



# The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall

From Columbia University Press

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## The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall From Columbia University Press

Since the Renaissance, countless writers have been magnetized by the notion of love between women. From Renaissance love poems to twentieth-century novels, plays, and short stories, *The Literature of Lesbianism* brings together hundreds of literary works on the subject of female homosexuality. This is not an anthology of "lesbian writers." Nor is it simply a one-sided compendium of "positive" or "negative" images of lesbian experience. Terry Castle explores the emergence and transformation of the "idea of lesbianism": its conceptual origins and how it has been transmitted, transformed, and collectively embellished over the past five centuries.

Both male and female authors are represented here and they display an astonishing and often unpredictable range of attitudes. Some excoriate female same-sex love; some eulogize it. Some are salacious or satiric; others sympathetic and confessional. Yet what comes across everywhere is just how visible—as a literary theme? Sapphic love has always been in Western literature. As Castle demonstrates, it is hardly the taboo or forbidden topic we sometimes assume it to be, but has in fact been a central preoccupation for many of our greatest writers, past and present.

Beginning with an excerpt from Ariosto's comic epic poem, *Orlando Furioso*, the anthology progresses chronologically through the next five centuries, presenting selections from Shakespeare, John Donne, Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Alexander Pope, the Marquis de Sade, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Dickinson, Guy de Maupassant, Henry James, Willa Cather, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Nella Larsen, Colette, and Graham Greene, among many others. It also includes some anonymous works—several published here for the first time—as well as numerous translations from the writers of antiquity, such as Sappho, Ovid, Martial, and Juvenal, whose rediscovery in the early Renaissance helped shape subsequent Western literary representations of female homosexuality.

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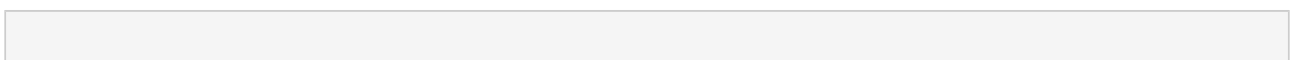
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**Editorial Review**

Review

Castle brings her characteristic good humor and wide-ranging intelligence to bear on... what she sees as the ubiquity of "the lesbian idea" in the Western literature.... Recommended for women's studies, sexuality, and comparative literature collections.

(Ina Rimpau *Library Journal*)

Castle makes a genial host... [and] we begin to get a clearer sense of the moral and imaginative power of female homosexuality. Castle is a grand debunker in everything she writes. Her refreshing common sense and humour gives this enormous book an enormous appeal. A marvellous introduction charts the territories covered. There are no encumbering notes, but extensive further reading is offered, and her introductions to the entries are alert, good-natured, helpful and entertaining.

(*Times Literary Supplement*)

This innovative anthology will serve as a superb resource?both as a text and as a secondary reading?for courses in women's studies, queer studies, gender studies, and introduction to literature courses.... Highly recommended.

(*Choice*)

Castle's full, rich, and spirited selection exults in the risk of border crossings. Reading with an acute critical sense of historical change, she has defined her topic with inclusive generosity, admitting peeping toms as well as embattled advocates to her band of literary lesbian writers. The effect is emancipatory, mind-stretching, witty, and often joyous.

(Marina Warner)

Castle should be commended for adding such an essential volume to any literary bookshelf.

(Elizabeth Millard *ForeWord*)

Castle has a consistently engaging style that will draw general readers as well as scholars of feminist criticism and gay and lesbian literary theory.

(Diane Rogers *Stanford Magazine*)

Castle's massive and highly readable volume is a greater, more encompassing accumulation?an exploration of the origin and transmutation of the idea of lesbianism in Western literature, spanning five centuries.

(Matthew Breen *Out.com*)

Wonderfully elucidating.

(Edmund White *Los Angeles Times Book Review*)

One of the great pleasures of reading this anthology is the opportunity to eavesdrop on Castle talking to herself. Her usual wry wit is present everywhere... [*The Literature of Lesbianism*] shows not what has been written by lesbians but what has been written about them. For this alone it is uniquely valuable.... If I could have but one volume of lesbian literature, this would be the one.

(Lorallee MacPike *Lambda Book Report*)

*The Literature of Lesbianism* is an invitation to explore a vast array of offerings that demonstrate the richness of the lesbian literary heritage.

(*Girlfriends Magazine*)

It's hard to decide what's more amazing: the astonishing (and often unpredictable) range of attitudes, the range of writers included.

(*Books to Watch Out For Newsletter*)

This is an excellent companion to earlier collections of gay literature.

(*Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance Chronique*)

Review

This anthology is quite simply magnificent, and no one but Terry Castle could have produced it. The magisterial introduction is a major essay, almost a monograph, massively learned, profoundly original, challenging and compelling. The selection of works is both generous and revelatory, including much excellent unfamiliar material, and a number of real surprises. This will be an essential volume for anyone interested not only in the history of women, and of sexuality, but in the complex energies of literature itself.

(Stephen Orgel, Stanford University)

A treasure-trove for lovers of literature and of lesbians.

(Susan Gubar, author of *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century*)

About the Author

Terry Castle is Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University. She is the author of six books, including *The Apparitional Lesbian* and *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!* She is a regular contributor to *The New Republic*, *The London Review of Books*, and other publications. She lives in San Francisco, CA.

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