

Harold Norse, 1964

Photo by Charles-Henri Ford

HAROLD NORSE: AN INTERVIEW

Internationally recognized poet, Harold Norse, was born in New York City in 1916. His writing has been acclaimed over the years by a large number of contemporaries, such as Anais Nin, James Baldwin, Tennessee Williams, Paul and Jane Bowles, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Dylan Thomas, William Burroughs and others. His association with these literary personalities is told for the first time in this interview.

Harold Norse left America in 1953 and spent fifteen years of self-imposed exile in Italy, Paris, Spain, Morocco, Germany, Switzerland, Greece and England. He returned to the U.S. at the end of 1968. He has prepared for publication a 350 page volume of his Selected Poems 1954-1972, as well as a book of his cut-up writings. His work has been translated into six languages. He currently lives and works in San Francisco, where he edits the literary journal, *Bastard Angel* (see review in *Gay Sunshine* No. 13).

Harold Norse's books of poetry include: *The Undersea Mountain* (1953); *The Roman Sonnets of G.G. Belli, translations and adaptations* (1960), with a preface by W.C. Williams [a new edition of this book will appear in 1974]; *The Dancing Beasts* (1962); *Karma Circuit* (1966); and *Penguin Modern Poets 13* (1969).

Harold Norse's poems have appeared in numerous magazines internationally. In 1966 the American magazine, *Ole*, was devoted to a collection of his poems with tributes by writers including Burroughs, Baldwin and William Carlos Williams.

The present interview was taped in San Francisco in April, 1973 by Winston Leyland, editor of *Gay Sunshine* for the past two years. He is currently working on a gay poetry anthology, scheduled for publication in 1974, as well as a collection of gay interviews which will be eventually published in book form. Future interviews in this series will include William Burroughs, Jonathan Williams, Ned Rorem, Gerard Malanga and others.

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WINSTON: We first met, Harold, at the time you sent some of your poems in to *Gay Sunshine* about a year ago. What impelled you to send your work to us?

HAROLD: I had just come to San Francisco from Venice, California. I picked up a copy and thought it was a remarkably good gay newspaper. I was casing the situation here, felt lonely, and looked through some of the local publications. I thought your paper superior in quality to any of the underground tabloids so I sent you some poems.

WINSTON: Did you start writing poetry in a committed way when you were very young?

HAROLD: I began writing when I began reading, at the age of seven. I didn't begin to talk until I was four; my mother called me tongue-tied — and then I never shut up. My mother was an illiterate factory girl. She made fun of my lisp and probably ridiculed me even earlier than that. When I was nine, I sent a poem to *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which published it. Later I discovered that Walt Whitman had been the editor of *The Eagle* — not when I sent the poem; I'm not that old. [Laughter] I hasten to clarify, lest we start off on the wrong foot immediately. [More Laughter] *The Eagle* published another poem, about a thunderstorm, when I was eleven. I wrote it during a tempest that lashed the trees and windows while my mother and the landlady took to the clothes closets. They don't make thunderstorms like they used to, have you noticed? They were terrifying when I was a boy in Brooklyn.

When I first read Whitman at the age of fifteen, it was the most mind-blowing literary event I had ever experienced, and I was confirmed in my decision to write poetry. *Song of Myself*, in particular, had a lasting effect on me, like a religious experience. I still think it's the greatest poem ever written. It moves me in a way that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and all the great long poems do not move me. "Cross out, please, those immensely overpaid accounts," Whitman says to the Muse about the old classics, thereby putting a whole new writing show on the road.

The Cantos of Pound I admire intensely. I can read six of the foreign languages he uses and correct the mistakes. It will be a source book for poets for the next hundred or two hundred years. It may be what he set out to accomplish, the American epic *Odyssey*. But it doesn't grab me on the gut level, the level of the whole being, like Walt's mind-boggling poem. Pound is both our Homer and Dante in some respects. But it's literary; it comes from books and learning. Walt's poem comes from himself, a man, a myth, a living self. He is both the epic and the hero, in one person. Walt Whitman brings his whole person and his era into his work without skirting the homo-erotic element. In fact, and he says so in the *Calamus* poems, this is the meaning of his work, what it is all about.

