

There are, arguably, many starting points for an exploration of LGBTQ literature. References to gender diversity and homoerotic activity recur throughout many cultural and literary traditions, Eastern as well as Western. Ancient Greek poets Sappho and Theocritus, for example, celebrate homoerotic desire, as do their later Roman counterparts Catullus and Martial. In his *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, the Greek philosopher Plato extolled the chaste love between men as the highest form of emotional intimacy. (It is from his name that the word “platonic” is derived.) His works helped shape the same-sex sonnet tradition from the Renaissance forward; they are key source texts as well for modern LGBTQ writers.

“LGBTQ” is itself a very recent Western acronym, one that has been in circulation only since the 1990s. This is also the case for “transgender,” the “T” in LGBTQ. Yet, it seems silly to restrict a discussion of LGBT literature to the last twenty or so years. The term “homosexual” (“der Homosexuale”) was coined by the Austro-Hungarian journalist and human rights advocate Karl-Maria Kertbeny in 1869 (Tobin, “Kertbeny’s ‘Homosexuality’” 3), and by 1900, both “homosexual” and “heterosexual” had made their way into English. Within dominant Western cultural contexts, twenty-first-century conceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality may differ from those of the late nineteenth century, but there is nonetheless a great deal of overlap. Perhaps, then, the most reasonable starting point for an overview of LGBTQ literature is at the end of the nineteenth century, by which time a modern understanding of sexuality and gender as identity categories was in place in Europe and the United States.

### Oscar Wilde

Within this historical and cultural framework, the most influential English-language writer at the turn of the century was Oscar Wilde

(1854–1900). Wilde is a gay icon, important not only because of the literature that he produced, but also because of his life story and, in particular, his arrest, trial, and subsequent imprisonment for “gross indecency.” Until his arrest in 1895, Wilde was a well-regarded and highly successful writer, known for his witty, epigrammatic style. Much of his work is parodic and subversive and offers an arch critique of social and literary norms. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891) and his comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) are cases in point. Indeed, a camp sensibility, so closely identified with gay culture, characterizes both his writing and his person. Writing in 1964, Susan Sontag (1933–2004), who was herself lesbian, argued that camp should be understood as “a certain mode of aestheticism ... [a] way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon,” which privileges not “beauty, but [rather] the degree of artifice, of stylization” (277). In terms of gender, camp turns on inversion so that, for example, “What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine” (Sontag 279). Yet, as Claude J. Summers has observed, for all his iconic status, Wilde is “an unlikely martyr and an ambiguous one” (743). Joseph Bristow has examined Wilde’s “fatal effeminacy” (16–54): the dandyism that marked his own personal style as well as some of the characters that he himself holds up for critique. Using slightly different terms, Summers reaches a similar conclusion in his analysis of Wilde’s story “The Portrait of Mr. W. H.” (1889). Summers explains, “On one level, the story is merely a pleasant speculation on the identity of the young man of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* ... and a detailed interpretation of the sequence and its relationship to Shakespeare’s plays. But on another level, the work is also a meditation on homosexuality and a foiled coming out story ...” (744). For Summers, the story “enacts a parable about the difficulty of maintaining homosexual idealism in the late nineteenth century”; it “both defends homosexuality and regretfully—perhaps prophetically—rejects it” (745). Wilde’s treatment of homosexuality in *Dorian* is similarly conflicted. It is hardly surprising, then, to recognize that sadness exists alongside wit in Wilde’s writings. So, for example, many of the characters in his fairytale collection *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* (1888)

long to realize impossible loves. Their suffering certainly resonates with, and also arguably encodes, homosexual yearning, loneliness, and self-sacrifice. Bristow offers a related interpretation of *Earnest*: “this is a comedy shaped by tragedy.... For what Wilde was seeking in this, his last and most significant drama, was a form that could articulate, as legitimately as possible, same-sex desire” (28).

