

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.

And in other spheres of life physical beauty and sexual versatility can still be rewarded with access to the private domains of the wealthy and powerful. The history of the minions and favorites reveals the erotic undercurrents beneath the surface of political life that could direct the tide which led some on to fortune, others only to disappointment and death.

Warren Johansson

### MINORITY, HOMOSEXUALS AS A

In the 1970s some U.S. gay leaders began to speak confidently of gay men and lesbians "emerging as a people"—a stable minority within an America made up of a mosaic of such groups. Apart from the problem of whether there is to be one people or two—homosexuals per se vs. gay men and lesbians—such claims raise serious conceptual, historical, and sociological issues.

*Historical Precedents and Parallels.* Minorities in the sense of an array of peoples ruled by a dominant group have existed at least since the formation of the Assyrian empire in the ninth century B.C. Yet as long as the rule of the *Herrenvolk* remained unchallenged, the status of the incorporated groups remained unproblematic. The question of ethnic minorities first attracted modern analysis in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the end of the nineteenth century, when the introduction of a parliamentary system had made the issue acute. In 1898 Georg Jellinek contrasted the older concept of a parliamentary minority, that is a fluid and changeable interest group, with the more fixed situation of the minority as an ethnic or religious collectivity, whose membership is determined not by the changing tides of political opinion but by loyalty to the community in which one was born.

To be sure this late nineteenth-century situation had parallels. The Ottoman Empire retained its *millet* system,

granting official recognition to what might be called national minorities, though these were organized on a religious basis. In the United Kingdom from 1707 onwards there were three subordinate entities: Wales, Ireland, and Scotland—the last possessing *de jure*, but not *de facto*, equality with England. Two characteristics seem essential in minorities of this general type: (1) they are communities of lineage or genealogy in the sense that a Romanian child is born of Romanian parents, a Welsh child of Welsh ones; and (2) each ethnic group has a territory which it occupies or occupied and which its members regard as their homeland, even if they reside, say, in Vienna or London.

The minority issue took on general European urgency when the representatives of the powers met in Paris in 1919 to redraw the map of Europe in the wake of World War I. The attempt to square logic with the principle of allocating the spoils to the victors led to many anomalies. In this atmosphere of the clash of conflicting rights, Kurt Hiller, the German left thinker and homosexual activist, conceived the idea of the sexual minority. In an address of September 19, 1921, he insisted that "human beings are marked not only by differences of race and character type, but also of . . . sexual orientation."

The coming of the world Depression in 1929 caused the issue to fall dormant, as economic problems dwarfed all else. In the 1940s in the United States, however, the second-class status of Negroes evoked increasing discussion and concern, which were to eventuate in the mass Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. As early as 1951, however, Donald Webster Cory (pseud. of Edward Sagarin) organized his widely read book *The Homosexual in America* around the idea of gay men and women as a minority who should be accorded their just rights. Cory and other leaders of the new homophile rights movement saw the opportunity of making a persuasive appeal to the traditional Anglo-Saxon virtue of fairness, while at the same