

the margin of society, as in the dark underworld of the prison, but expresses the fullness of affection with all its physical demands and its spiritual powers. Homosexuality is not the whole of Vautrin's existence, but he is incomprehensible without it, it stylizes his will to power and invests it with its driving force.

There is also a political aspect to homosexuality in Balzac: in it he saw a defiance of the society that proscribed and marginalized it and a challenge to prevailing moral values. By virtue of living outside the French bourgeois society of his day, Vautrin gains insight into its hypocrisy and expresses his contempt for its sham values. He declares that in reality honesty is useless, money is everything, the sole moral principle is to maintain a façade of propriety, justice is corrupt. The poor are no better than the rich, and it has always been this way. In such an ethical context homosexuality is the practice of those who have gauged society and perceived its hollowness, liberating themselves from the social contract, while the world of heterosexuality is a world of false anti-values maintained by shameful and covert means. The affirmation of the erotic is the negation of the legitimacy of the respectable and so-called honorable.

In 1835 Balzac published his extravagantly plotted *La fille aux yeux d'or*, which concerns a beautiful young woman kept in seclusion by a lesbian who, after an absence, discovers her ward's infidelity with a man and kills her. Again, the writer sought to use the theme to illustrate the corruption of contemporary society, but was less successful in empathizing with his characters.

Elsewhere in his work, in *Séraphita* (1834), Balzac took up the theme of the androgyne under the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg. He asserted that he had begun to write the story at the age of nineteen and that he had long "dreamed of the being with two natures." The underlying myth is that all the angels were once human beings who earned their elevation

to this celestial dignity. The personage after whom the story is named appears to the main characters, Wilfrid and Minna, as Séraphita and Séraphitus respectively. But while Minna is an insignificant and dreamy romantic heroine, Wilfrid is a mature hero with a stormy past and aspirations for a glorious future, who nevertheless is ready to sacrifice all his ambitions to obtain Séraphita "who should be a divine woman to possess." Balzac represents both as in love with one and the same person, a chosen being endowed with a mysterious power. The androgyne does not symbolize bisexuality, but nature in its wholeness, in its original purity, "the diverse parts of the Infinite forming a living melody." Having revealed to the hero and heroine an ideal love, Séraphitus-Séraphita departs for a heaven free of the earthly misery that human beings must endure.

Recently, the story "Sarrasine" (1830) has attracted scholarly attention, notably from the homosexual critic Roland Barthes. This short, but resonant narrative concerns the ambiguities of a family whose fortunes are founded on the achievements of a castrato.

Balzac confronted the mysteries of homosexuality and intersexuality in their forms both real and ideal, not just as a chronicler of the France of his time, but also as a visionary whose imagination relived myths of pagan antiquity.

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BANG, HERMAN (1857-1912)

Danish novelist and short story writer. Associated with the theatre for much of his life, Bang was also active as a journalist and critic in opposition to Georg

Brandes. He died during a tour of the United States.

Bang internalized a negative view of homosexuality from the pathological theories current in his youth. Fearful of **blackmail** and ridicule, he guarded his expressions of what meant most to him, even in letters, so that his inner life must be read between the lines. Declaring that people were not ready for the truth about homosexuality, he withheld his essay on the subject. This study, "Gedanken zum Sexualitätsproblem," deliberately written in a neutral and objective tone, was published posthumously in Germany in 1922. Nonetheless, Bang believed that his homosexuality was a gift, linked to his creativity as a writer and permitting him to see both the masculine and the feminine side of human nature.

His first novel, *Haablose Slaegter* (1880; *Generations without Hope*) focuses on the decadent scion of an ancient family, who is evidently homosexual. His novella *Mikaël* (1904) presents a much more joyous picture of life and love, including special friendships in artistic circles. In 1916 the Swedish director Mauritz Stiller made *Mikaël* into a film under the title *The Wings*; this work is regarded by some as the first gay motion picture. Although Bang today enjoys the status of a major writer in his own country, understanding of his work has until recently been hampered by imposition of Freudian schemas, which ignore the complexities of his self-understanding.

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BANNEKER, BENJAMIN (1731-1806)

American mathematician and astronomer. The son of free blacks who were landowners in Baltimore County in tidewater Maryland, he received a brief

education at a one-room country school that ended when he was old enough to work full-time with his father on the farm, but like most intellectuals of the colonial period he continued to learn through private reading for the rest of his life. By his method of self-instruction he emerged a competent mathematician and amateur astronomer. Proficient enough to calculate an almanac, he devised one for the year 1791 but was unable to see it through to press. However, *Banneker's Almanack* for the years 1792 through 1797 was published in a number of editions. It reflected a new trend in that its contents were devoted to national events and local causes; also by popularizing the theme of anti-slavery, it contributed substantially to the abolitionist cause. Banneker assisted Major Andrew Ellicott during the preliminary survey of the ten-mile square and in establishing lines for some of the major points in the future capital of Washington. In his time he was the emblematic figure of black achievement in the sciences, and as such received considerable attention from the abolitionist societies.

Banneker remained a bachelor all his life, and no evidence can be found for any romantic attachment or for illegitimate offspring. He led a casual, rather solitary existence, and since his father died when Benjamin was twenty-eight, he had to assume full responsibility for his mother and the farm. His leisure time was given by preference to his studies. A trace of self-revelation may have escaped in a short essay in his first published almanac which declared that poverty, disease, and violence inflict less suffering than the "pungent stings . . . which guilty passions dart into the heart." Benjamin Banneker deserves to be remembered as a homosexual who played a significant role in the intellectual life of the young American Republic.

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