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## *Belle Epoque*

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## Belle Époque

[The writers mentioned, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, and Radclyffe Hall (John), are women I have spent much time with.]

Natalie comes to me through interlibrary loan  
from Birmingham, Alabama no less,  
and John comes from a small college  
nestled in the hills of New York,  
and Gertrude from somewhere in Minnesota.  
They have spread you apart,  
like noisy school girls  
who disrupt lessons,  
trying to diffuse your energy.  
You who struggled alone  
to read Sappho in the original Greek  
before the hands of translators  
could turn it into lies;  
You who worked  
to rebuild Lesbos in Paris,  
who held gatherings of women  
in your secret garden;  
You who loved whomever you wished  
and were silent about nothing;  
Yes, they have tried to hide you.  
On dusty shelves in libraries  
around their world  
they lose your filing card  
or lock you in closed tiers  
for "rare" books.  
But one by one I will steal you away,  
I will bring you together again  
so that this time,  
alone in my study,  
I too can be a part of your world.

Karen J. Hall