

## Andrei Platonov

# *The Anti-Sexus*<sup>1</sup>

On the following pages is the reprint from *Cabinet* of the first English translation, by Anne O. Fisher, of Andrei Platonov’s “The Anti-Sexus,” written in 1926. Originally signed “Andrei Platonov, translator from the French,” the text purported to be a promotional pamphlet translated into Russian by Platonov. “The Anti-Sexus” was not published in its original Russian until 1981, when it was included in a special issue of Russian Literature, with annotations provided by Thomas Langerak; the endnotes provided here rely heavily on his authoritative commentary.

### From the Translator

Below we have appended the text of an advertising pamphlet published in eight languages by the *Industriale Internationale Revü* in New York.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to deny the exceptional literary and advertising talent of this pamphlet’s author, just as it is impossible to deny this businesslike composition’s imperialistic cynicism, prim pornography, and monstrous vulgarity, the magnitude of which provoke nothing less than sorrow. However, there is something in the style of this brochure with a decided whiff of Anatole France, if we may be so bold as to here pronounce that noble, honest name; and this, in part, gave us the courage to publish such an unprecedented work.

No document characterizes the epoch of the bourgeoisie’s living decay, its utter moral atrophy, better than the one appended below. Even we, as experienced professional readers, have never read anything like it. Even though we’re ready for anything these days from the warmongering bureaucrats and capitalist, fascist fat cats who’ve offered their testimonials about the advertised device, we never thought they could be so completely devoid of sense and lacking in basic tact.

Comrade Shklovsky, who employed his formal method to comment with such deft irony on all this drivel, is of course omitted from the preceding catalogue.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in *Cabinet* no. 51 (Fall 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Attentive readers may wonder why an advertising brochure written by “Yakov Habsburg, general agent for the Soviet lands” and aimed at a Russian-speaking market would be available in eight languages, including French (purported to be the language of Platonov’s source document), but not the most salient one, namely Russian. This is presumably simply an oversight on the author’s part.

Apparently it's not physiology that has hit the mark ("the brain is one of the last organs to decompose"); it's a Russian Bolshevik slogan, "reason is the first thing to go"—for those whom History wants to punish.

This is perfectly true, and this is why the entire world reeks to high heaven of the Anglo Euro-Americans—indeed, that whole imperialist sector's—demonstrable fiction.

Therefore the surest contra-“antisexual” agitprop is the publication of this curious document, for now the fixed expression on people's faces will shift, and their faces will be illuminated by rosy-pink laughter: the greatest friend of soul and stomach, and the fiercest enemy of all this suffocating industrial, moral, and physiological insanity.

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**The Anti-Sexu**  
**Patented Devices**  
**Berkman, Châteloy, and Son, Ltd.<sup>5</sup>**

Main Offices: Berlin–London–Geneva–Washington. Branch Agencies: London, Paris, Copenhagen, Brussels, New York, Warsaw, Budapest, Baghdad, Peking, Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Chicago, Frankfurt (on Oder and on Main), Tokyo, Lisbon, Seville, Rome, Athens, Montevideo, Constantinople, Angora, Calcutta, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Mecca, Cairo, Bethlehem, Alexandria, Bangkok, and Damascus, with officers on every passenger vessel of the Hamburg-America line as well as on the airlines Deruluft<sup>4</sup> and Lufthansa.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

How varied are the epochs... how varied the country locations... how varied the cultures where our worldwide company works. Nevertheless, our patented products enjoy universal demand from the Arctic to the Antarctic, and even on those latter lands, and, additionally, in the wild countries between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. Human passion reigns supreme over time, location, climate, and economy.

The metalworking industry's manufacture and distribution of our company's product for the satisfaction of these passions is a matter of cosmic importance, both metaphysically and morally. It is exceptionally symptomatic that, in contrast to common wisdom, the annual sales rate

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<sup>5</sup> The story was written in 1926, according to a letter from Platonov to his wife. As Joe Shepard's 1973 dissertation "The Origin of a Master: The Early Prose of Andrei Platonov" (Indiana University, 1973: 185) shows, the name Berkman is a reference to Alexander Berkman (1870–1936), an American anarchist of Russian descent, who lived with Emma Goldman for a few years in immediate post-revolution Soviet Russia and later described his disillusionment with Bolshevism in *The "Anti-Climax": The Concluding Chapter of My Russian Diary "The Bolshevik Myth"* (Berlin: Maurer & Dimmick, 1925).

<sup>4</sup> An actual joint German-Russian airline, founded in 1921.

of our product—given no difference in economic situation and size of population—is the same in the northern latitudes as it is in the southern latitudes, the tropics.