Even as his work speaks to the doubled possibility of archness and isolation of gay male experience at the turn of the century and beyond, it is Wilde’s trial and imprisonment that have cemented his status as gay martyr. In 1893, Wilde began an affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, which sparked the ire of Douglas’ father, the Marquess of Queensberry. After Queensberry termed Wilde a sodomite, Wilde sued him. The judge ruled against Wilde, who was then arrested, tried, and convicted for gross indecency; he was sentenced to two years of hard labor. (Playwright Moisés Kaufman [1963–] dramatizes the trials in *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* [1997]). While in prison, Wilde wrote *De Profundis* (1897, 1905, 1962), a letter addressed to Douglas. The significance of this work, according to Summers, is “that in it the writer breaks out of the bourgeois mold he had so frequently attacked yet to which he so tenaciously clung.... [H]e discovers a new freedom and emerges as Saint Oscar, the victim of gay oppression who finally triumphs over a philistine society” (747). Wilde died within a few years of his release from prison. (For more on Wilde, see Joseph Bristow; Philip E. Smith.)

## Early Twentieth-Century Gay Literature

Wilde’s fate underscored the vulnerability of gay men, irrespective of social standing. Laws in the Great Britain and the United States were particularly oppressive. Gay writers took note.

The minor literary figure Edward Prime-Stevenson (1858–1842), an American expatriate who lived much of his adult life in Italy and Switzerland, wrote under the pseudonym Xavier Mayne. In 1906, he had his short novel *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906) published privately in Naples. *Imre* recounts the love story of English businessman Oswald and Hungarian officer Imre. Aside from its happy ending,

the novel is noteworthy because of the insight it provides into early twentieth-century social and scientific discussions of male homosexuality. In 1908, Prime-Stevenson published *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality as a Problem in Social Life*, a general history, including literary history, of homosexuality.

In the United States itself, the gay literary output of Harlem Renaissance poets is particularly noteworthy. While the homoerotic themes in works by Countee Cullen (1903–1946) are at times highly coded, Jeremy Braddock argues that, within the context of “Harlem Renaissance literary production,” Cullen’s poetry collection *Color* (1925) “represents the most thorough elaboration of a homosexual poetics” (1253). The most significant poet of the Harlem Renaissance is Langston Hughes (1902–1967); critics have only fairly recently begun to read his work within the context of his sexuality. So, for example, Sam See notes that, in his 1940 memoir *The Big Sea*, Hughes links Harlem with drag; for See, the memoir facilitates a queer unpacking of Hughes’ earlier “Harlem-based poems, ... especially those in *The Weary Blues* (1926) [which] characteristically cross gender, sexual, racial, and even formal lines” (799).

Homoerotic themes are also present in much of the fiction of acclaimed British writer E. M. Forster (1879–1970). In his most significant novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), the final passage describing the relationship between Fielding and Aziz may be read as a commentary on the impossibility of intimacy not simply between colonizing and colonized subjects, but also those subjects *as men*.

Forster’s most direct contribution to gay literature is the posthumously published novel *Maurice*, along with the short story collection *The Life to Come and Other Stories*. The novel was inspired by a meeting with socialist and gay rights activist Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), author of *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), and his working-class lover George Merrill. (Carpenter, along with Wilde and nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892), has proven a significant influence for gay writers.) Forster completed the novel in 1914 and circulated the manuscript among friends. (The inter-class heterosexual relationship in D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady*

*Chatterley's Lover* [1928, 1960] is, in turn, indebted to Forster's depiction of the love story between the upper-middle-class Maurice Hall and under-gamekeeper Alec Scudder.) Forster knew quite well that the publication of gay fiction during his lifetime would ruin his career. As it was, the publication of *Maurice* and *Life* in 1971 and 1972, respectively, initially met with homophobic reaction.

Two other early twentieth-century authors should also be mentioned: the Frenchman André Gide (1869–1951) and the German Thomas Mann (1875–1955). In his writing, Gide, who was introduced to Wilde in 1891, critiques the cultural mainstream and, in so doing, opens up a space for same-sex expression. In the novel *The Immoralist* (1902), protagonist Michel acknowledges his homosexual attractions, while, as Scott Fish explains, Gide's later works *The Counterfeiters* (1926) and *Corydon* (1924) "make a case for pederasty" (328). In Mann's fiction, homosexual desire is most clearly present in *Death in Venice* (1912), a text that, according to Robert Tobin, is "constructed at least in part out of a network of gay signs" ("Life and Work" 242). In the novella, German writer Gustav Aschenbach observes a Polish youth, Tadzio, on the beach. Enthralled by the boy, to whom he never actually speaks, Aschenbach dons new clothes and puts on makeup in an attempt to appear younger. Passion proves his undoing: he remains in Venice even after cholera has broken out, and he dies of the disease. From an autobiographical perspective, the story reworks Mann's own understanding of his own latent homosexuality as a threat to his respectability.