I've only recently been re-reading Whitman. "Calamus" and "Children of Adam" are homosexual poems. They can't be read in any other way; they wouldn't make sense. When I first read him I felt that he was the archetypal poet and that if I did nothing else I would have to somehow write poetry and bring out as much as I could about the truth of my life as an autobiographical record. But I ran into obstacles from the beginning because I had no current precedent, and my early stuff was so hairy it must have been either very unusual or just a chaotic mess. The Forties was hardly hospitable to that sort of poetry; it was a period of critics and professors who regarded Whitman as a flop. Now, thirty years later, we know that Whitman was the father of American poetry, and homo-erotic poetry at that.

Hart Crane, another homo-erotic poet, was my second illuminating poetic experience. I didn't know he was homosexual, but then I hardly knew that I was. I identified with Crane — his first name was also Harold. He was also a Cancerian, an only child who had to "shoulder the curse of sundered parentage." His parents also never got along together, and he loved young men. So Whitman and Crane in my teens became the guides, points of departure for me. They were my lasting influences, although I departed from both of them in other directions.

WINSTON: Were you born and brought up in Brooklyn?

HAROLD: Actually, I was born in the Bronx. Since I was illegitimate, my mother had to give birth to me out of Brooklyn so that my grandmother wouldn't know about it. Brooklyn was where I grew up, and went to school.

There was a plaque to Walt Whitman, where he first printed *Leaves of Grass*, on the red brick wall of a cheap diner. The plaque was on Cranberry Street over some garbage cans that stray cats scavenged in.

Also, a few blocks away, Hart Crane had lived and written *The Bridge*. His apartment was then occupied by one of my English professors, so I knew it first hand. It was on Columbia Heights, and the rear windows overlooked the Brooklyn Bridge. Crane used to go up to the roof when drunk. He would cry and often attempt suicide, but his old friend and lover, Samuel Loveman, whom I met later in Greenwich Village (he was then an old man) would rescue him. He told me that story and others about Crane which later came out in the biographies. He also said I bore a startling resemblance to the young Crane — he called him Harold.

It's amazing when I think about it — so close to the venerable departed greats who meant everything to me as a boy. Their spirits were in the air, hovering over me. Right next door to Crane's old apartment I lost my cherry to a college professor and learned about homosexual love, with Whitman and Crane nodding sadly and mellowly over us. The foghorns from the "river that is East" sounded from the tugboats.

At the age of seven, after I'd been stashed away in Irish Catholic nurseries while my mother worked in the factories, I acquired a stepfather. He really hated me (but not more than I hated him) and never stopped belittling and humiliating me. He called me "Sissy" and "Mary" because I wouldn't go out and play ball with the other boys but preferred reading and writing at home. He was jealous of the hysterical guilt-stricken attentions of my mother who was probably trying to make up for those years she had abandoned me. I was

already a rebel, suspicious of women and needing the attention and love from the eternally missing male parent. To me homosexuality was not so much a rebellion as a need for approval and affection from the male, which I never got from my stepfather.

When I was about fourteen, I slowly became aware that I was staring at other boys, especially when we were naked in the swimming pools and locker rooms. I wanted to feel them up. Then I had a sudden flash: what I really wanted was to kiss and fuck. I had no such feeling for girls at all. I had some kind of a nervous breakdown at the age of sixteen. Frustration and secrecy about all this were more than I could handle. I thought I was a complete freak, the only one in the world of my kind. The last thing I would have told my friends was the way I felt about them. I grew up butch, in a very butch environment. I tried to slash my wrists when I was sixteen, a severe case of sensory deprivation. I didn't even know one was allowed to touch anyone. Girls used to throw themselves at me, and I got pretty good at dodging them. But nothing came of it till I was nineteen, when I had my first straight experience, and that didn't last too long. Something was missing and only I knew what it was.

