Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia

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be pronounced as a contraction of “c'est la vie”: the name therefore produces the statement “eros, that’s life.” Not only was it affixed to many of the readymades, but also, as “Rose,” Duchamp posed for Man Ray in drag, displaying exaggerated feminine mannerisms in many of the resulting photographs, though not passing particularly well as a woman. Considered from a range of feminist perspectives, Duchamp’s tendency to see Rose Sélavy as his “muse” can be seen as representing an assimilation of an abstract “feminine” as a territory for the critically transgressive. But since he was openly disdainful of feminism, this move is clearly problematic. Still, as Amelia Jones has argued, the alter ego of Rose Sélavy also ruptures the seamless authority of the status of the modernist artist. Duchamp enacts this rupture in a manner that furthermore makes him accessible to viewers’ interpretations across the divide of gender binarism. For such reasons, there has been a resurgence of critical and biographical interest in Duchamp at the tail end of the twentieth century.

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Bibliography

See also Art History; France; Postmodernism

Dürer, Albrecht (1471–1528)
Albrecht Dürer, the outstanding German artist of the Renaissance, was married and never publicly accused of homosexual behavior. Still, several of his works evince an interest in the theme of homosexual desire. And several comments in letters by Dürer and his friends hint at bisexuality.

In contemporary Italian culture, artists and humanist scholars were frequently associated with homosexuality, both jocularly and accusingly. Neoplatonic poets and thinkers in particular introduced homophilic as well as misogynist themes into their works. It is likely that Dürer, the son of a goldsmith, was introduced to the possibility of “learned homosexuality” by his friend Willibald Pirckheimer, a Nuremberg patrician and scholar who had studied in Italy. Dürer himself visited Venice twice, in 1494–1495 and again in 1506–1507.

In a drawing dated 1494, Dürer depicts the murder of Orpheus for the sin of pederasty, at the hands of the scorned Thracian women. The episode is recounted in Ovid (Metamorphoses XI, 1ff). Dürer shows Orpheus on his knees, defending himself from the blows of the women, while a very small boy runs away. A banner in the tree above identifies the figure as “Orpheus, the first sodomite.” Dürer’s drawing is based on an engraving by an anonymous north Italian master. A similar boy escapes in Dürer’s woodcut Hercules; in some traditions Hercules, too, was associated with homosexuality. In the woodcut print from about 1496, The Men’s Bath, Dürer shows six nearly nude men lounging in an open-air bathhouse. The four main figures are believed to bear the facial features of Dürer, Pirckheimer, and the brothers Stephan and Lorenz Paumgartner. They are joined by two musicians. The genitals of the “Dürer” figure are directly juxtaposed to a waterspout with a spigot in the shape of a rooster. The woodcut is sometimes interpreted as an allegory of the four humors; it may also reflect actual contemporary customs in Nuremberg.
Durrell, Lawrence (1912–1990)

Born in Jullunder, India, Durrell has a personal history that reflects the tensions and desires on which he would focus for the rest of his life. His father, a British civil engineer, would always be part of the colonial regime in India; his mother, an Irish national, likewise would juxtapose her cultural difference so that Durrell would redistribute the legacy of colonization, war, and fascism along an axis of sexual desire. In his writing, Durrell suggests that sexual desire counteracts the boundaries of history. Often linked creatively to Henry Miller and Alfred Perles, Durrell represents a particular point in Anglo-American arts and letters when the novel ruptured under the weight of erotic intensity.

Although he was not gay, Durrell’s books, plays, letters, and poetry exhibit diverse sexual orientations that come about through his characters’ identification with particular times and places. Thus Alexandria, Geneva during World War II, and Cairo are places where characters explore their desires and are, thus, constantly caught in a tangle of ever-changing combinations. Their desires, furthermore, demand this sexual multiplication. They are sexually active in a kind of heady atmosphere in which the sensuality of the locations elicit their responses.

Most of the literary criticism concerning Durrell’s work derives from the sixties and reflects an emphasis on Durrell’s preoccupation with eros and thanatos. Secondary materials focus on Durrell’s characters’ restatement of sexual desire as the desire for death. We see this direction particularly in literary criticism concerning the novel Sebastian, a spin-off of Durrell’s famous Alexandria Quartet. However, in Sebastian, Durrell experiments with the Lacanian theory of the “death drive.” In fact, both gay and straight characters discuss Lacan’s theory implicitly and explicitly throughout the text. Thus Durrell’s exploration of the three male characters, Affaid, Schwarz, and Mnemides, gives the beginning of a fiction-based theory of masculine desire. For example, in the homosexual character of Mnemides, sexual desire is reimagined as a release of pent-up energy: “I cried out and dropped the phone, but it was done . . . I dreamed of him. I was on fire. Finally. . . I capitulated and asked him to come. I could not wait, I was in a frenzy of capitulation” (14). By following Lacan, Durrell posits that desire leads to death because death is the conduit to a pre-Oedipal passivity.

The problem with Durrell’s texts is that they are complicated now by a world caught up in the destructive power of AIDS. Eros and Thanatos as