Other gay authors from this period include novelist Frederick Rolfe, who, writing under the pseudonym Baron Corvo, is known for *Hadrian the VII* (1904) and *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole* (1909); playwright and novelist Ronald Firbank (1886–1926), who wrote *The Princess Zoubaroff* (1920), *Santal* (1921), and *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926); playwright Noël Coward (1899–1973), who achieved early fame with his Wildean comedy *Fallen Angels* (1925); and the World War I poet Wilfred Owen (1893–1918).

## Early Twentieth-Century Lesbian Literature

American expatriate writer Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), who lived most of her adult life in Paris, is a major figure in lesbian and modernist literature, well known for her experimentations with form. Her early short novel *Q. E. D.* (1903), atypical of her work in general in that it follows a conventional linear style, recounts her relationship with May Bookstaver. The novel offers an early example of the adjective “queer” as a signifier of sexual deviance. One of the stories in *Three Lives* (1905), “Melanctha,” is “ostensibly the story of a mulatto girl and a Negro doctor,” but in fact it reworks *Q. E. D.*’s account of the relationship with Bookstaver (Katz xxxviii). In 1907, Stein met Alice B. Toklas, who became her partner. Many of Stein’s writings encode aspects of their relationship, which lasted until Stein’s death. “Lifting Belly” and “A Book Concluding With As a Wife Has a Cow: A Love Story” celebrate their shared life. Stein’s best known work is *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), whose playful and subversive blurring of the boundaries between herself and Toklas in effect creates a narrative space for lesbian visibility.

Other key lesbian literary figures of the early twentieth century include such fellow Americans as Harlem Renaissance writer Nella Larsen (1891–1964) and expatriates Natalie Barney (1876–1972) and Djuna Barnes (1892–1982); German writer Christa Winsloe (1888–1944); French writer Colette (1873–1954); and British writers Renée Vivien (1877–1909), Silvia Townsend Warner (1893–1978), Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), and Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943). Larsen explores women’s sexuality in her two important novels *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929). The latter suggests a lesbian relationship between the two principal female characters. While little is known of the last three decades of Larsen’s life, much has been written about Natalie Barney. Her epigrams *Thoughts of an Amazon* (1920) and *More Thoughts of an Amazon* (1939) are worth noting; she is most famous, though, for her Parisian literary salon, her several affairs (including with Vivien and the painter Romaine Brooks), and her appearance in various lesbian works, especially Barnes’ *Ladies Almanack* (1928), Colette’s *Claudine and Annie* (1903), Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), and Vivien’s

*A Woman Appeared to Me* (1904). Barnes' best-known work is her novel *Nightwood* (1936), which came out the same year as Warner's *Summer Will Show*, a lesbian historical novel set in 1848 Paris. Based on Barnes' ten-year relationship with the sculptor Thelma Wood, *Nightwood* is simultaneously dazzling and haunting. It is a major work of lesbian and modernist fiction. So, too, are Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, which has been termed "the lesbian Bible," and Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), her "love letter" (Nicolson 202, qtd. in Knopp) to Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962).

Hall's novel draws on the work of sexologists, such as Havelock Ellis (1859–1939), in order to tell the tragic story of Stephen Gordon and her relationship with Mary Llewellyn. Stephen ultimately sacrifices her life with Mary, whom the narrator characterizes as "all woman," in order that the younger woman might marry Stephen's best friend, Martin Hallam, and so realize the traditional happiness denied lesbian couples. (In formal terms, Hall underscores the importance of conventions by recounting Stephen's story via a conventional linear realist narrative.) Banned shortly after its publication, the novel was the subject of two major obscenity trials in Great Britain and the United States. Hall lost the first, but won the second. Ironically, the trials ensured that the book remained in high demand; it has never been out of print. Indeed, though problematic in many ways, including its reliance on racist and sexist models of sexual and gender identity, *The Well of Loneliness* has resonated with lesbians and proven a crucial source text for lesbian and, more broadly, queer novels (for example, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* [1993] and Judith Frank's *Crybaby Butch* [2004]) for decades. For Esther Newton, Hall's "mannish lesbian" is "a double symbol, standing for the New Woman's painful position between traditional social and political categories, and for the lesbian struggle to define and assert an identity" (568). More recently, Jay Prosser has made a case for reading Stephen as a transsexual hero. Whether one reads Stephen's masculinity as a sign of her lesbian butchness or a sign of her trans\* identity (or, perhaps, both), the *Well* is a classic of LGBTQ literature.