When I was fifteen, I also read some very lurid accounts of homosexuality as a perversion, a disease, in Kraft-Ebing's book and in Wilhelm Stekel's *Bi-Sexual Love*. The title, of course, had attracted me. They were very German. I remember reading about a young boy in Vienna who picked up filthy old piss-stinking bearded bums and enjoyed having them shit on his chest, the only way he could get his rocks off. I felt degenerate, depraved and thought I was diseased. In reality, I was a love-starved, fresh-faced, innocent, blooming virgin, starry eyed with romantic idealism, who masturbated six or seven times a day and grew more introverted and unhappy as no outlet for my love materialized. All I wanted was just one boy my own age. I had all kinds of crushes in every school I went to — my family moved frequently. I remember many of them now; even their names bring back some of those first pangs of puppy-love, hero-worship: William Gilmore, Nick Gaponovitch, Irving Brodsky, Joe di Bona. They're as alive for me now as they were then.

At nineteen I took the subway to Manhattan and padded the streets around Times Square. I was getting ogled and whistled at everywhere. Guys would lick their lips at me, and I didn't even know what that meant! I thought they were making fun of me.

One day I was vaguely wandering around Bryant Park behind the Public Library with the statue of William Cullen Bryant all green with pigeon shit. It was dusk and someone that I took for a very pretty girl approached. But the "girl" had a bass voice under the lipstick, eyeshadow, plucked eyebrows, and asked me to go home with him. We rode uptown in the subway. In his room it was dark and he didn't switch the light on. He grabbed me and kissed me — my first kiss. There was a flash of electricity like lightning from my lips and the boy jumped back as if he had been electrically shocked. I was startled too, but I was used to my own tensions and sexual magnetism. It was static electricity, like touching a door-knob when you're standing on a rug with crepe soles. He said, "My God, that's what I've always wanted — electric youth!" [Laughter] Being electric, having animal magnetism, is not only figurative. It's real! I lit up the dark room with my desire.

He told me later that there were lots of boys my own age who wanted the same thing; that if I hung around Times Square I'd meet them, but I mustn't look belligerent or scared — something that was almost impossible for me. I used to stand against the corner cigar store on Broadway and Times Square for hours. But I probably looked like a straight, uptight kid, so I never made out. I had been conditioned in Brooklyn as a macho boy and could never lose that almost fierce, provincial, tough guy appearance under such conditions. Otherwise, I was gentle and clownish with the other kids I knew to hide my feelings.

I grew up with Italian, Jewish and Russian kids who were very macho, and I'd rather have died than be called a fag. This defensive behavior remained for many years, as a facade, until I returned to America and Gay Liberation was under way. In that sense, Gay Lib was really responsible for my second coming out. I'd never been in the closet once I knew what gay life was. I was heavily into it in New York, but I kept it secret from my straight friends, since I was afraid of their contempt and disapproval. Being rejected under any conditions was unbearable to me. I had no ego-identity at all. Soon afterwards, I got to know W.H. Auden and my provincial youth slowly began to vanish.

W.H. Auden

WINSTON: Were you in college when you met Auden?

HAROLD: I had just gotten out of college, where I won the gold medal for poetry and was editor of the college magazine. I met Auden, Spender and Isherwood soon after my graduation. This was during the war. They had come to the U.S. because of the war. Auden scandalized the English literary world by refusing to return. He was regarded with disfavor for many years afterwards because the English considered him a deserter while they were undergoing the Blitz. Auden's reasons for staying here were largely pacifist, I think, and at the time he was also a leftist. Apart from his poetic skill, his early reputation was based on his leftism. In the heavily Marxist era of the Thirties and Forties almost every intellectual was a Marxist. We used to attend Marxist Writers' Conferences together — I was the youngest one there.



Harold Norse, age 21

WINSTON: Isn't it sad in Auden's case and in that of other writers, too, like John Dos Passos, that they start out as leftists, quite radical, and in old age are transformed into political reactionaries.

