

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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