, the “most terse and elegant” of Latin elegists.

A frequent subject of Tibullus is the *puer delicatus*, the boy who, in the Hellenic tradition, would be young, handsome, and even girlish, that is to say, with none of the repellent coarseness of the adult male. But the Roman counterpart, or those of the **Hellenistic monarchies**, is cruel, unfaithful, and mercenary, closer to the Alexandrian or modern hustler or kept boy than to the classical *eromenos*. Marathus, Tibullus' love, conforms to type: endowed with beautiful hair and a fair complexion, somewhat femininely preoccupied with his physical appearance and the use of cosmetics. He torments his lovers, lies to them, and is unfaithful to them. At one point Tibullus considers terminating the unhappy affair with its psychologically sado-masochistic overtones. Yet Marathus himself, when he falls in love and is repaid in the same coin, is reduced to childish whining and tearful bewilderment. In all these respects Roman pederasty as depicted by Tibullus, like that of **Alexandria**, came nearer than did the Hellenic antecedents to certain modern unedifying variants of the homoerotic liaison.

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William A. Percy

### TILDEN, WILLIAM T., II (1893–1953)

American tennis player. Also known as Big Bill and Gentleman Bill Tilden, he was voted the most outstanding athlete of the first half of the twentieth century by the National Sports Writers Association, ahead of such notables as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and Johnny