HAROLD: It happened to Wordsworth long ago. And to Kerouac more recently. One changes not only physically but mentally, too. Needs change, feelings change. And revolutions that promise the Earthly Paradise soon end up with Earthly Hell. You can't expect too much from social revolution, although I think the next one will either be the worst failure or the greatest success.

At the time I met Auden my best friend was another young poet, Chester Kallman, then still at Brooklyn College. Spender, Auden, Louis MacNeice and Isherwood gave a reading in New York. Chester said, "Let's go sit in the front row and wink at them." After the reading we went over to meet them and Isherwood gave us their address. Chester went over to see them without me. He became Auden's lover. Isherwood was interested in me but I couldn't respond to anyone much older than myself. I regret that now because as you get older you realize that you've missed out on people merely because of ageism, or sexism.

This is a difficult question to deal with simply because it isn't really so much sex chauvinism as it is a question of taste. Just as society cannot successfully legislate sex or tell the individual what to do with his body, so we cannot legislate taste. On the other hand, much as I would love to see youth making it with older men, I can't condemn them for not doing it if it repels them. Intellectual and artistic youth can learn and experience a lot from older artists, writers, who can save years of mistakes and false starts for the younger man. There is an interchange of complementary gifts and abilities between the older and younger man, so long as they do not set it up as a purely arbitrary sex relationship which can be exploitative and cynical. I was always afraid of this kind of sexual exploitation as a youth, but was perhaps overreacting in the case of Auden and Isherwood.

I would not like to subject a young man to any form of coercion in sexual relations. I don't see how it could really benefit either party in the end. If there is real feeling between them, it can work out. Unfortunately there aren't that many really gifted youths around who can take advantage of such a relationship. If money and cold ambition are involved, I don't think such affairs stand a chance. I think there is a good chance of success if there

is mutual admiration: on the one hand for artistic achievement and, on the other, for beauty.

WINSTON: Did you discuss poetry much with Auden and Spender at that time, or was it just a brief encounter?

HAROLD: Spender, as I said, returned to England. With Auden, a friendship continued for years. This friendship deteriorated into bad feelings — mostly because of touchiness on all sides. I don't recall discussing poetry with Auden so much as listening to his opinions. He was very forceful, witty, sometimes bitchy, often kind. I was very quiet and shy. I was his secretary for a while. I needed a job badly and he was really helpful. He said I could do typing for his poems and correspondence.

Once we were all at a Village restaurant. Auden talked a lot and everyone told jokes or stories, but I said nothing for hours. Auden turned to me and said, "Do you suppose that Harold is secretly remembering everything we're saying and taking mental notes for his memoirs and that's why he doesn't open his mouth?" I was, in fact, painfully shy. This was my first friendship with a famous literary person and I was overwhelmed, feeling my own inexperience, youth and provincial background. Auden's Oxford accent at the time was not always easy to follow. He sort of gulped his final syllables and spoke very fast. I was uncomfortable, too, because I felt I didn't know how to express myself, and he dazzled me. So I couldn't discuss poetry or anything else. He was hard on Hart Crane, whose work he found turgid or turbid, and Crane, you know, was my hero.

Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas had just hit the scene, though he had not yet come to America. Auden had similar reservations about his obscurity or obfuscations, whereas I found him the most stimulating poet since Crane. Later, when Dylan's reputation seemed to overshadow Auden's, I recall some bitterness on Auden's part about him which I couldn't go along with. And although I made it with Auden once, I couldn't accept a follow-up on that either.

I got to know Dylan Thomas when he came to America and found myself much easier and open in his presence. He was warm and boozy, spontaneous and anarchistic and desperate. A mutual friend of ours, the Scots poet, Ruthven Todd, who had known Dylan intimately since they were about eighteen, phoned me and said, "Dylan's coming to this country, and he has nowhere to stay. Can you put him up? He won't burn the house down." Would I put him up? I had the Third Avenue apartment on East 38th Street, in the Irish Bar area, which he would love. When he arrived, I got another call from Ruthven. "Dylan's staying at the Beekman Towers and I can't go to see him right now. Give him a ring and tell him you're a friend of mine and I'm sure he'll see you." It was a glacial January winter, as I recall.