Hence, permit us to conclude that the physiology of man is virtually identical and stands true despite any feature of location, level of culture, time, race, presence of the printing press or lack thereof, ugliness of the race or comeliness thereof, or other extraneous circumstance.

Hence, it's clearly our achievement of complete satisfaction that results in such complete demand. Of its own accord, the entire world demands consumption, not production; the world doesn't even produce the desire for pleasure when there is no chance of obtaining the latter. Considering our global experience in product sales... our tireless pursuit of perfection in the instrument models currently in production... our ever-expanding network of factories (the number of which reached 224 as of Jan. 1, 1926)... and our vigilant concern for consumers' individual nuances and resultant instrument modifications to adapt to said nuances, we have decided to include the Soviet Union in our export market, as we consider its volume sufficient to justify the organizational expenses inevitably associated with the unavoidable adaptation to a new market's specifics, given that any commercial success must take into consideration all the concrete characteristics of a particular situation. The world's leading moral authorities have declared our actions to be completely free of any cause for concern, in fact, to be worthy of state sponsorship and private philanthropic support, something our company was not slow to use to our advantage, and which we will continue to use henceforth. The head of the company, Mr. Berkman, has already been included on the list of nominees for the Nobel Prize and during the past year received the honoris causa and honorary title of Doctor of Ethical and Aesthetic Sciences from the Sorbonne. Without taking up too much of your highly valuable time, permit us to share with you, in the most general of outlines, the principles upon which our founders based this unique, worldwide company.

The sexual force of mankind was repressed during the epoch of war, but flourished uncontrollably in the postwar period. It was this, in part, that enabled our factories to work at capacity and our company to enjoy financial prosperity. But it is this unregulated sexual life of mankind, so pregnant with calamity due precisely to said unregulated state—it is just this that causes the founders of our company such torturous spiritual anxiety, just this that is the true reason for our affirmative activity. There is also the well-known link between sexual feelings and morality.

The sanctity of the ancient institute of marriage is universally recognized, a sanctity that stems from the immutability of matrimonial love and the eternity of the conjugal bed, fraught with supreme affirmative delights and the resultant spiritual pacification. In marriage, truth is replaced by peace. Even if no philosopher in the world can prove which is better, mankind, has proclaimed that peace is better than truth. And only

mankind can be the object of industrial and commercial activity; philosophers cannot be such an object.

Having taken all this into account, our company has filed for patents in all the civilized countries for the Anti-Sexus, an electromagnetic instrument destined to regulate the realm of sex and, both together with this and because of it, the highest function of man: his soul, that is to say, the divinity hidden within, which must now, finally, be made evident and available for general use, as one of the common benefits of civilization. An unregulated sex is an unregulated soul; it's unprofitable; it suffers and creates more suffering; this, in the age of the universal scientific organization of labor, in the age of Ford and radio, in the age of the League of Nations, Rutherford, and plans for interplanetary travel by means of the living force contained in the so-called Kreuzkopf "brick"<sup>5</sup>—this cannot be tolerated. Progress proceeds in an uneven, broken line, in other words, certain individual dots limp weakly behind. Our company has been called upon to even out the line of progress; our company has been called upon to abolish the sexual savagery of mankind and recall man's nature back to an advanced culture of peace, and to a regular, calm, planned tempo of development.

In an age of social and economic crises when marriage is financially difficult... in an age of alimony when it's almost impossible to have children... and when woman has once more become just a poet's fantasy now that man is impoverished, we have been called upon to solve the global human problem of sex and the soul.

Our company has transformed sexual feeling from a crude elemental urge to an ennobling mechanism, we have given the world moral behavior. We have removed the element of sex from human relationships and cleared the way for pure spiritual friendship.

Still, keeping in mind the high-value instant pleasure that necessarily accompanies contact of the sexes, we have endowed our instrument with a construction affording a minimum of three times this pleasure, as compared to the loveliest of women used at length by a prisoner recently released after ten years in strict isolation. This is the measure of comparison, the quality quotient of our patented instruments.

Furthermore, a special regulator allows users to achieve pleasure of any duration, from several seconds to several days, should our honorable consumer happen to have that much free time. A special selector disc allows users to regulate the expenditure of semen in units of volume, and thus to achieve the optimal level of spiritual equilibrium, that is, to prevent excessive depletion of the organism and overall loss of tone in daily activities. Our motto is the spiritual and physiological fate of the cus-

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<sup>5</sup> Ernest Rutherford (1871–1937), physicist, who laid the foundation for the study of radioactivity and the construction of the atom; Kreuzkopf refers to the character Peter Kreuzkopf in Platonov's story "The Lunar Bomb," published in 1926; Kreuzkopf constructs not a brick, but a spherical projectile in which he plans to be shot to the moon.

tomers and the exercise of his sexual function: everything is in his hands... which rest on the corresponding regulators. And this we have achieved.