Published later in the same year, Woolf's *Orlando* is as formally daring and playful as *The Well* is conventional and serious. Modeled on Sackville-West, with whom Woolf began an affair in 1927, title character Orlando defies the constraints of time and gender. (Sackville-West had herself written a novel, *Challenge* [1924], which fictionalized her earlier relationship with Violet Trefusis.) We first meet Orlando as a young Elizabethan nobleman; by the eighteenth century she is a woman. Even as she at times questions them, Orlando adapts to the customs of each age she inhabits. When read alongside *The Well*, *Orlando* is striking for the lack of anxiety that accompanies the protagonist's gender change and his/her love of women. As Sherron E. Knopp observes, "Orlando's 'condition' is neither the congenital defect that [sexologists] described nor the debilitating case of arrested development that Freud suggested but a simple natural fact" (31). Woolf is a major twentieth-century writer. Lesbian themes also appear in two of her most important novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Woolf's contemporary Winsloe was, in turn, a noteworthy writer in Germany during the first part of the century. Her play *Knight Nérestan* (1930), which she retitled *Yesterday and Today*, explores the theme of homoerotic desire within a girls school. Directed by Leontine Sagan, its film adaptation, *Mädchen in Uniform* (that is, *Girls in Uniform*; 1931) is an iconic work of lesbian and Weimar film. Winsloe also published the English-language lesbian novel *Life Begins* (1935).

## LGBTQ Literature at Mid-Twentieth Century

Among the most important gay writers of the mid-twentieth century are Britons Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986) and W. H. Auden (1907–1973), who first met in prep school and then later, again, at Cambridge. Isherwood is best known for his novels *The Last of Mr. Norris* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), referred to together as *The Berlin Stories*, on which Kander and Ebb's musical *Cabaret* is based, and *A Single Man* (1964). The title of this later novel encodes the protagonist's publicly unacknowledged and inarticulable grief at the death of his partner. As Octavio R. Gonzalez remarks, *Single's*

“depiction of homosexuality as a legitimate minoritarian identity, rather than individual pathology, was a radical political gesture” (758). Isherwood’s life-long friend and collaborator W. H. Auden, in turn, is one of the great poets of the twentieth century. While Auden married Thomas Mann’s daughter Erika in 1938, he did this so that she could leave Nazi Germany; his significant, as well as at times difficult, long-term intimate partnership was with minor American poet Chester Kallman (1921–1975). Summers observes that Auden’s poems, such as “The Prophets,” “Like a Vocation,” “The Heavy Date,” and “The Common Life,” were inspired by this relationship (Summers 64).

Italian Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975) is a major twentieth-century Italian literary figure, known for his poetry and fiction as well as his films, which often focused on the beauty and the ugliness of young petty criminals, thieves, and male prostitutes. His novels include *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) and *Una vita violenta* (1959). Frenchman Jean Genet (1910–1986) was also interested in subcultures, whether criminal or gay or both. In fact, his writings focus on the commonalities of homosexuality and criminality and celebrate the linkage of sex, sexuality, and social upheaval. This is the case in his novel *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1942), which, composed while he was in prison, is recounted by a masturbating prisoner, and his important play *The Balcony* (1956). In their political radicalism and sexual hedonism, Genet’s writings have influenced any number of later gay writers, including American Edmund White (1940–).

The most notable gay American poet of the 1950s was “Beat Generation” writer Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997). The “Beat Generation” participated in the counterculture of the 1950s; their eschewal of middle-class values included an openness to sexual experimentation. In 1956, Ginsberg published *Howl and Other Poems* (1956). The subject of an obscenity trial, “Howl” begins with the lines “I saw the best minds of my generation/destroyed by madness...,” and includes such graphic descriptions of sex as “[men] who let themselves be fucked in the ass by/saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,/who blew and were blown by those human/seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic/and Caribbean love.” Poet

Mark Doty (1953–) terms “Howl” a work “of visionary friendship, ... a chronicle of friends seeking ... enlightenment” for which sex serves as a vehicle (7).