I phoned Dylan and when the hotel operator connected us, there was a silence. I said, "May I speak to Mr. Thomas?" I heard a voice coughing and hacking and choking. "Mr. Thomas?" More hacking. Then the voice, deep and resonant, "Oh, I wish I were dead! Hello, who's this?" "I'm a friend of Ruthven Todd's and..." "Any friend of Ruthven's is a friend of mine," said Dylan. "Come right over." I was broke as usual but hopped into a cab. When I got to the penthouse bar, I saw him at a table, sitting with John Malcolm Brinnin. This was the first time he had come to the States and I was probably the second American poet to lay eyes on him.

I went over to the table and Brinnin, whom I knew, did not look happy to see me. I think he said, "What are you doing here?" I was dressed in blue jeans and old clothes, which literary people just did not do in those days in social situations. But Dylan rescued me and said, "Sit down! I wanna talk to you." He seemed bored with the situation until I came, and he actually leaned over to me and said in a stage whisper that could be heard distinctly by Brinnin, "How can we get rid of this bastard?" Brinnin got up and said he would be back in half an hour. We rapped for more than an hour. He told me that he came to America to make money because he had a wife and three children to support. He said he couldn't write any more, that everything he wrote was self-imitation, not growth or development; but that in the glow of his fame nobody really knew that, least of all the Americans, who worshipped him. So he'd better cash in while it was still good. He was entirely natural and unassuming and I appreciated that. He made me feel he was interested in me.

When Brinnin came back, Dylan was three sheets to the wind, pinching the

waitress's ass but not loud or offensive. When we got into the elevator, a tall distinguished elderly man in formal evening dress stood uneasily in front of Dylan with a homburg held reverently over his heart as if he were at a funeral. Dylan began to make doggy sounds; he snarled and barked and finally leaned towards the man's back and began to bite it. The man twitched and squirmed and never turned his head, maintaining his poise and dignity, like Marjorie Rambeau, the big woman in the Marx Brothers movies. When we got to Brinnin's car over the ice and snow, Dylan slumped in the back seat, with me next to him. "We've got to go and meet Allen Tate and the *Partisan Review* people," Brinnin said, "and you're not invited, Harold." "If Harold doesn't go, I don't go," Dylan muttered thickly. Then he passed out and I got out of the car, said "Fuck you," and left.

It was like the Forties academic vanguard, in the person of Brinnin, versus the rebels and misfits, in the person of Dylan, the successful misfit, and myself, the uninvited outsider. I saw Dylan quite a few times after that. Once, in the White Horse Tavern, when I got up to piss, he watched me fondly and boomed in his deep voice, "There goes another little Lord Byron." (Presumably including himself as we were both about the same height). He was beautiful and tragic and too good for the thin-blooded, goose-stepping literary snobs who surrounded him and finally contributed to his death.

WINSTON: I understand that you also knew Paul Goodman well at this time.

HAROLD: I'm writing a long poem in sections about the life and death of Paul Goodman. You know, I introduced Goodman to Auden at a party I gave at my pad in Greenwich Village. Paul seemed awed by Auden. In fact, he had asked me several times for an introduction. He just lay on the floor looking up at Auden and listening. This was very uncharacteristic of Paul, who was used to just the reverse. everybody at his feet listening to the Great Mind. But at that party I was amazed at his behavior. Later that summer on the beach at Fire Island Auden and Paul who had gotten to know each other, were arguing hotly about some issue, and Auden screamed, "Well, that's what I think, and anybody who doesn't agree with me can go fuck himself!" Paul related that story and was rather disillusioned with Auden for a while. But they had a mutual admiration society between them anyway.