In addition, men of advanced age who have fallen out of sexual communion can use our devices to again become communicants. We work for all ages and for all peoples.

For eight years now, we've been manufacturing just three models of instruments for men, and three for women. The market evidently doesn't demand additional variety, thanks to the wide range of variation allowed in the configuration of each model, according to each consumer's individual particularities. As a goodwill gesture to our new client, the Soviet lands' unique inhabitant, we have allowed special discounts, such as giving union members who buy collectively up to 20 percent off the current list price as well as a one-year installment plan. The prices of our instruments for 1926 are as follows:

1. Model BS300042 for individual use, without sterilizer—20 dol.
2. Model BS3001843 for use by a limited number of persons (for example, for male members of one family), with sterilizer—40 dol.
3. Model BS300000401 for use by unlimited numbers (to be installed in public toilets, train cars, workers' barracks, at political rallies, in theaters, on streets, in office buildings, and so forth), with automatic sterilizer—100 dol.

Indicated pricing is for warehouse pickup and does not include discounts or packaging. There are the same three device models and usage guidelines for women, but with a 15 percent increase in price. We emphasize again that our principles of action are unimpeachable, reposing on the very pinnacle of morality... we respectfully remind you of the need to organize your soul, the most important part of yourself... we stand guard over your economic interests, protecting these from the encroachment of elemental sexual forces... thus we make so bold as to offer you the chance to make an indispensable, one-time capital expenditure in order to cross the line of expenses for sexual gratification off the debit side of your account book once and for all, and forthwith embark on the path of financial and moral prosperity.

Awaiting your kind comments and orders, we remain respectfully yours,

*Yakov Habsburg*, General Agent for the Soviet Lands.

### **Testimonials from Notable Persons about our "Anti-Sexus" Instruments**

War is the global passion of mankind. It will cease only when life on earth ceases, no matter what tired people and their daydreaming politicians say. War is masculinity itself, and will abide as long as life remains manly and progressive. The instruments of Mr. Berkman, Mr. Châtelois,

## The Anti-Sexus

and Son will, I am sure, play a great role in the upcoming war, when thousands of young men amassed on the front lines will be serviced by them.

Even as recently as the last war, military leaders reckoned with soldiers' spirits. Forced chastity creates an excess of nerves. Nervous soldiers mean defeat. We need armies of men with spiritual equilibrium, who are capable of decades of war. The abovementioned instruments have been drafted to assist military leaders in their difficult work on the path to victory.

—Hindenburg

Berkman, Châteloy, and Son have founded a gleaming new era in the moral service of mankind. There's no doubt that the optimal historical situation is for the human brain to regulate everything in the universe, and that this regulation should manifest itself as an electrical transformer that turns wild forces of nature into standardized automatons. This task of regulating conjugal physiology into an exact, routine form faced me back when I was twenty-five and had just gotten married, but at that time my thought process, distracted by mechanical exercises, couldn't concentrate on it. I regret this. Maybe then I wouldn't have set up enterprises for the fabrication of automobiles, I'd have set out to fabricate devices that automate and normalize morality, which is more suitable to my spiritual framework.

But Berkman, Châteloy, and Son foresaw my youthful thoughts and put them into large-scale operation for the good of mankind. I am deeply glad for this.

I wish this new industry, so brilliantly organized by Berkman, Châteloy, and Son, worldwide success. I hope this marvelous company's beneficent product enjoys market development by having breeders expand production to include the planet's entire animal population, not just people, whose numbers will be fatefully limited by the action of this same company's instruments. Taking this measure will increase the assets side of the company's balance sheet and, along with it, the moral fortitude of the world.

—Henry Ford

Close analysis of the production cost of the "Anti-Sexus" instrument proved it to be overly expensive. I asked the Financial Department to recalculate this cost based on our raw materials and equipment and ascertain whether we could reduce it. They reported that reductions of thirty are possible, for now. As of next year we will begin manufacturing the Anti-Sexus at our factory in Detroit.

In addition, we have approved installment payment plans of up to five years, which will make the instrument perfectly affordable for each and every citizen.

