

bly as a result of this development that in the last years of his life he decided to seek protection in the church, becoming a priest.

Nonetheless, as late as 1564, in pronouncing the oration at the funeral of Michelangelo, the impenitent writer could not bring himself to omit (however brief and prudent the mention) of the bonds that linked the great sculptor to Gherardo Perini and Tommaso de' Cavalieri.

One year later Varchi followed Michelangelo. His death ended a cycle of homosexual intellectuals that had started with Marsilio Ficino and closed with the imposition of the new rigid climate of the Counterreformation.

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Giovanni Dall'Orto

VARIANT

This term, used both as adjective and as noun, enjoyed a limited currency in the 1940s and 1950s as a synonym of **homophile**. It probably owed its origin to the wish to avoid the unfortunate connotations which such terms as **pervert** and **deviate** had acquired by contamination from the older moralizing vocabulary, so that the latter designations were completely unacceptable to the gay community and its sympathizers. Two works that featured the word in their titles were George William Henry's *Sex Variants* (New York, 1941), a collection of risqué sexual biographies of homosexual men and women assembled by his collaborator Alfred A. Gross, and Jeannette Foster's classic study *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (New York, 1956).

While the term could have been applied to the whole range of departures from conventional sex expression, in prac-

tice it was limited to the homosexual, the underlying notion being that homosexuality is a part of the spectrum of normal sexual activity, not some willful or depraved aberration. Hence the usage was an effort to locate homosexual expression in the domain of the biological rather than of the pathological—to guard against the "medicalization" of the subject. In her **biographies** Barbara Grier drew a distinction between overt lesbianism and "variant" behavior in which the homosexual expression is latent or even denied. Perhaps because of its blandness and ambiguity, the term largely faded from the literature of the 1960s and later as a positive "gay consciousness" emerged.

Warren Johansson

VARIETY, REVUE, AND CABARET ENTERTAINMENT

Forthright presentation of homosexuality in popular entertainment was not uncommon so long as the deviant was depicted as an outrageous freak: a mincing effeminate in the case of men, a tough bull-dyke in the case of women.

Earlier History. At the beginning of the twentieth century French topical revues teemed with such caricatures; one presented a tableau of an ephebe crowning Count Adelswärd Fersen with roses. In *La Revue de Cluny* and *Je veux du nu, na!* (both 1908), Prussian officers were boldly lampooned as "queers" in the wake of the Eulenburg scandal. In the 1920s, the American vaudevillian Elsie Janis was startled to find that the Parisian revue in which she starred contained a lesbian sketch and a tableau of Henri III tatting with his minions. After World War I, the comedian O'dett brought homosexual gags into the French music hall and the clown Rhum played a "fairy" in his circus routine *La Cabine miraculeuse*. But a sharp dividing line between life and art had always been maintained. At the Chat Noir cabaret, Maurice Donnay's shadowplay

Ailleurs (Elsewhere, 1889) was hailed as a masterpiece, one of its episodes featuring entwined lesbians and a caricatured androgyne. Yet when Colette Willy performed at the Folies Bergère in a sketch, "Le Rêve d'Égypte" ("The Dream of Egypt," 1907), in which her sapphic lover, the Marquise de Belbeuf (d. 1844), portrayed a male painter infatuated with his model, the reaction was hissing and scandal.

In the United States, the trade journal *Burlesque* announced hopefully in 1916, "The days of the . . . sissy . . . are over. They have all been worked to death." This did not prevent their persistence in smart revue, and a generation later one could find Bert Lahr and Ray Bolger camping it up in a parody of *Design for Living* in *Life Begins at 8:40* (by D. Freedman, 1934). Fannie Brice, one of the great headliners of the Ziegfeld Follies, made no secret that her trusted aide and adviser was the maidenly Roger Davis.

Most nightclubs catering to a specialized clientele provided some sort of performance: the writer Katherine Mansfield was seen in a one-woman show à la Ruth Draper in a London lesbian club in 1913. Homosexual cabarets in Weimar Berlin were regular tourist attractions. The Eldorado-Diele featured such attractions as the ball-walker Luziana (billed as "Mann oder Frau?," "Man or Woman?"); the Alexander-Palast gave Saturday shows starring the best variety performers of the city, including Mieke the female impersonator. But the outstanding and outspoken gay comedian, Wilhelm Bendow (1884–1950), was beloved by straight and gay audiences alike. In the guise of a scatter-brained "fairy," he insinuated pungent innuendo, blasting politicians and society fads. His fans included the Nazis who allowed him to go on performing until 1943 when the war went sour for them, and he was banned for too much frankness.

