

to the specifically erotic has also been felt to be a defect of the term homosexual itself, hence the temporary popularity of the word **homophile**.

In its remote origins, the term orientation stems from architecture, where it signifies the alignment of temples and churches on an east–west axis (from *oriens*, “east”). In psychology it has come to mean awareness of one’s position or direction with reference to time, place, or identity of persons; also it denotes a tendency to move toward a source of stimulation or a particular direction, as in tropisms. From this nexus it is but a short step to the concept of *sexual* orientation. The widespread adoption of the expression is related to the 1970s popularity of such compounds as action-oriented, identity-oriented, and success-oriented. It is possible that the semantic modulation into the erotic sphere was anticipated by the late-nineteenth-century German use, with respect to sex, of the term *Richtung*, “direction.”

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ORIGIN MYTHS

See *Inventor Legends*.

ORPHEUS

Greek mythological figure, the son of the muse Calliope, noted for his magical art in music and poetry. Whether Orpheus was a historical personality is disputed, but if so he lived in the generation before the Trojan War, therefore in the thirteenth century B.C.

Orpheus in Antiquity. A number of important aspects of the career of Orpheus are recounted by ancient Greek writers. Of Thracian origin, Orpheus possessed musical skill that could enchant animals and plants and cause them to do his will. Trees would transplant themselves for him, while birds and even fish gathered to hear his song. As a member of the expedition of the Argonauts, he beat time for the rowers and stilled harsh winds.

When his wife Eurydice died of the bite of a poisonous snake and was taken to Hades, Orpheus obtained her release by giving a concert for the ruler of the Underworld. Warned not to look at Euridice on the trip home, Orpheus yielded to temptation and lost her forever. Orpheus then gathered around him a group of Thracian young men, to whom he introduced the new practice of **pederasty**. Greek vase paintings show this epebic entourage enchanted by the splendors of his song. Yet Orpheus’ influence provoked resentment among the forsaken female companions of his new lovers. The women—sometimes identified with the maenads of the Dionysiac cult—ganged up on him, attacking the musician with spears, axes, and stones. Orpheus was dismembered, his head separated from the rest. Eventually the head floated away, still singing, together with his lyre. Orpheus’ head washed ashore on the island of Lesbos, where it received the honor of a shrine. The shrine could still be visited in ancient times, and reputedly the head might be heard faintly singing. Some scribes claimed to have taken down the words, which then presumably provided the texts for the Orphic hymns. Around these hymns developed a religious cult, Orphism, whose role and significance are still the object of debate by historians.

Most images of Orpheus in Greek and Roman art are either representative depictions of him as singer or dramatic scenes of his later career—his leadership of the male band in Thrace, his death, and the survival of the head. These last events were important to the Greeks not only because they laid the foundation for his influence after death, but because he was regarded as the **inventor** of pederasty. Although he was not the only candidate for this honor, his nomination reflects the Greek penchant for attributing significant cultural achievements to particular individuals. The Eurydice episode, which in modern consciousness has become virtually synonymous with Orpheus, was less important to the Greeks, and may

even be a later grafting onto the earlier torso of legend.

The Fortunes of Orpheus. The Middle Ages had a curiously divided concept of Orpheus. To some early Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, the element of cosmic harmony seemed uppermost, and he was even compared to Christ. During the later Middle Ages, however, the singer was subject to moralization: as a sodomite, he was seen as deserting his fate.

It was left to the neo-Platonic circles of fifteenth-century Florence, with their fondness for merging pagan wisdom with a rarified Christianity, to rehabilitate Orpheus as seer, musician, and lover of men. The Greek Orphic hymns, now read once more, were hailed as evidence of Orpheus' skill as a mystical theologian. In 1480, apparently, Angelo Poliziano (Politian) created for the court of Mantua his brilliant short play, *La Favola di Orfeo*. At Mantua Poliziano could have inspected the frescoes of the life and death of Orpheus done by Andrea Mantegna six years before. In his play Poliziano boldly states that after losing Eurydice Orpheus turned with great zest to his own sex. The Italian humanist's description of Orpheus' later career echoes the Latin poet Ovid, with some touches of his own. A lover of youths, Orpheus "plucks the new flowers, the springtime of the better sex when men are all lithe and slender."

The finest artistic representation of the revived ancient Orpheus is by a northern painter, Albrecht Dürer. In a masterly drawing of 1494 he reworked an earlier Mantegna design to show a heroic Orpheus—virtually a pagan martyr—dying at the hands of frenzied maenads. The banderole contains a German inscription reading "Orfeus der erst puseran" (Orpheus the first bugger), a blunt expression by which Dürer acknowledged the musician's distinction as the inventor of homosexuality.

In the second half of the sixteenth century the chill winds of the Counterre-

formation gradually suppressed knowledge of the homoerotic themes of classical antiquity. Thus Ottavio Rinuccini's Florentine opera *Euridice* of 1600 deals only with the married Orpheus—he even brought Eurydice back to her husband in a happy ending. This tradition of suppressing his later career has been generally followed in all the arts. Toward the end of the nineteenth century there was a revival of the tragic Orpheus, as seen in paintings by Odilon Redon and Álvarez de Sotomayor, but usually as an emblem of the alienated artist, and not as a sexual innovator. To the modern gay movement was left the task of reviving the homoerotic Orpheus.

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ORTON, JOE (JOHN KINGSLEY) (1933–1967)

English playwright and novelist.

In the 1960s, Orton's works shocked British audiences and had a significant impact on the direction of contemporary drama, despite the slender canon he had produced before he was bludgeoned to death in 1967 by his long-time lover, Kenneth Halliwell, in a murder–suicide, sparked by artistic as well as sexual jealousies.

Orton, self-educated under Halliwell's guidance after the two met while students at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, offered a cynical view of human nature, grounded in violence, sexuality, exploitation, greed, narcissism, and ruthlessness, in plays that are nonetheless witty, urbane, and stylized. An artistic descendent of Oscar Wilde, Orton wrote drama that can be thought of as either