

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-71657-4 - The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing

Edited by Hugh Stevens

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
GAY AND LESBIAN WRITING

In the last two decades, lesbian and gay studies have transformed literary studies and developed into a vital and influential area for students and scholars. This *Companion* introduces readers to the range of debates that inform studies of works by lesbian and gay writers and of literary representations of same-sex desire and queer identities. Each chapter introduces key concepts in the field in an accessible way and uses several important literary texts to illustrate how these concepts can illuminate our readings of them. Authors discussed range from Henry James, E. M. Forster and Gertrude Stein to Sarah Waters and Carol Ann Duffy. The contributors showcase the wide variety of approaches and theoretical frameworks that characterize this field, drawing on related themes of gender and sexuality. With a chronology and guide to further reading, this volume offers a stimulating introduction to the diversity of approaches to lesbian and gay writing.

HUGH STEVENS is Senior Lecturer in English at University College London. His publications include *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge, 1998) and *Modernist Sexualities* (co-edited with Caroline Howlett, 2000).

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

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University College London



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Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination; Same-Sex Love in India (with Saleem Kidwai); *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West; Gandhi's Tiger and Sita's Smile: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Culture* and *A Play of Light: Selected Poems*. She has translated many works from Hindi to English and published widely on Shakespeare, most recently in *Shakespeare Survey*.

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CHRONOLOGY

This chronology should not be read as attempting to delineate an objective record of gay and lesbian writing. It gives some events important to gay and lesbian history, and lists some representative and influential texts.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Unknown | Zeus, king of the gods, abducts Ganymede, a Trojan prince, from Mount Ida. Greek mythology has many instances of youths desired and pursued by male deities. |
| Unknown | Orpheus, unsuccessful in his attempt to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld, teaches the men of Thrace the art of loving boys. |
| Unknown | David loves his friend Jonathan, as recorded in the first book of Samuel. When Jonathan dies, David laments, ‘your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women’. |
| c. 625–570
BCE | Life of Sappho, the lyric poet of Lesbos, whose nine books of lyric poetry, of which approximately 200 fragments remain, include many love poems addressed to women. |
| c. 427–327
BCE | Life of Plato, whose dialogues <i>Symposium</i> and <i>Phaedrus</i> are influential for the views they advance on male–male love. |
| 54 CE | Nero becomes Emperor of Rome. According to Suetonius, in <i>Lives of the Twelve Caesars</i> , Nero married two men in legal ceremonies, Sporus (whom he first castrated) and Doryphorus. |
| 98 | Trajan, ‘devoted to boys and to wine’ (Cassius Dio, <i>Roman History</i>), becomes Emperor. |
| 130 | Antinous, beloved of Emperor Hadrian, drowns in the Nile. Hadrian deifies Antinous and founds the city Antinopolis in his memory. |