Greenwich Village in New York also provided tourist attractions: "during the twenties and thirties, there were many

nightclubs in the area which featured homosexuals on public exhibition, either as part of the show or as paid sitters or mixers in the crowd. . . . These deviates drew such crowds that many paid homosexuals were only acting that way for a fee" (Leo Klein, *You Are Not Alone*, 1959). Wartime travel restrictions, military and, later, municipal police interference curtailed this type of freak-show. Black clubs in Harlem, tolerated by the authorities as peripheral folk-culture, remained open in advertising the predilections of the performers: Bessie Smith, Gladys Bentley, "Moms" Mabley, Ada "Bricktop" Smith, and others.

After World War II. Post-war revues emphasized glamour drag and the impersonation of female superstars, making an appeal to audiences of either sexual persuasion. But the increase of homosexual consciousness gave rise to comedians such as Michael Greer and Wayland Flowers with his ventriloquial Egeria, Madame; their jokes could best be appreciated by an in-crowd. In England, popular comedy has always displayed a broad streak of camp much appreciated by the mass public, which manages to segregate it mentally from its condemnation of real-life sexuality: comedians like Frankie Howerd, Kenneth Williams, and Larry Grayson have exploited this, particularly through *double-entendre*.

Glamour drag made a comeback in the 1970s with La Grande Eugène in Paris, Dizi Croquettes in Rio de Janeiro, and even Zou at the Blue Angel in New York. With gay liberation, "alternative cabaret" became more vocal and evident. In England, Bloodlips continued to use outrageous drag, self-aware camp, and outworn variety conventions to make political statements. Three-man operations like the Terry Towel Show and The Insinuendos played in pubs and clubs throughout London, to mixed audiences, with great success in the late 1980s. The West German equivalent was the three

Tornados (Gunther Tews, Holger Klotzbach, and Arnulf Rating), founded in 1977.

The first gay revues in the United States were flashy commercial enterprises like Fred Silver's *In Gay Company* (1975). But more extreme drag groups like Hot Peaches and "gender-bender" concepts heralded more politically satirical enterprises. Typical is the five-man United Fruit Company, which arose in 1985: its targets included AIDS, gentrification, U.S. interference in Central America, and TV commercials. San Francisco fostered Gay Comedy Nights at the community arts center, the Valencia Rose, from 1981 to 1985; performers who cut their teeth there later constituted *Can't Keep a Straight Face*, a three-man/three-woman revue which resembles traditional cabaret in its reliance on sketches and in its satirical point. In other cities as well, the emergence of the gay audience from underground and its merging with a "with-it" public has encouraged more elaborate entertainments than mere microphone jockeys; for example, Boston's Club Cabaret has begun to sponsor regular musical revues (*The Ten Percent Revue*, 1987; *Disappearing Act*, 1988).

Lesbian Performers. British lesbian comics have often managed to walk the knife-edge between radical statement and commercial success: Karen Parker and Debby Klein were cited as one of the three top cabaret acts in England in 1987. Siren Theatre Company created a parodic Western, *Hotel Destiny* (1988), which simultaneously spoofed stereotypical film roles and illusions of personality. American lesbian performance in the mid-1980s has centered around the WOW cafe in Manhattan's East Village. In a parody of talk-show formats, Alina Troyana would appear both as the outrageously "femme" Carmelita Tropicana and the "butch" Julio Iglesia to send up traditional gender identities within the lesbian community. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver of the Split Britches Company comprise a doubles act

that shifts between these roles. While some stand-up comics, such as Terry Baum, graphically and hilariously depict lesbian sexuality, others, such as Kate Clinton, who began performing at feminist conferences and musical events, have had to tailor their material to more mixed audiences when they moved to comedy clubs. Achieving split focus has not proved a problem for Lily Tomlin, using material by Jane Wagner; having begun as a mainstream comedian, she has become bolder and franker as her particular constituency has grown more conspicuous.

Laurence Senelick

VASE PAINTING, GREEK

Introduced during the Neolithic period of prehistory, ceramic pots were the all-purpose containers of the ancient world. They were used for eating and drinking as well as for long-term storage. In order to increase their value, or make the wares inside more attractive, many vases, especially those intended for the upper classes, bore incised or painted decoration.

In Greece during the Mycenaean period in the second millennium, figural decorations appeared on vases, though none is erotic as far as present knowledge goes. In the succeeding "dark age," vase painting became austere geometrical, with schematic animals and human figures appearing only occasionally. A wave of Near Eastern influence enriched this meagre repertoire, heralding the emergence of the full-blown black-figure style featuring an elaborate iconography of mythological and everyday-life scenes. Leading potters and painters, especially at Athens, began to sign their work as a mark of pride. About 530 B.C. a fundamental change occurred in the technique of Greek vase painting, with red figures in reserve against a black ground, a field reversal of the contrast that had been the hallmark of the black-figure mode. Iconographical conventions continued, however, basically unchanged.