The Forties

WINSTON: What were you like at that time, in the Forties?

HAROLD: I got drunk a lot, lived in furnished rooms and cold water flats, had sex with thousands of people, needed a shave, let my hair grow, couldn't keep a job, cruised gay bars and johns, padded the pavements, published a lot of poetry in magazines, went to parties, watched friends destroy themselves, destroyed myself, listened to music, met everybody in music and poetry, almost collaborated on an opera with Lou Harrison, was in at the start of the Living Theatre, saw a lot of Ned Rorem (with whom I collaborated on a song cycle), Edouard Roditi, John Cage, the Becks, Alan Hovhaness, Lou Harrison, Paul Goodman and so on.

In 1944 I met Tennessee Williams and lived with him while he was finishing the script of *The Glass Menagerie* in Provincetown. Jimmy Baldwin, who I met the same year, showed me the manuscript of his first novel, *Crying Holy*, before it was published as *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, a work which made him famous. Jimmy and I were particularly close; we had a real love for each other. I introduced Jimmy to editors and publishers and may have got him his first magazine publication. I met Gore Vidal but we never got it together, just chance meetings in bars and parties. I also met Paul Bowles in 1944 but didn't get to know him until Tangier in 1962.

WINSTON: I gather that 1944 was a watershed year for you then. Did these writers influence you in your writing?

HAROLD: No, not at all, with the possible exception of Kenneth Patchen and, earlier, Auden, for a short time. When I met Allen Ginsberg, also in 1944, I was already a published poet. He was unknown. My first appearance as a poet was in *Poetry* (Chicago) in 1943 with a long poem called "Key West." It was a Crane-like poem.

Ginsberg and I first met on a subway train. There was nobody else in the car; it must have been the wee hours. I saw this kid sitting opposite me in a red scarf and glasses talking to himself. The train was roaring so I couldn't hear what he was saying. At the stops I made out that he was reciting French poetry. I knew the

lines; it was Rimbaud, probably *Drunk Boat*. At one of the stops I said, "Rimbaud!" And he said, "You're a poet!"

Ginsberg and I went to my room in Horatio Street in the Village and Allen and I read our poems to each other but did not make it. Allen liked smooth, blond, crew-cut types and I was a short, hairy, dark Jewish boy. I found him sexy and appealing but had no idea of his poetic capacities; the poems he showed me were slight, four liners, and he seemed even shyer than I was. We didn't see much of each other after that until we met again in Paris, in 1962, when he presented me with a copy of *Kaddish*, which had just come out.

I missed the whole Beat Scene beginnings at Columbia. I left America in 1953 and didn't return till 1968. Fifteen years during which the Beat scene turned everything upside down. William Carlos Williams influenced my approach more than anybody by telling me, in the early Fifties, to use the spoken American language, not the English literary tradition. Allen carried the ball further than anybody. He influenced the whole climate begun by Williams.

I had been to Black Mountain on an invitation from Lou Harrison to read my poetry around 1951, after Williams had singled me out as having something new to present. There I met Charles Olson, who referred to me in his class as a "distinguished poet." I also met Franz Kline, who was just beginning his action painting.

Beat Hotel

WINSTON: I was just looking through Bryon Gysin's new book, *Let The Mice In*, with a text by Burroughs and Ian Sommerville on the Cut-Up Method. I understand you were also living at the Beat Hotel in Paris with Burroughs and Gysin at the time the whole Cut-Up Method was being worked out.

HAROLD: Yes. Ian Sommerville was a young English mathematician on summer vacation when we met at the Mistral Bookshop where he was working. One day when I went to see Burroughs at the Beat Hotel, Room 15, the door swung open and a guy, stripped to the waist, whom I took to be Burroughs for an instant, though I knew them both, said, "Hello, man. Bill's not in." Then I realized it was Ian, and my mind was blown. I was magicked. Bill Berkson was with me, and he thought it was Bill, too, although Ian was still in his teens. Ian was also tall and thin, but the strange mirage could only be accounted for as a projection of Burroughs' image onto Ian, which was a kind of magical mindfuck that Burroughs used to practice, called "the replica," superimposing yourself on another. I didn't yet know that Burroughs was a shaman. This replica thing appears in *Naked Lunch* and elsewhere in his writings. "Where's Bill," I asked Ian, still mystified and uneasy. "Hey, man, Bill's kicking," said Ian. "I'm nursing him back to health."

