

gay director, brought out *An Army of Lovers*, a record of his visits to American gay liberation leaders. *Improper Conduct* (1984) by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez featured interviews with gay exiles from Castro's Cuba. *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1985), concerning San Francisco's slain political leader, received an Academy Award in 1986. The availability of cheaper equipment has made documentaries of important events, such as the 1987 march on Washington, easier, and the video rental system has made them available to those who cannot attend the often brief theatrical engagements. Major cities, such as Amsterdam, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, now have annual film festivals in which gay and lesbian motion pictures of all sorts are showcased.

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Wayne R. Dynes

FIRBANK, RONALD (1886-1926)

English novelist and playwright.

Firbank, an aesthete and a dandy, was the grandson of a Durham miner, whose Vic-

torian rags-to-riches ascent provided the income for his grandson to live independently and to publish most of his books privately. A delicate child, he was educated mainly by private tutors. He attended Trinity College, Cambridge, during the height of the university's homoerotic period, but never took a degree. In 1907 he was converted to the Roman Catholic church by R. H. Benson, a closeted homosexual who had been a patron of Frederick Rolfe ("Baron Corvo"). Shy and retiring, Firbank spent much of his life traveling, writing his novels on the backs of large postcards. He seems to have had no long-term homosexual affairs, as he remarked with resignation, "I can buy companionship."

Characteristically, the plot of his first novel, *Vainglory* (1915), which concerns the quest of a society woman to have herself memorialized in a stained-glass window, is a slight affair. The interest lies in the social color as expressed in the dialogue, where Firbank leaves out many of the usual narrative markers, including the identity of the speakers, so that the reader is left to construct much of the background for himself. *Valmouth* (1919) concerns a nursing home for centenarians, while *Prancing Nigger* (1919) is set on a Caribbean island. In the latter novel, he introduces his own name as that of an orchid: "a dingy lilac blossom of rarity untold." His last novel, *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, in which the eponymous cleric chases but never quite succeeds in catching choir boys, was published just after his death in Rome from a pulmonary infection (1926).

Seemingly spun from the stuff of trivial social comedy, Firbank's novels made a significant contribution to literary modernism through their original use of the device of the "reader's share," whereby he left unstated the details of plot and characterization. Firbank's popularity waxes and wanes, but he had a major influence on such younger contemporaries as Evelyn Waugh and Muriel Spark.

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Ward Houser

FLANNER, JANET ("GENET"; 1892-1978)

American journalist. After settling in Paris in the 1920s, Janet Flanner began a series of reports on life in the French capital in *The New Yorker*. From 1925 onwards she wrote under the pseudonym of Genet, and the acuteness of her analyses of politics, diplomacy, and culture made the name an indispensable asset during the magazine's great phase.

Having returned to the United States as the clouds of World War II gathered, Flanner met her life companion, Natalia Danesi Murray, in New York in 1940. Of Italian birth, Murray was an editor, publisher, film producer, theatrical and bookstore manager, and Allied propagandist for the United States Office of War Information. At the time of their meeting Flanner was 48, Murray 38. The two women, who had both divorced their husbands before they met, remained linked emotionally and intellectually until Flanner's death at the age of 86. They were separated physically for much of each year: Flanner returned to live in Paris, while Murray lived in New York and Italy. They both witnessed many important events of the times, knew those who created them, and commented on what they saw in pungent prose. The evidence lies in their letters, which Murray decided to publish when she "realized how unique our relationship was," but "also as a demonstration of how two women surmounted obstacles, trying to lead their personal and professional lives with dignity and feeling."

In their comments on political events, Flanner and Murray saw male vanity and the persistence of unthinking

ideological loyalties as responsible for many difficulties that could have been avoided. Much of their correspondence focuses on their friends: Margaret Anderson, Kay Boyle, Nancy Cunard, Ernest Hemingway, Carson McCullers, Anna Magnani, and Tennessee Williams. Because some aspects of the exchange do not accord with today's social conscience, it attracted mixed reviews in the 1980s. Yet the letters are an invaluable record of over thirty years of a passionate, yet honest relationship of two intensely active women.

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Evelyn Gettone

FLAUBERT, GUSTAVE (1821-1880)

French novelist. The son of a surgeon, Flaubert grew up in a medical milieu preoccupied with the progress of a science to which he felt himself unequal. From his early years at the lycée onward, he preferred the pen to his father's scalpel, and singlehandedly edited a minor journal, the *Colibri*, that clumsily but clearly foretold his future talent. In Paris he read law but never took the degree for reasons of health, and there met Maxime Du Camp, with whom he formed a close friendship. Together they traveled through Brittany and Normandy in 1847, bringing back a volume of reminiscences that was to be published only after Flaubert's death (*Par les champs et par les grèves*, 1885). Between October of 1849 and May of 1851 the two traveled in Egypt and Turkey, and there Flaubert had a number of pederastic experiences which he related in his letters to Louis Bouilhet.

On his return to France Flaubert shut himself up in his country house at Croisset, near Rouen. Instead of aspiring to self-discovery in the manner of the