

love with the 50-year-old Mabel Batten, whom she had met at the resort of Homburg. The two took up residence together and, influenced by her lover, Hall converted to Roman Catholicism. In 1915 the two women attended a tea party in London, where Hall met Una, Lady Troubridge, the wife of an admiral. When Batten died soon after, the way was clear for Hall and Troubridge to live together—much to the admiral's puzzlement. The two women were destined to remain together for thirty years.

Hall published several volumes of poetry during this period, but it was only with the appearance of her novel *Adam's Breed* in 1926 that she achieved popularity. In this work she transposed her own personality into that of a man, Gian-Luca. Two years later, however, she launched her bombshell, the openly lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness*. This work, though it seems mild and lacking in explicitness today, was declared "obscene" and the British courts ordered all copies seized. After this point Hall and Troubridge judged it prudent to live abroad, retaining however the conservative political and social views characteristic of their class.

Inevitably *The Well of Loneliness* strikes readers today as a time-bound work, inasmuch as Hall subscribed to current theories of "sexual inversion," which she popularized. Indeed as a role model she may have led many women into an unnecessary cultivation of stereotypes. Nonetheless, the notoriety of her work helped to move lesbianism into the consciousness of a public which in the Anglo-Saxon world at least had managed until 1928 to ignore the phenomenon almost entirely.

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HANDBALLING

This sexual practice involves the insertion of one partner's hand—and sometimes much of the arm—into the rectum of the other. Before attempting such insertion the nails are pared and the hand lubricated. Sometimes alcohol and drugs are used by the receptive partner as relaxants. This practice acquired a certain popularity—and notoriety under the name of *fistfucking*—in a sector of the gay male leather/S & M community in the 1970s. A few lesbians have also reported engaging in it. A medical term, apparently uncommon, has been proposed for handballing: brachiproctic eroticism.

It need scarcely be stressed that handballing is dangerous in all its variations, as puncturing of the rectal lining may lead to infection and even death. Although handballing does not directly expose the passive partner to AIDS or to sexually transmitted diseases, by scratching or scarring the rectal wall it may create tiny portals for the invasion of microbes during a subsequent penetration. With the new emphasis on safe sex in the 1980s, handballing has greatly declined, and it will probably be relegated to history as one of the temporary excesses of the sexual revolution.

Historical precedents are elusive. It may be conjectured that the recent resort to the practice is due to medical knowledge of operations in which the anus is dilated, since the ordinary individual scarcely credits that such enlargement is possible or desirable. In a late Iranian version of the binding and riding of the god of darkness Ahriman by the hero Taxmoruw, the demonic figure breaks loose by means of a trick and swallows the hero; by pretending to be interested in anal intercourse the brother of Taxmoruw manages to insert his arm into Ahriman's anus and retrieve the body from his belly. The brother's arm—the one that entered the demon's anus—becomes silvery white and stinking, and the brother has to exile himself voluntarily so that others will not become

polluted. The myth is interesting as linking the forbidden sexual activity with stigmatization and outlawry of the perpetrator.

There seems to have been no term for handballing in the Greek language, though *siphniazein* (from the island of Siphnos) has been defined as to "insert a finger in the anus." This harmless practice has long been known, and it may have served as a kind of modest precedent.

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HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Harlem is a section of northern Manhattan originally developed as housing for the white middle class. As New York's blacks were gradually excluded from residing in the southern part of the island, however, from 1915 onward it became the chief Negro center of the city—and of the nation. New York City's black community was reinforced by thousands migrating from the South in search of freedom from discrimination and lynching. In the 1920s, sometimes termed the Jazz Age, Harlem's black culture and intelligentsia enjoyed a golden age. Harlem was the center of Marcus Garvey's nationalist movement, and also an entertainment mecca for blacks and whites alike.

Probably the most important achievement of the Harlem Renaissance was the emergence of new writers whose works could appear under the imprint of major publishers. The writings of the gay poet Countee Cullen (1903–1946) were to become widely known. Cullen's marriage to Yolanda Du Bois, daughter of the famed black scholar and journalist W. E. B. Du Bois, proved a disaster, but his homosexuality was hushed up. To this day conflicting opinions are heard on the possible homosexuality of Langston Hughes (1902–1967), one of the major figures of the group. Either he was particularly successful in covering up or repressing his homo-

sexuality, or it did not exist at all—though the latter seems unlikely. There is no doubt of the orientation of the experimental writer (Richard) Bruce Nugent (1906–), who lived into gay liberation days, when he gave informative interviews. Nugent wrote what may have been the first fictional account of American black homosexuality, the short story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," published in the little magazine *Fire!* (1926). The bisexual Wallace Thurman took a more sardonic view of the Harlem Renaissance, as seen in his novel *Infants of the Spring* (1932).

White enthusiasm for the achievements of black America's "talented tenth" was heavily laced with stereotypes—including the one that made the Negro the symbol of heterosexual virility. The creative contribution of blacks was still held to be circumscribed by their "more elemental" approach, in contrast to the cerebral logic attributed to the white tradition. This perception encouraged a stream of chic whites north of 110th Street, where they attended speakeasies and nightclubs. Here they could see a series of bisexual and lesbian entertainers, notably Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, "Moms" Mabley, and Gladys Bentley. Carl Van Vechten, a blond gay novelist from Iowa, became the unofficial publicity agent for this side of Harlem. Other, more ordinary gays flocked to Harlem night spots where they found a more tolerant atmosphere. It was not just a Bohemia like Greenwich Village, it was a place where the homosexual visitor could be more relaxed and uninhibited. Huge drag balls were given at the Rockland Palace and the glittering Savoy Ballroom. This side of Harlem is sensitively reflected in Blair Niles' novel *Strange Brother* (1931).

The deepening Depression of the 1930s caused all these activities to fade. Until the black cultural revival of the sixties and seventies, the Harlem Renaissance was almost forgotten. Although even today its homosexual component tends to be slighted, the trend made a real contribution to American gay life and culture.