That was the beginning of a permanent relationship between them. Ian was extremely brilliant in physics, mathematics and technology, and figured heavily in bringing to the scene many concepts and ideas that went into cut-ups and in other ways influenced Bill's work, although Ian was not a writer. Ian's ideas in engineering figured in the creation of The Dream Machine that he and Gysin developed. Without being a writer or painter, Ian was a collaborator of both Burroughs and Gysin.

We all lived in the Beat Hotel, which was an old hotel on Rue Git-le-Coeur, where you could do anything, come and go as you liked, have visitors at all hours, something very rare for Paris, where there's a lot of surveillance.

I moved into the hotel about the end of 1960, as Burroughs kept telling me how great it was. "Best hotel in Paris for the money. For two bucks a day you've got a room, gas stove, heat, and no snooping concierge. You can't beat it." I always admired Bill. He had a frightening presence, especially when he was a junkie.

At our first meeting in the summer of 1959 I was scared stiff. Corso had told me to look him up. I knocked at Room 15 and there was no answer. When I was about to retreat down that smelly dark hallway — it stank of feet — the door opened and an emaciated, cadaverous man stared right through me; gimlet eyes, I wrote later, absolutely terrifying cold, piercing, impersonal eyes. I said I was a friend of Allen's and Gregory's and they told me to look him up. He muttered, "Come in, man. Come in." It was a very tiny room, with a window over a grey court — a grey room — *breakthru in grey room* — and a grey ghost in the room. The walls were covered with his black marker drawings, a series of endless, paranoid labyrinths. I sat down and he sat down without look-

ing at me, crossed his bony legs and dug at his fingernails with the end of a match, without saying a word. I don't know how long we sat in silence, but it seemed like eternity. Finally, he asked me where I had been, and I said I lived mostly in Italy. "Italy?" he said in a faraway sepulchral voice. "I don't like Italy. I hate the sun." I said, "Oh." Then I told him I came to Paris in May, 1959.

The conversation didn't get going, as he dug at his nails, hunched over, never looking at me. It was really weird. I think I stayed a couple of hours, and by then I was pretty strung out. I said, "It's been very nice, man, I'll come back again." At that point, when I stood up to go, he fixed his gaze on me once more, as he did when I had come to the door. He was still sitting, and he stared in a slow panning motion from the top of my head right down to my feet, a long slow look taking in everything, x-raying me, like a machine, and then he said, "Yeah, man, come back sometime" in his spectral voice.



William Burroughs (left) & Harold Norse
Paris 1961
Photo by Ian Sommerville

WINSTON: In his photos he looks severe and forbidding, which I suppose is at variance with what he is really like.

HAROLD: Yes and no. He does have a very forbidding manner and look. I've always thought he looked like a Mississippi Riverboat oldtime gambler, and he is from that part of the world. Even in his worst junkie days he always wore a shirt, tie and suit, though shabby. He looked like a gentleman on the skids. And when you have a dope habit that requires fifty or a hundred dollars a day, you can be on the skids.

All this is in his first novel, *Junkie*, which documents the period when he had to roll drunks and take crazy jobs like being an exterminator, private eye and such. He looks like the brains of a gang. It took a long time for me to get over an uncomfortable feeling in his presence. Though very articulate, he's tightlipped and taciturn. I always had the impression that he was evaluating and assessing everything you said.

