

volume of the series finds Claudine in her seventeenth year in Paris, where a long illness causes her hair to be cropped and her contacts limited to her father's older sister and the latter's grandson, Marcel, a pretty and effeminate youth who is absorbed in his own affair with a male schoolmate, which has already made trouble for them at the lycée and provoked the wrathful contempt of Marcel's father. The series continues in the same vein with homoerotic as well as heterosexual interaction among the characters.

Stella Browne, in a psychological study of women authors with lesbian tendencies, mentions Colette as having been involved with two women, the film star Marguerite Moréno and an unnamed foreign noblewoman, of whom character sketches drawn with great discretion figure in *Ces Plaisirs* (1932). The entire setting of Colette's life work is the amoral, sensual world of a coterie of Parisian literati and *rentiers* in the years before World War I—an ambiance in which homosexuality was a subdued, but certainly not a major element. Colette herself enjoyed the company of male homosexuals, especially Jean Cocteau and Jean Marais, in her literary set during the years of her renown as one of the great living French authors.

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Evelyn Gettone

COLOR SYMBOLISM

In addition to their aesthetic aspect, colors acquire symbolic values, which are culturally variable. In Western civilization black is the color of mourning, while in some Asian societies white is. Many men today will avoid wearing lavender or pink because of their "fruity" associations. Yet over the centuries so many hues have been linked to homosexuality

that it would be almost impossible to eschew them all.

According to the poet Martial, several colors were associated with effeminate homosexuality in imperial Rome. He limns an exquisite "who thinks that men in scarlet are not men at all, and styles violet mantles the vesture of women; although he praises native colors and always affects somber hues, grass-green (*galbinus*) are his morals" (I, 96). While scarlet and violet were the traditional colors of effeminacy, an off-green seems to have been the new, "in" color of the day. Martial even uses the *galbinus* shade metaphorically to represent the lifestyle as a whole. In late Victorian England, Robert Hichens' novel *The Green Carnation* (1894) helped to revive the association. In 1929 an American physician, John F. W. Meagher, stated flatly, "Their favorite color is green." Whether it was or not, this assertion took hold in the popular mind, and in the 1950s American high school students avoided green on Thursday, reputed to be "National Fairy Day." Another color associated with the "decadent" 1890s was yellow, because of the London periodical that was almost synonymous with the aesthetic sophistication of that era, *The Yellow Book*. A current Russian term for a gay man is *golubchik*, from *goluboy*, "blue," evidently through association with the "blue blood" of the aristocracy of the Old Regime.

Probably the most enduringly significant sector of the color wheel is, however, the red to purple range (as Martial duly noted two thousand years ago). According to Havelock Ellis, one could not safely walk down the streets of late-nineteenth-century New York wearing a red tie without being accosted, since this garment was then the universal mark of the male prostitute. In gay slang this fashion was referred to as "wearing one's badge." Because of the "scarlet woman," the great Whore of Babylon of the Book of Revelation, that color has acquired a strong association with prostitution and adultery (cf.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*). During the Nazi holocaust homosexual inmates were made to wear a pink triangle, and subsequently gay activists have taken up this symbol as a kind of armorial badge. In Europe the words *rosa* and *rose* (= pink) are widely used. The popularity of this color seems to reflect the contrast boys/blue vs. girls/pink, suggesting gender-role reversal. In American culture the word lavender—a blend of red and blue (as in "lavender lover," *The Lavender Lexicon*, etc.)—almost speaks for itself. Gershon Legman (in his 1941 glossary published as an appendix to George Henry's *Sex Variants*) claimed to relay popular lore when he wrote of seven stages of homosexuality, "from *ga-ga* to the 'deeper tones' of lavender." This shade has a secondary association with scented powder and aromatic flowers, producing an unconscious synaesthetic effect. Beginning with the Romans, it has been customary to refer to florid passages of writing as "purple patches." Reflecting at the end of his life on his many bitter sweet encounters with male prostitutes, Oscar Wilde saluted them as "purple hours" illuminating life's grayness.

In the 1970s some elements of gay-male society observed a back-pocket handkerchief code with colors correlating with one's specific preference. Thus yellow signified an interest in "water sports" (urolagnia), black S/M, and brown scatophilia. The mid-1980s saw public display at rallies and marches of a rainbow "Gay Pride Flag," consisting of six parallel stripes ranging from bright red to deep purple. The juxtaposition of colors stands for the diversity of the gay/lesbian community with regard to ethnicity, gender, and class—perhaps also connoting, in the minds of some, the coalition politics of the Rainbow Alliance headed by Jesse Jackson.

Although the color preferences ascribed to gay people are various, two features, not altogether compatible, stand out. First there is a fondness for mixed hues and off-shades, generally from the

red-to-blue gamut. In keeping with the notion of the "third sex" as an intermediate entity, these hues may be associated with a particular time of day, the transition between daylight and night that is the province of "twilight men." Second, following the stereotype of homosexuals as "screaming" self-dramatizers who flaunt their identity, they are held to be irresistibly attracted to such bright colors as red and purple. These attributed motivations reveal the degree of prejudice that is involved, but over the course of time many gay people have adopted such colors, in part as a signal that can be easily understood by their peers.

See also **Flower Words**.

Wayne R. Dynes

COMEDY

See **Theatre and Drama**.

COMICS

The ultimate origins of this familiar aspect of modern popular culture lie in the illustrated European broadsheets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which were, however, directed toward adults. Among these are a few stray items depicting the execution of contemporary sodomites, as well as lurid images of the conflagration that destroyed the city of Sodom itself.

The nineteenth century saw the appearance of children's books which approximate real comics, but these were not accessible to a mass audience. The first true comic strips were introduced in 1897 as a circulation-building device in the Sunday supplements of the Hearst newspapers. The now-familiar pulp comic book was a creation of the Depression: the first commercial example is *Famous Funnies* of 1934. Although these strips generally affirmed middle-class values, and certainly contained not the slightest overt indication of sex, they were regularly denounced by pundits as a pernicious influence on the young (cf. Fredric Wertham,