CHRONOLOGY

- 218–22 Reign of Roman Emperor Elagabalus. Cassius Dio writes that Elagabalus ‘carried his lewdness to such a point that he asked the physicians to contrive a woman’s vagina in his body by means of an incision, promising them large sums for doing so’.
- 342 Constantius II and Constans, joint Emperors, issue a decree prohibiting men ‘marrying a man as a woman’.
- 390 Emperors Valentinian II, Theodosius and Arcadius issue a law against sexual acts between men. Passive partners in same-sex acts were to be punished by being burned alive in public.
- 527–65 Justinian’s reign as Byzantine emperor. The Code of Justinian criminalizes both active and passive same-sex partners, and applies the death penalty.
- c. 1050 Saint Peter Damian’s *Book of Gomorrah* condemns sodomy as ‘the vice . . . never to be compared with other vices because it surpasses the enormity of all vices’.
- 1265–74 Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, condemns ‘unnatural’ sexual acts, including same-sex behaviour, masturbation and bestiality.
- 1534 Under King Henry VIII, the ‘Buggery Act’ (25 Henry VIII, c. 6) is introduced, with hanging the punishment for buggery.
- 1592 or 1593 Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*, gives a bold portrayal of Edward’s relationship with his ‘sweet friend’ Gaveston.
- 1594 Richard Barnfield, *The Affectionate Shepherd*, a collection of homoerotic pastoral poems, followed in 1595 by *Cynthia, with Certaine Sonnets*, which contains more homoerotic sonnets describing Daphnis’s yearning for Ganymede.
- 1598 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Queer criticism has been absorbed by the question of how to interpret Antonio’s love for Bassanio.
- 1598 Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in which Leander is abducted by Neptune, who confuses him with Ganymede.
- 1603 Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*. Its portrayal of Achilles and Patroclus is the most homoerotic representation of loving friendship in Shakespeare’s oeuvre.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1609 Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, the first 126 of which consist of love poems addressed to a young man.
- c. 1640–89 Life of Aphra Behn, novelist, poet and playwright. Many of her poems celebrate gay male and lesbian relationships.
- 1664 and 1667 Posthumous publication of poems by Katherine Philips, containing many passionate erotic celebrations of female friends.
- c. 1672 In *The Farce of Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery*, thought to be by John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester, King Bolloxinion proclaims ‘that buggery may be used / O’er all the land’, and he and his subjects find creative ways of obeying the proclamation.
- 1709 Ned Ward, *History of the London Clubs*, describes London’s subculture of sodomites, or ‘mollies’.
- 1748 Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, includes portraits of an effeminate sodomite, naval captain Whiffle, and his ‘crowd of attendants, all of whom, in their different degrees, seemed to be of their patron’s disposition’.
- 1782 While imprisoned in the Bastille, the Marquis de Sade writes *The 120 Days of Sodom*, which describes libertines systematically enjoying every imaginable sexual activity. The novel was first published in 1904.
- 1791 In Revolutionary France, the Penal Code of 1791 decriminalizes sodomy. This principle stands in the Napoleonic Penal Code of 1810. France is the first Western European country to decriminalize sexual acts between men.
- 1791–1840 Life of Anne Lister, a Yorkshire Landowner whose partially encrypted diary records her many seductions of women.
- c. 1784 Jeremy Bentham, *Offences Against One’s Self*, an unpublished essay arguing against the sodomy laws.
- 1795 Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, Gothic novel about a pious and handsome monk in love with a young male novice, who turns out to be a woman.
- 1796 Anna Seward, *Llangollen Vale*, a long poem celebrating the romantic friendship of ‘the Ladies of Llangollen’, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby.

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- 1810 The Vere Street affair, in which several men are arrested at a London gay tavern and later savagely pilloried.
- 1806–36 In England in this period there are on average two hangings a year for male–male sodomy.
- c. 1833 *Don Leon*, anonymous poem (falsely attributed to Lord Byron) which advocates the decriminalization of sodomy.
- 1850 Lord Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, a long elegy for his friend Arthur Henry Hallam.
- 1860 Third edition of Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, with the ‘Calamus’ poems celebrating ‘adhesiveness’ or ‘the manly love of comrades’.
- 1861 In England the Offences Against the Person Act removes the death sentence for buggery. The penalty is changed to imprisonment for between ten years and life.
- 1864–5 Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, the German sexologist, publishes five books under the title *Researches on the Riddle of Male–Male Love*.
- 1869 The Austro-Hungarian writer Károly Mária Kertbeny publishes two pamphlets criticizing anti-homosexual laws. These pamphlets contain the first written examples of the word ‘homosexuality’ (German *Homosexualität*).
- 1884 *Callirrhöë*, and *Fair Rosamond*, verse dramas, the first publication of Michael Field, the pseudonym of Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper, a lesbian couple who went on to publish many more plays and books of poetry.
- 1885 The Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act makes ‘any act of gross indecency’ committed by a man with another man, ‘in public or in private’, punishable by imprisonment for up to two years.
- 1886 Henry James, *The Bostonians*, in which the feminist Olive Chancellor falls in love with Verena Tarrant, the beautiful daughter of a mesmerist.