Other significant American writers from this time period are Frank O’Hara (1926–1966), Gore Vidal (1925–2012), and James Baldwin (1924–1987). Like Ginsberg, part of the New York scene, O’Hara is known for his poetry, art criticism, as well as poetic collaborations with artists. For Bruce Boone, O’Hara in his poems “talks gay” (80). His poetry includes descriptions of drag and gay male encounters; a camp sensibility pervades much of his work, such as in, for example, a famous poem he wrote about Lana Turner. For his part, Vidal was a prolific essayist, novelist, and playwright; he was a public intellectual who identified as bisexual. Two of his most important gay/queer works are the coming-of-age/coming-out novel *The City and the Pillar* (1948), which he significantly rewrote and published as *The City and the Pillar Revised* in 1968, and *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), the first novel to focus on a character who undergoes gender reassignment surgery. A key figure in American, and, more specifically, African-American literature, James Baldwin wrote essays, fiction, plays, and poetry. Gay and bisexual characters appear in many of his novels, including *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), *Another Country* (1962), *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* (1968), and *Just above My Head* (1979). The first of these is a classic of pre-Stonewall (pre-gay liberation) literature: *Giovanni’s Room* offers a beautiful, homophobically cast first-person narration of a ruptured love affair. Though early critics faulted it for both its frank and positive depiction of gay male love and the absence of any black characters, recent readings have praised the novel for its nuanced and sensitive treatment of both race and sexuality (see, for example, Abur-Rahman; Armengol).

The most prominent mid-century American playwright was Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). Though he was himself gay, his work evinces the negative understanding of homosexuality that permeated mainstream US culture in the 1940s and 1950s. So, for example, one of his most famous plays, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), equates homosexuality with literal and metaphoric dead ends. As

Brenda Murphy observes, “For Williams,” protagonist Brick “is a gay man trapped in a heterosexual marriage, not a straight man who is set free” (193).

In contrast to Williams, British playwright Joe Orton (1933–1967) wrote plays whose comedy turns on bold, anti-conformist portrayals of sexuality. Crossdressing, incest, bisexuality, and homosexuality all prove vehicles for social critique in *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1963), *The Ruffian on the Stair* (1963), and *What the Butler Saw* (1967). Various writers have dramatized Orton’s colorful life and lurid death (he was murdered by long-time partner Kenneth Halliwell, who subsequently took his own life): Simon Moss in *Cock-Ups* (1981), Lamie Robertson in *Nasty Little Secrets* (1983), and John Lahr in *Diary of a Somebody* (1987) (D. S. Lawson [532]). Other writers from this period include Kenneth “Seaforth” Mackenzie (1913–1955), whose novel *The Young Desire It* (1937) is an Australian gay classic; New Zealander James Courage (1903–1963) for his novel *A Way of Love* (1959); and German writer Hubert Fichte (1935–1986) for novels such as *The Orphanage* (1965) and *The Palette* (1965).

Within mid-century lesbian literature, in turn, notable authors include playwright and novelist Jane Bowles (1917–1973) and fiction writers Patricia Highsmith (1921–1995), Ann Bannon (1932–), Jane Rule (1931–2008), and Brigid Brophy (1929–1995). Even though their major work is not explicitly lesbian, playwright Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965) and poet Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) should also be mentioned. While Bowles is known for her novel *Two Serious Ladies* (1943), as well as the puppet play *A Quarreling Pair* (1945), her contemporary Highsmith achieved fame with such thrillers as *Strangers on a Train* (1949) and the Tom Ripley novels, whose title character exhibits an ambiguous sexuality. Her one lesbian novel, *The Price of Salt* (also appearing as *Carol*), which she began in 1948 and published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan in 1952, is a lesbian classic. One of the very few pre-liberation lesbian novels to have a positive (if not altogether happy) ending, *Salt* features the complex, at times even expressionistic, psychological portraits characteristic of her crime fiction.

