

means so much respected in Italy as it should be; but they laugh instead of burning, and the women talk of it as a pity in a man of talent."

In the twentieth century Florence saw a fervent cultural flowering, to which such homosexuals as the writers Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893–1973), Piero Santi (1912–), Aldo Palazzeschi (1885–1974), and the painter Ottone Rosai (1893–1957) contributed. The present scene in Florence is characterized by a special concentration of leather locales, which attract homosexuals from other northern Italian cities, as well as foreigners.

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FLOWER SYMBOLISM

In classical antiquity the theme of picking flowers represented enjoyment of life's transient pleasures, which must be gathered before they fade: the *carpe diem* motif. For many cultures the budding of plant life in spring represents nature's resplendent, but ever temporary self-renewal. Ancient pederasts wrote poignantly of the *anthos*, or "bloom" of the adolescent sex object destined to fade all too soon.

The idea that specific flowers have meanings, that there is a "language of flowers," seems to derive from Turkish eighteenth-century practice, when flowers served to make up a secret code for love messages in the harem. This concept of the *selam*, a flower code able to express a range of meanings, spread to western Europe, so that by 1820 Victor Hugo spoke of

"doux messages où l'amour parle avec des fleurs!" In 1884 Kate Greenaway summed up Victorian lore on the subject in her book *The Language of Flowers*. One dialect she did not present was the homosexual one, which was then known to a very small group. In 1894 Robert Hichens' novel, *The Green Carnation*, popularized that flower as the distinguishing mark of the aesthete, though the Wilde scandals in the following year led quickly to the abandonment of that particular badge. Of course flowers featured prominently in the interior-decoration schemes of the Arts and Crafts Movement and they were central to the fin-de-siècle imagery of the Art Nouveau in design and the minor arts.

The association of pansies with male homosexuals is documented in America as early as 1903. Dressing up in overelegant fashion may be called pansying up, while an effeminate boy may be called pansified. Other flowers that have been associated with male homosexuality are lilies and daffodils (the latter is jocular). The use of violets as a gift in Edouard Bourdet's play *The Captive*, a major event of the 1926 Broadway season, caused an association of this flower with lesbianism that lasted several decades.

The slang term for the act of several persons having sexual intercourse with each other simultaneously is a daisy chain. While such a gathering might be heterosexual, the usual interpretation is that of a male-homosexual orgy.

The reasons for the floral metaphor are various. Botanically, flowers have both male and female organs of reproduction. In the early nineteenth century the study of this phenomenon led to the creation of the term bisexuality, though it is doubtful whether this recognition had much direct impact on the popular imagination. Flowers assume complex shapes and colors as a means of passive sexual attraction, since they lure insects who will bear their pollen to their partners. Then too they often have a scent, something to which homosexuals are allegedly addicted.

In Greek mythology the death of heroes could give rise to flowers and other plants. Especially touching is the story of the lovers Calamus and Carpus. When the latter was accidentally drowned, Calamus, inconsolable in his grief, found solace in being changed to a reed. Then the beautiful youth Narcissus, having spurned the love of a nymph, was caused by the goddess Aphrodite to feel unquenchable love for himself. At length he gained relief by being turned into the flower that still bears his name. As noted, the ancient Greeks described the bloom of a teenaged boy as the *anthos*, "blossom, flower," a term which captures not only the rosy glow of youthful beauty but its transience.

In our society flowers, because of their delicacy and beauty, are most often given by a man to a woman. Flower names, such as Blossom, Camille, Daisy, Lily, and Petunia, are given only to women (though at one time they were assumed by gay men as "camp names"). The adjective florid means ornate and excessive; it can also describe an advanced stage of disease. Finally, flowers can be raised in hothouses to assume striking, even bizarre shapes and colors. They represent the triumph of culture over nature, a principle that also serves to buttress our society's stereotype of the homosexual.

See also **Color Symbolism**.

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FOLKLORE, GAY MALE

Traditional aspects of culture—learned behavior—that are generally passed on orally or by example instead of through writing are usually classified as folklore. All people, regardless of education and social status, have many types of folklore. Often this is divided into such broad categories as oral tradition, nonverbal communication, and material culture. Each of these concepts can be further broken down

into genres—specific types of folklore.

Homosexual men have developed a large number of traditions, including an argot (a form of language used by people who wish not to be understood by outsiders), jokes, legends, personal experience narratives, clothing and jewelry used as symbols, and a type of behavior known as "camp."

Language and Humor. The language used by some homosexual men is quite developed, and it is much more enduring than slang. The words and phrases cover a range of subjects; the largest group is made up of words used to describe various types of people. For example, **queen** is a standard term some homosexual men use to refer to themselves and others; it can be used derogatorily or as a term of endearment, a sort of affectionate insult. This term is frequently used in compounds, like "flaming queen"; "flaming" means "carrying on in a blatantly effeminate manner" and is probably derived from "flamboyant." Some gay expressions have entered the general vocabulary, most notably "to come out of the closet" and the word **gay** itself, as referring to sexual orientation. Such a colorful language commonly results in puns and other types of word play.

Humor is one of the hallmarks of the folklore of homosexual men. The most familiar genre of humor is the joke. The following riddling question shows how jokes can carry messages: "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?—Only one, but the light bulb has to really want to change." The joke is based on the stereotype that homosexual people are mentally ill and in need of professional help, and that psychiatrists can "change" them, making them heterosexual. But the punch line carries the subject further, making the point that homosexual people are in control of their lives, and psychiatrists cannot "change" them. By implying that gays do not *want* to change, this joke offers a psychological victory over oppression.