Andrei Platonov

Thus we will completely wipe out prostitution, once and for all, and every unemployed male will also obtain these instruments. We'll free the young working men from the obligation to get married, too, which will stabilize their budgets, allowing us to proceed without having to give them the raises which so hinder our continued progress and technical improvements in our factories.

—Ford, Jr. (Ezekiel)<sup>6</sup>

Better to drain your seed into a piece of metal, if you do not wish to transform it into a tree of knowledge, than into the defenseless body of a human being, created for friendship, ideas, and sanctity.

—Gandhi

The devices of Mr. Berkman, Mr. Châteloy and Son make it easier for the metropolis to manage the hot-tempered colonial races and to reduce the number of useless revolts against civilization which are based, as we now know, on nothing more than the unsatisfied sexual urges of young men. It's also become much easier to post first-class administrative men to the colonies now that their wives aren't in continual danger of rape, as used to be the case. And another thing: these very administrators' wives, furnished with the company's equipment, no longer need allow, indeed invite, rape.

—Chamberlain

I'm against the Anti-Sexus. It doesn't allow for intimacy, for the living interaction of people's souls, but it's this interaction that's always foremost whenever the sexes unite, even in those cases when the woman is a commodity. This interaction has its own value, independent from sexual intercourse: it's that fleeting feeling of friendship and sweet affinity, that feeling of your loneliness melting away, that no antisexual mechanism can give. I'm for the actual closeness of people, for them breathing into each other's mouths, for one pair of eyes gazing straight into another, for how you truly feel your own soul during the crude act of intercourse, and for enriching it at the expense of some other soul that just happened along. This is why I'm against the Anti-Sexus. I'm for the living, suffering, laughable, stuck-in-a-rut human being who blows his stock of meager life-juice just to feel a moment of fraternity with another derivative being. And I'm also against all this mechanized stuff because I am, was, and ever shall be for what's real, for what's pitiful and laughable, but alive... and poised to become powerful.

—Charlie Chaplin

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<sup>6</sup> Ford's son's name was not Ezekiel, but Edsel; the substitution may be a jab at Ford's documented anti-Semitic sentiments, or, since Ezekiel prophesied the horrific destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, to be followed by the end of Jewish exile and the victorious construction of a new Temple, Platonov could have been hinting that Ford's manufacturing empire was also to undergo spectacular defeat.

***Note from the Company***

While we take C. Chaplin's protest into consideration, and while we do not avoid publishing negative testimonials, the Company also makes it known that our best engineers have been asked to develop a workable design for a new Anti-Sexus that will affect not only the sexual realm but the higher nerve centers simultaneously, thus mechanically creating those priceless feelings of communion with the cosmos and friendship on a higher plane with all living things about which Mr. Chaplin so exhaustively expressed his regret.

The Company expects to be able to create this feeling of communion with life not as an abstract sensation, but as the charming, concrete figure of a woman or man (depending on the customer's sex), a figure of whatever is most intimate and desirable for each customer's psychological structure and nervous system. However, the Company does not expect to achieve broad distribution of this particular instrument model, since it is well established that love—and in Mr. Chaplin's testimonial he is clearly referring to real, albeit transitory, love—love is not a quality common to all people, so we don't expect planning production based on it to be commercially viable. Love, as contemporary science has proven, is a psychopathic condition that is characteristic for certain constitutions predisposed to nerve degeneracy, not for healthy, practical men. Still, we work not only for all ages and all peoples, but also for all organic systems in all their variety, since our Company strives first and foremost for moral order and convenience the world over.

—On behalf of the Company, Mr. Berkman

Once we make coitus an individual act by ousting its live second half, once we remove all obstacles to the exercise of sexual function and render it commonly available, we will be on the direct road to chastity and to the dominance of the principle of rejuvenation: the utilization of our internal secretions, our glandular discharges, inside our own bodies.

—Prof. Steinach<sup>7</sup>

After using the Anti-Sexus you relive your younger days, then sleep soundly. I haven't slept this well in twenty-five years. Some fount of youth that had been running dry in me has begun flowing again. I'm very grateful to the manufacturers of the Anti-Sexus. My daughter has suggested I found a Berkman, Châtelay, and Son Institute of Permanent Youth. I gave the approval and the money for this glad affair.

—Morgan

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Eugen Steinach (1861–1944) was an Austrian researcher into endocrinology who, just before World War I, pioneered the “Steinach operation” (ligation of the vas deferens) in his search for a procedure to restore men's youth, vitality, and sexual vigor. Celebrities, artists, and other public figures testified en masse to the operation's spectacular results.

