

During the 1920s lesbians were stereotyped as affecting a severe version of male formal dress, and indeed some prominent figures such as Radclyffe Hall did adopt this mode, while Marlene Dietrich offered a subtle variant of it in the movies. More recently lesbians have been perceived as preferring somewhat shapeless garments and no makeup. While this look does correspond to the type sometimes known as the "granola dyke," other gay women prefer more elegant dress, of which there are several versions.

Nudism began in Europe in the early twentieth century, and is still more widespread there than in the United States. It is often thought of as being sexually provocative, but in practice nudism is ascetic. The removal of clothes, as in striptease, suggests sexual activity to follow; without clothes one lacks an important means of communication, enticement, and bodily enhancement.

See also **Dandyism; Transvestism.**

Daniel Eisenberg

### COCTEAU, JEAN (1889–1963)

French playwright, poet, novelist, filmmaker, actor, and artist. Cocteau was one of the most famous, controversial, and perplexing of twentieth-century cultural figures.

By 1908 Jean Cocteau was corresponding with Marcel Proust and well on his way to self-promotion in the art world. He became an important contributor to Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Cocteau lived openly with male companions at many times in his life. Grief at the death of the young novelist Raymond Radiguet in 1923 was one cause of his famous turn to opium in the 1920s. During the period 1937–50 his creativity was spurred by his relationship with the actor Jean Marais. Later he adopted the painter Edouard Dermit. Throughout his life, Cocteau was surrounded by a coterie of gay male artists

and celebrities. His homosexuality kept him at a distance from André Breton's Surrealists, who championed heterosexuality.

Cocteau tended not to deal directly with homosexuality in his public work, generally choosing either indirect, displaced, or universal approaches to sexuality. Yet one of his first dramatic works was an adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In his three earliest collections of poems Cocteau treated narcissism and the "love that dare not speak its name." In 1928 he published without signing his name to it *The White Paper*, a story which begins with an open declaration of homosexuality. His first film, *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), has an overall homoerotic and autoerotic ambience. Throughout his career, he made many drawings, including some for Jean Genet's novel *Querelle of Brest* (1947). The frequent themes of doubling, monstrosity, and punishment for love in his work can be linked to his experiences as a sexual outsider, but more rigorous scholarship is needed to go beyond the old clichés.

Cocteau created one of the most extraordinary private mythologies of the twentieth century. Of his voluminous works, some of the best include the films *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) and *Orpheus* (1950), the novel *The Terrible Children* (1929), the plays *The Infernal Machine* (1934), *The Knights of the Round Table* (1937), *The Eagle with Two Heads* (1947), and *Bacchus* (1951), the poetry collections *Opera* (1927) and *Requiem* (1962), and the essay "Opium" (1930). Publication of Cocteau's multivolume diary (1951–63) is now in progress. In 1987 his letters to Jean Marais were published, as earlier his poetry for him had been appended to Marais' *Stories of My Life*. Marais continues to direct Cocteau's plays and preserve the legacy of his friend.

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*Peter G. Christensen*

### COLETTE (1873–1954)

French novelist. Born Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette in a small Burgundian village, she was the daughter of an army captain who had fought in the Crimea and lost a leg in the Italian campaign. Her whole literary career was to be marked by memories of her rural childhood, in which "Claudine's household" was a disorderly but sensual ambiance, with a somewhat eccentric mother, an assortment of pets, a large garden, and all the sensations of the provincial countryside. But the lost paradise of her early years caused regrets later on, when she said: "A happy childhood is a bad preparation for contact with human beings." In 1893 she married Henry Gauthier-Villars, who under the name of Willy was a celebrity of the Paris boulevards, but the marriage was ill-fated, as Willy soon reverted to the ways of a free-roving bachelor. This failure in her first marriage impressed upon the young woman the distance between love and happiness.

Some notebooks that Colette had filled with her childhood memories at Willy's behest were the starting point for her first novel, *Claudine à l'école* (1900), followed by a whole series with the same heroine which found its way to the stage. The sequel was Colette's slow conquest of her marital and literary independence. In 1906 she obtained a divorce and began to live alone in a modest apartment in Paris, soon "protected" by a strange creature, Missy, the youngest daughter of the Duc de Morny, who possessed money and a passion for the theatre. The two women appeared on the stage in daring pantomimes, a period of her life in which Colette struggled to earn her livelihood and which she recorded in *La Vagabonde* (1911) and *L'Envers du music-hall* (1913). Her

second marriage in 1912, this time to Henry de Jouvenel, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Le Matin*, to which she contributed an article a week, was no happier than the first. For a time she abandoned both the stage and her writing career and gave birth to a daughter. World War I revived her journalistic bent, and she was sent as a reporter to the Italian front. She also composed a work entitled *La Paix chez les bêtes* (1916), which depicts her withdrawal from the world of human relations into the intimate sphere of household pets. In 1920 Colette published her masterpiece *Chéri*, whose male hero confronts Léa, a woman of fifty who has not "abandoned her search for happiness."

In 1923 she divorced her second husband, and also published *Le Blé en herbe*, whose serialization by *Le Matin* was halted so as not to offend the readers. By now a successful writer, in possession of a villa at Saint-Tropez, "la Treille muscate," she issued one novel after another on the theme of the eternal combat between the sexes. In 1935 Colette married Maurice Goudekot, her faithful admirer, and settled permanently at the Palais-Royal in Paris. In her last years she composed a few more important works, among them *Gigi* (1945), while basking in her reminiscences and her literary fame.

Colette's work was more autobiographical than anyone could have admitted when it first appeared. The Claudine series features a tomboyish girl who at fifteen develops an intense crush on a pretty assistant mistress, Aimée, who tutors her in English at home, but the affair is interrupted when the domineering headmistress herself turns fond of the assistant. Aimée abandons Claudine to become the pampered favorite of her superior. Claudine even eavesdrops one day upon an intimate moment enjoyed by the two women in their dormitory quarters while their classes are running wild in the schoolrooms. Later, the headmistress implies to Claudine that she might have replaced the junior mistress as her favorite. The second