

triumphantly elected to the coveted post of San Francisco supervisor. He quickly became a nationally known figure, whom many believed destined to rise to higher office.

Later mythology has portrayed Harvey Milk as a radical leftist, but more careful scrutiny shows that he retained elements of his conservative background to the very end. At bottom he held an almost Jeffersonian concept of the autonomy of small neighborhoods, prospering through small businesses and local attention to community problems. His belief in citizen participation led him to stress voting, something radicals often reject as irrelevant. Above all, by not painting himself into a corner through a set of inflexible doctrinaire principles, Milk was able to develop the broad base he needed for acquiring and keeping power.

Milk's public career was tragically short. On the Board of Supervisors he was frequently opposed by his colleague Dan White, a militant defender of "family values." After White first resigned and then sought vainly to reclaim his post, he decided to shoot Mayor Moscone, who had thwarted him. On November 27, 1978, he shot not only Moscone but his enemy Harvey Milk. In the subsequent trial White's lawyers mounted the notorious "twinky defense," claiming that his judgment was impaired through consuming too much junk food. The judge sentenced him to only seven years, eight months for voluntary manslaughter. This verdict triggered a major riot on the part of San Francisco's gay community. After White's release from prison he took his own life, ending the sordid chapter in American politics that he had begun.

Despite his differences with the San Francisco gay establishment and his occasionally unethical behavior, Milk succeeded in riding the crest of a wave that had been gathering strength for some years. During the *beatnik*/hippie period the city had become a mecca for all sorts of disaffected people, while retaining its old eth-

nic mosaic. Milk anticipated the later strategy of the "rainbow coalition," but because of his personal gifts, and the time and place in which he lived, he was able to make it work more effectively for gay and lesbian politics than any other single individual has done before or since.

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### MILLAY, EDNA ST. VINCENT (1892-1950)

American poet. Born in Rockland, Maine, she attended Vassar College (1913-17), and then settled in New York's Greenwich Village, where she was at first associated with the rebellious bohemianism then at its height. However, her 1923 volume *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems* confirmed an independent maturity, which she had already projected in her precocious "Renaissance" of 1912. Her work drew not only on the austere landscape of her childhood in Maine, but on the Elizabethan and Cavalier poets which, thanks in part to T.S. Eliot, were then undergoing a revival. She was one of the last poets of the twentieth century to master the sonnet.

Millay's poetic drama, *The Lamp and the Bell*, written during a stay in Paris after her graduation, concerns the undying devotion between two women. Octavia, the authority figure in a school that seems to be Vassar, holds that the friendship between her own daughter and the princess is unhealthy and will not last. But she is mistaken, and the women prove their passionate devotion until one of them dies. While Millay had always written heterosexual verse, several of her sonnets of this period are deliberately ambiguous as to gender. She became more specific after her marriage in 1923, excising the ambiguity

from her new work—a tacit confession that the earlier poems concern women. Many critics believe that the quality of her poetry gradually declined as Millay grew older (she wrote nothing in the last decade of her life). This decline may be linked with her felt need to suppress one half of her sensibility.

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### MINIONS AND FAVORITES

Since the late sixteenth century these terms have been given to the intimates of kings and queens who accorded sexual favors to their royal protectors in return for honors, gifts, and positions of influence. In particular, the *mignons* were the openly effeminate courtiers of **Henri III** of France, who behaved in a manner well calculated to scandalize the puritanically minded. But this was no new phenomenon in European history: as far back as classical antiquity, when homosexual conduct was not so stigmatized, rulers had bestowed titles, honors, and estates on handsome youths who shared their beds—and often exercised a decisive role in the political life of the court. The relationship of the Roman emperor **Hadrian** to his favorite **Antinous** was the outstanding instance of such a liaison. **Edward II** and **Piers Gaveston**, **James I** and the Duke of Buckingham, **William of Orange** and **William Bentinck** are later examples from British history.

In an age when power was concentrated in the hands of a sovereign whose every whim was law, those who could gratify his sexual tastes often became his advisers as well, though the two functions could also be kept rigorously distinct. The power could also be exercised in the opposite direction, so that the term acquired a pejorative nuance as designating an individual with no political will of his own, totally dependent upon his protector or

benefactor. The role of female favorites has been more frequently acknowledged by historians who so titled the chief mistress of the monarch, who was often the de facto ruler of the court, with the power to disgrace and exile a rival and her clique of followers. The favorites might have their own entourage of lesser courtiers anxious for the favors to be had through the intermediary of the royal bed partner, so that elements of jealousy and ambition complicated the political struggles behind the scenes. Naturally heterosexual animosity, particularly in eras when homosexuality was strongly tabooed, could lead to conspiracies that would endanger the position or even the life of the favorite.

The status was therefore a coveted but precarious one. A favorite whose beauty was fading or had made a false move in the deadly game of court politics could be supplanted by a younger and more adroit rival, as others were always ready and waiting to occupy the monarch's couch. But the rewards of such a position were great enough to ensure a constant stream of aspirants, often the ambitious sons of members of the lesser nobility who capitalized on their looks and virility—and were not infrequently required with arranged marriages into influential families that betokened wealth and power. There was no sharp dividing line between the heterosexual and homosexual spheres in antiquity and even in much of the later period of European history. For some rulers marriage was largely pro forma, as in the case of **Frederick the Great** of Prussia, who made no secret of his preference for the male sex.

With the coming of the constitutional state and of parliamentary rule in the nineteenth century the significance of the minions faded. Their modern counterpart would be the intimates of figures in the musical and entertainment world (such as **Rock Hudson** and **Liberace**)—intimates who bask in the fame and multimillion dollar incomes of these celebrities in return for the sexual pleasures they bestow.