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- 1891 Death of Herman Melville. His posthumously published *Billy Budd* (1924) describes the Master-at-arms John Claggart's tortured desires for a handsome young sailor. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, often read as a novel about homosexuality.
- 1895 The 'Wilde Trials'. Wilde is found guilty of 'gross indecency' under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.
- 1896 Willa Cather, 'Tommy the Unsentimental', a short story showing a tomboy's strategies of dealing with small-town disapproval.
- 1897 Wilde, *De Profundis*, a long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas in which Wilde refers to the 'perverse pleasures' of his life as a 'fact about me'.
- 1912 Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*, describing the elderly Gustav von Aschenbach's obsession with Tadzio, a beautiful Polish adolescent boy.
- 1913 E. M. Forster, *Maurice* (published 1971), tells of a gentleman who falls in love with his friend's gamekeeper.
- 1915 Gertrude Stein, *Lifting Belly*, one of Stein's many innovative texts which can be read as celebrating lesbian sexuality. D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, prosecuted for its sexual explicitness, describes a love affair between Ursula Brangwen and her teacher Winifred Inger.
- 1919 Magnus Hirschfeld founds the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Science or Institute for Sexology) in Berlin. The Institute was closed by the Nazis in 1933.
- 1922 Death of Marcel Proust. His *À la recherche du temps perdu*, a *roman fleuve*, continues to fascinate readers with its daring explorations of male homosexuality, lesbianism, jealousy, cruising and perversion.
- 1923 Ronald Firbank, *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, one of his many camp novels, in which Laura de Nazianzi joins the lesbian Convent of the Flaming Hood. D. H. Lawrence, *The Fox*, portrays a female couple running a farm.

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- 1924 André Gide, *Corydon*, a collection of essays about homosexuality and culture.
- 1928 Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, novel about Stephen Gordon, a female 'sexual invert'.
Djuna Barnes, *Ladies Almanack*, a humorous *roman à clef* about lesbian life in Paris.
Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, about a young man who becomes a woman, inspired by Woolf's love for Vita Sackville-West.
- 1929 Nella Larsen, *Passing*, portrays the complicated friendship between two light-skinned African-American women, and suggests parallels between concealing sexual and racial identities.
- 1933 In Germany, the Nazis begin a policy of banning homosexual groups, shutting down gay and lesbian locales and sending homosexuals to concentration camps.
- 1936 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*, describes the love of Robin Vote for Nora Flood, and the nocturnal adventures of the inverted Dr Matthew O'Connor.
- 1937 W.H. Auden, 'Lullaby', one of his many great gay love poems.
The pink triangle begins to be used to identify gay men in Nazi concentration camps. It later becomes a symbol of gay liberation.
- 1939 Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, describes homosexual life in the German capital just before the Nazis come to power.
- 1939–45 During the Second World War, awareness of homosexuality increases, in particular because of the United States Armed Forces' policy of discharging gay men and lesbians as unfit for service.
- 1943 Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies*, about two female friends, Christina Goering and Mrs Copperfield, who leaves her husband when she falls in love with Pacifica, a young prostitute.
- 1945 Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*, explores tensions between homosexuality, Catholicism and class.

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- 1948 Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, portrays the ‘coming out’ of protagonist Jim Willard and the gay life of New York.
Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (followed by *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953), raises awareness of homosexuality by suggesting it was much more prevalent than had been believed.
- 1949 Patricia Highsmith, *Strangers on a Train*, one of her many suspense novels exploring homosexual themes; later filmed by Alfred Hitchcock (1951).
- 1950 The Mattachine Society is founded in Los Angeles, and begins campaigning for greater tolerance and the repeal of sodomy laws. Several other ‘homophile organizations’ are formed shortly afterwards.
- 1952 In Angus Wilson, *Hemlock and After*, Bernard Sands, a homosexual, confronts various problems: a paranoid wife, a young lover with an overly possessive mother, and Mrs Curry, a procuress for paedophiles who wants to blackmail him.
Patricia Highsmith publishes a novel about a lesbian love affair, *The Price of Salt* (later entitled *Carol*), under the pseudonym Claire Morgan.
- 1953 James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, describes the growing sexual awareness of a fourteen-year-old African-American, John Grimes.
- 1954 In Britain, Peter Wildeblood, Michael Pitt-Rivers and Lord Edward Montagu of Beaulieu are found guilty of homosexual offences and imprisoned. The Wolfenden Committee is formed to examine the legal treatment of homosexuality.
- 1955 Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian rights organization, is founded in San Francisco.
- 1956 James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, a novel describing how young American David falls in love with the Italian Giovanni in Paris.
Alan Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, the title poem of which contains frank descriptions of homosexual acts.

