

# BRUCE NUGENT

b. July 2, 1906

d. May 27, 1987

## AUTHOR

*“You’d be surprised how good  
homosexuality is. I love it.”*

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that openly depicted  
homosexuality.**

Bruce Nugent was a writer and artist during the Harlem Renaissance. He was the first out black writer.

He was born Richard Bruce Nugent to a middle-class African-American family in Washington, D.C. After his father died in 1920, Nugent moved to New York to live with his mother. When he told her he was going to be an artist, she sent him back to Washington.

Nugent met author Langston Hughes at a salon in the home of fellow poet Georgia Douglas Johnson. In 1925, Hughes found Nugent’s poem “Shadow” in a trash can and had it published.

Nugent returned to New York, where he moved in with the writer Wallace Thurman and pursued art and writing. One of Nugent’s drawings was published on the cover of *Opportunity: Journey of Negro Life*. Along with Hughes and other Harlem Renaissance luminaries, Nugent cofounded *Fire!!*, an African-American art magazine. In 1926, he published “Smoke, Lilies, and Jade,” the first literary work by an African-American that openly depicted homosexuality.



In 1952, Nugent married Grace Marr, who unsuccessfully tried to change his sexuality. They were married nearly 17 years until Marr’s death.

In 1964, Nugent was elected co-chair of Columbia University’s Community Planning Conference, an organization that promoted the arts in Harlem.

Nugent was open about his sexual orientation and was known for his vivacious personality and elegantly erotic style. Called the “Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance,” he is remembered for living unconventionally and for following his own path.