With the introduction of these antisexual instruments, we have lost the specific set of beautiful and powerful motions accompanying divine passion. This is to be regretted. But we have gained a specific sexual comfort, a certain amount of time saved, the equilibrium of a healthy constitution, and independence from womanly caprice. This is to be welcomed. And another thing: I think that contemporary film will compensate for this lost set of coital motions by purging them of everything that's unconscious, that's beastly and elemental, and replacing them with a powerful, virginal body's airy motion through space.

—Doug. Fairbanks

The future belongs to civilization, not to culture: the future will be won by he who is spiritually dead and intellectually pessimistic. Marriage, styled spiritually after Faust, is inconceivable in the vulgar plane of true civilization; the only thing conceivable there is the mechanical process of discharging excess raw organic force that can't be sublimated into the spirit. The Anti-Sexus machine is yet another herald of the age we are now entering, where civilization is a dead, comfortable building whose foundation is overgrown with the green grass of a lively, but lost, culture.

—Oswald Spengler

The Anti-Sexus machine is utterly indispensable for long trips and very easy to use. It's now absolutely obligatory to include these among the essential supplies of any expedition aiming to be the least bit scientifically organized and equipped. The presence of these machines is an additional plus for the expedition's success.

—Sven Hedin

I heard this little ditty once when I was in Russia: Lucky fellows live with milkmaids. As the rest of us have learned, lads like this have got it made: cream and butter at every turn!

At a time when Europe's growing poorer by the day and Russia's none too rich herself, when not every man will marry a milkmaid, we need a mechanical "milkmaid." The "Anti-Sexus" mechanism has been called forth to take her place. Mankind spends around five hundred billion rubles each year on prostitution, not counting the indirect cost in health, the colossal waste of time, the existence of a whole international class of socially detrimental male and female prostitutes, and so forth and so on.

The money we save, which would total around a trillion rubles a year, would be enough to buy milk, cream, and butter for every man, with no need to make such satisfactory fare dependent on taking a milkmaid to wife.

Yes. But it's the Anti-Sexus, after all, that gave us this savings of a trillion a year and universal access to the milk supply! Therefore it's more effective than any economic reform, no matter how revolutionary.

—Keynes

## The Anti-Sexus

I don't write. Usually I act. I regard the Anti-Sexus as an indispensable requisite for every cultured person, a requisite both at home and on the front. Our king decreed the Anti-Sexus free from all taxes and duties. Women emancipated from the duties and the consequences of sex will become increased assets to our country. Every member of the Fascists' union is obligated to own an Anti-Sexus, and everyone has to have one, from a slovenly bum to our sovereign king.

—Mussolini

Women too shall pass, just like the Crusades. The Anti-Sexus will come upon us, unavoidably, like the morning sun. But it's plain as day: the point is the form, the style of the automatic age, and absolutely not its essence, which doesn't exist. After all, that's one thing there's not enough of in this world: existence. Sweet shame made into state practice, though it remains a treat. Now one doesn't have to live so dimly, as if in a condom.

—Viktor Shklovsky

### *Note from the Company*

Since it is impossible to fit all the testimonials in here, the Company is planning to issue three volumes dedicated specifically to the evaluation of our instruments by global luminaries of thought, feeling, poetry, science, good, utility, social democracy, finance, politics, communism, technical skill, and aestheticism. The upcoming volume will contain the evaluative deliberations of Messrs. Averbakh, Zemlyachka, Kornely Zelinsky, Soong Ching-ling, Bachelis, Grossman-Roshchin, Deterding, S. Budantsev, Lawrence Windrower, Osinsky, General Po-Lu-Ghui, Tarasov-Rodionov, Prof. Westinghouse, Kirshon, and many other respected authorities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Most of these names are of prominent early Soviet literary and political figures, many identified with the writer's group RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) that was dominant until the creation of the Writer's Union in 1932 and whose critics habitually attacked Platonov. Soong Ching-ling (1890–1981) was a Chinese political leader; in 1925, she would have been in the Russian news because her first husband Sun Yat-Sen's KMT (Kuomintang, "Nationalist Party") established an alternative regional government in Guangzhou, which was followed in 1928 by the new KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek's Russian-supported military victory. Some names are invented (Lawrence Windrower and Po-Lu-Ghui, which puns on a dirty word in Russian). George Westinghouse (1846–1914, not a professor) invented the compressed-air brake for trains and went on to be a leader in the electric industry, both pursuits of which Platonov, an engineer who worked on electrification and land reclamation projects, had first-hand knowledge.