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- 1957 The Wolfenden Committee publishes its report recommending that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence'.
- 1958 In Britain, the Homosexual Law Reform Society is founded.
- 1962 Illinois repeals its sodomy law, becoming the first US state to do so.
- 1964 Jane Rule, *Desert of the Heart*, an optimistic lesbian love story.
- 1966 Death of Frank O'Hara. His *Collected Poems* (1972) contain many bold celebrations of gay life in New York.
- 1967 In Britain, the Sexual Offences Act decriminalizes homosexual acts in private between two adult men; the age of consent is set at twenty-one.
- 1969 The Stonewall riots occur in New York after police raid the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, Manhattan. The riots are typically seen as the beginning of 'gay liberation'. After the riots, gay activist groups such as the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance are formed in New York.
- 1970 On 28 June, the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the first gay pride parade is held in New York.
- 1972 On 27 June, *Gay News*, Britain's first gay magazine, begins publication.
- 1973 The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.
- 1977 Rita Mae Brown, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, an unusually explicit lesbian novel which becomes enormously popular.
- 1978 Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language*, contains her celebrated sequence, 'Twenty-One Love Poems'.
Larry Kramer, *Faggots*, and Andrew Holleran, *Dancer from the Dance*, both describe the exuberant contemporary gay scene of Manhattan.

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- 1979 Death of Elizabeth Bishop. Her *Complete Poems, 1927–1979* (1983) contains many lesbian love poems, although homosexual themes are dealt with only obliquely or discreetly.
- 1980 The first AIDS-related deaths are observed in the United States. By the end of 1981 there have been 121 deaths, but the cause of these deaths is unknown.
- 1982 Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, a ‘bio-mythography’ merging history, biography and mythology, tells the life of a black lesbian poet.
Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, describes the love of young Celie for the singer Shug Avery.
James Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, poetic trilogy in which Merrill and his lover David Jackson communicate with spirits, including dead friends such as W.H. Auden, using a ouija board.
Edmund White, *A Boy’s Own Story*, an influential ‘coming out’ novel.
The term AIDS – acquired immune deficiency syndrome – is introduced.
- 1983 A team of scientists led by Luc Montagnier identify the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, at the Pasteur Institute in Paris.
- 1985 Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, a *Bildungsroman* about a lesbian girl growing up in an evangelist working-class family.
- 1986 Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate*, a novel in verse exploring gay and bisexual themes in San Francisco.
In the *Bowers v. Hardwick* case, the Supreme Court rules that there is no constitutionally protected right to engage in homosexual sex. This decision allows individual states to retain laws against ‘sodomy’.
- 1991 Tony Kushner, *Millennium Approaches*, the first part of his two-part drama about AIDS, *Angels in America*. The second part, *Perestroika*, opens in 1992.
Denmark becomes the first country in the world to introduce same-sex civil unions.

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- 1992 Thom Gunn, *The Man with Night Sweats*, a collection of poems containing many moving elegies and poems about friends with AIDS.
- 1995 Mark Doty, *My Alexandria*, acclaimed collection of poems responding to the AIDS epidemic.
- 1995 Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) slows development of HIV infection to AIDS, and helps lower AIDS-related death rates.
- 1998 Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*, gay novel which wins the 1999 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.
Sarah Waters, *Tipping the Velvet*, acclaimed for its fictional recreation of Victorian sexual subcultures.
- 2000 Vermont becomes the first US state to introduce same-sex civil unions.
- 2001 Jamie O'Neill, *At Swim, Two Boys*, gay novel set in Dublin during the 1916 Easter Rising.
Holland becomes the world's first country to legalize same-sex marriage.
- 2003 In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court finds that state sodomy laws violate the individual's right to privacy under the fourteenth amendment.
- 2004 Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, a novel set in 1980s Britain, wins the Booker Prize.
Colm Tóibín, *The Master*, a novel based on Henry James's life in the late 1890s, is shortlisted for the Booker and wins a number of other prizes.
- 2005 Carol Ann Duffy, *Rapture*, a series of poems about a love affair, wins the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry.
- 2006 Elizabeth Bishop, *Edgar Allan Poe & The Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*, reignites debate about lesbianism in Bishop's poetry.