During the 1950s and early 1960s lesbian pulp fiction flourished. It was cheap and widely available, and literally made legible a sense of identity and community for lesbians who lived lives otherwise far removed from queer contexts. American Ann Bannon is the most important author in this subgenre. For much of the twentieth century, cultural prohibitions in general and censorship restrictions in particular required that lesbianism be represented as a deviant form of sexuality aligned with criminality and disease. (One thinks, for example, of the fates of lesbian characters not only in *The Well of Loneliness*, but also in *The Children's Hour* [1934] by Lillian Hellman (1905–1984) and *Mary Lavelle* [1937] by Kate O'Brien [1897–1974].) Lesbian pulp novels of the 1950s and early 1960s typically ended with either the lesbian character's conversion to heterosexuality or her incarceration, institutionalization, or death. Yet, as Suzanna Danuta Walters explains, writers such as Bannon were often subversive in their storylines, which even as they offered the requisite unhappy or at least not-so-happy endings, managed to affirm lesbian desire. Bannon's fiction, which features recurring characters such as Beebo Brinker and Laura Landon, celebrates the butch-femme lesbian culture of New York's Greenwich Village. Over a five-year period, Bannon published five novels: *Odd Girl Out* (1957), *I am a Woman* (1959), *Women in the Shadows* (1959), *Journey to a Woman* (1960), and *Beebo Brinker* (1962).

Jane Rule's best-known work, *Desert of the Heart* (1964), owes much to Bannon's novels, even as it also explicitly engages lesbian and gay as well as canonical literary traditions. The novel, which recounts the romance of professor Evelyn Hall (whose surname arguably pays homage to Radclyffe Hall) and cartoonist Ann Childs, takes its title from a line in Auden's elegy "In Memory of W. B. Yeats." Aside from *Desert*, which ends happily, other novels by US/Canadian author Rule include *This Is Not for You* (1970), *Against the Season* (1971), and *Memory Board* (1987). The last of these offers a compelling portrait of an older lesbian couple. (For more on Rule, see Schuster.)

In her novels, as well as essays, Brigid Brophy critiqued marriage and examined various forms of sexual expression. For

example, in *The King of a Rainy Country* (1956), loosely based on her own life, she subverts the heterosexual pairing of characters Susan and Neale, by, among other things, investing the characters in a quest to find Susan's schoolgirl love, Cynthia. A French girls school is, in turn, the setting for *The Finishing Touch* (1963). As Patricia Juliana Smith explains, the novel "presents a sexually voracious lesbian headmistress who ... manages to carry on her school—and her *affairs*—with relative impunity" (204). Other works by Brophy include *In Transit* (1969) and *A Palace without Chairs* (1978).

For Bannon and Rule, lesbianism and, for Brophy, lesbianism and bisexuality clearly shape their literary production. This is hardly the case for either poet Elizabeth Bishop or playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Acclaimed American poet Elizabeth Bishop was a prolific writer; yet perhaps only in its absence is her lesbianism apparent in her work. As David R. Jarraway explains, "... Bishop's implicitly lesbian subjectivity becomes possible only as a function of a real that eludes symbolic articulation within reality's dark holes .... Little wonder that she has so little programmatically to say about homosexuality" (247). Lorraine Hansberry, in turn, is best known for her play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), for which she won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award; she was the first African American to do so. *Raisin* tells the story of an African American family's quest to realize their dreams of social mobility. Hansberry's lesbian writing is limited; two letters of hers appeared in the first nationally-distributed lesbian publication, *The Ladder*, originally a newsletter for the country's first lesbian civil rights organization, Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955 by Phyllis Lyon (1924–) and her partner Del Martin (1921–2008). Reading these short pieces alongside the major work, Lisbeth Lipari concludes that Hansberry is "a major political rhetor and public intellectual of her time who ... explored the complex interlocking intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality from antiracist, postcolonial, feminist, antiessentialist, lesbian, and Marxist perspectives" (221).

This essay has offered an overview of LGBTQ literature produced from 1890 through the 1960s in dominant Western cultures. In the 1960s, social movements, such as the civil rights

and peace movements in the United States and the second-wave feminist and gay and lesbian movements in the United States and elsewhere, along with changes in censorship laws regarding publishing, led to major changes in the LGBTQ literary landscape. In contrast to the coded references to gay and lesbian experience that characterize much of the writing of the first part of the twentieth century, literature published from the 1970s forward is marked by a politics of visibility, celebration, and push-back for a range of LGBTQ peoples. Within a US context, 1969 is the year often used to designate this shift. This is the year of the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village, New York, a key event in the modern LGBTQ rights struggle. Part 1 of “On LGBTQ Literature” thus ends at this crucial moment, one that ushered in expanded possibilities, social, political, and cultural, for LGBTQ people.

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