

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,

Seduction of the Innocent, New York, 1953].

Batman, appearing in 1939, featured the adventures of a playboy detective and his teenage ward, Robin. Although the relationship is portrayed as a simple mentor-protégé one, some teenage male readers were able to project something stronger into it. This aspect was certainly flirted with in the campy television offshoot beginning in 1966, though this series reflects a much changed cultural climate. In 1941 there appeared *Wonderwoman*, featuring an Amazon with special powers living on an all-woman island. This strip—contrary to the expressed wishes of its creators—served as a focus for lesbian aspirations. In the 1970s it was rediscovered by the women's movement as a proto-feminist statement.

In the late 1940s "Blade" drew several illustrated stories, including "The Barn" and "Truck Hiker," that can be considered predecessors of the gay comics. Circulated underground, they have been officially published only in recent years. Somewhat later the wordless strips of supermacho types created by Tom of Finland began to circulate in Europe.

It was the American **counterculture** of the 1960s, however, which first made possible the exploration of taboo subjects in a context of crumbling censorship restrictions. In 1964 a Philadelphia gay monthly, *Drum*, began serializing *Harry Chess* by Al Shapiro ("A. Jay"). Modeled on a popular television series, *Harry Chess* was both macho and campy, though explicit sex scenes were veiled. In the 1970s no-holds-barred examples appeared drawn by such artists as Bill Ward, Sean, and Stephen (*Meatman*).

Following the practice of mainstream magazines, the Los Angeles *Advocate* had a regular one-panel series by Joe Johnson named *Miss Thing*. The hero of this popular classic was an outrageous queen of a type that gay liberation was trying to make obsolete. Subsequently *Christopher Street* published a series of

New Yorker-style cartoons that capture, perhaps all too well, the sophistication of Manhattan's upper East Side.

In 1980 Howard Cruse, together with his publisher Dennis Kitchen, started a series of pulp books called *Gay Comix* that included work by both men and women. Out of this work evolved Cruse's gay-male couple, Wendell and Ollie, with whose more-or-less real-life problems many *Advocate* readers could identify.

European artists also developed strips. France's Hippolyte Romain's *Les Chéries* provides an acid portrait of older Parisian queens. In Spain Nazario's *Anarcoma*, featuring a macho transvestite, played fast-and-loose with gender categories. Probably Europe's most original contribution, however, is the work of Düsseldorf-based Ralf König. The often ludicrous situations of his homely characters highlight banal, yet touching aspects of everyday gay male life.

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Wayne R. Dynes

COMING OUT

The cultural and psychological process by which persons relate to a particular model of homosexuality by internalizing a sense of **identity** as "homosexual" or "lesbian" in accordance with that model is called "coming out." As there are different (if any) identity models of homosexuality in different cultures, the coming out process also shows wide variation.

Conceptual Problems. In the industrialized countries of Northern Europe and North America, the process can be applied to anyone with a substantial erotic interest in others of the same gender, and its end result is identification as a "homosexual" or "lesbian." In much of the rest of the world, the process concerns primarily the sexually receptive male, not