On the other hand he's very fun-loving, a fabulous raconteur. As we got to know each other, in the early days, that came out in both of us. I used to amuse him with crazy stories I heard around Paris. We joked a good deal. After he kicked his habit, he smoked grass with us. He could go on for hours, in his room or Brion's or mine or Ian's, like in *Naked Lunch*, telling tales of his earlier experiences, re-living each part, with a thousand different faces and voices, until you thought you were hallucinating. I'm sure he had total recall. He made every scene come alive. I'd often hear his voice rumbling from the room next to mine where Ian lived. One night in Ian's room, with only candlelight, Bill read from the manuscript of *The Soft Machine*, which he was working on, and we were all zonked by that incredible prose and the way he read it. Brion knelt and kissed his hand and called him Master.

We used to sit on the terrace of the Cafe St. Michel, just around the corner from where we lived. Once, as we were watching the endless parade of young French and foreigners go by, mostly with guitars strung from their backs, and long hair, an hour passed without a word, a common occurrence with Burroughs. Then he snorted, and drawled drily, "Not a decent fuck in the whole generation." [Laughter]

Around this time Burroughs predicted the breakdown of censorship. He also went to try the first experiments with acid at Harvard when Leary tried them as a psychology professor. He came back muttering that Leary wanted to control the world. It did influence a whole generation. Burroughs said it would be subversive. He meant subverting the straight, linear, logical, square, prosaic, unimaginative and suppressive way of behaving

and thinking, for what McLuhan, around the same time, was calling the all-at-onceness of experience, seeing that experience is not what logic and reason would like it to be, by superimposing on it a pre-programmed, conditioned, semantic pattern that really sets up a barrier between the directness of what you see and feel and the object of your seeing and feeling. Also the extrasensory faculties have to be accounted for in the total experience, but all such urges, intuitions, flashes, are simply left out of the spectrum by the straight, linear, conditioned thinking process, although it still exists, unaccounted for and unrecognized by the observer himself, scientific or ordinary.

Even poets, especially the academic, have been writing from the stance of a purely rational approach, discounting the complex nature of experiencing. This approach is destructive of poetry in any case, since poetry (as well as some kinds of prose like that of Burroughs or Anais Nin) comes out of the direct, unimpeded observation of things as they are without

done the method even before the first cut-up text, *Minutes to Go*, appeared in 1960, I am the only American poet with a body of poetry in cut-up dating from the original Beat Hotel beginnings. I am collecting a volume of these cut-ups called, *Harold Norse/Of Course*.

Cut-up is primarily a deconditioning of language patterns and habits. The message behind all of Burroughs writings is *Kick the Habit*. The chief purpose of cut-up is to cut through the normal syntax that controls behavior and shuts out alternate semantic experiences. The logic of subject, verb, predicate as 'causal relationships, taken from the type of Western thinking that has dominated mankind since the rise of the sciences and industry, is rejected in favor of the Eastern concept of nature and behavior based on aleatory relationships, chance, coincidence. This cuts the mind free from inherited habit patterns, based on our education, received from parents and society.

Radio, TV, the newspapers, the movies, educate us every day of our lives. One statistic shows that every American is subjected to something like 360 commercials a day on the average. This is subliminal coercion, manipulation. Cut-up undercuts this kind of education with a new kind: self autonomy achieved by destroying the commercial messages and substituting chance messages from Elsewhere. These are messages from the Beyond, from space, from the collective unconscious. The random approach, based on chance, leaves the field wide open from something New. Chance, in the West, is thought of as gambling or play, because Western thinking is structured on causality, based on cause and effect. Not all cultures believe this, as Carl Jung has shown.

In his Introduction to the Wilhelm edition of the *I Ching*, Jung states that Western scientific thinking derives its conclusions from laboratory experiments but that Nature does not act the same outside the laboratory. Every process is constantly interfered with, interrupted, by other processes. So Western science is based on limited or false data, from which it draws hard and fast rules, even moral laws, erroneous but sanctioned by authority. Western thinking is clearly limited and places us right at the bottom of Plato's cave.

The ancient Chinese based their observations of nature on the principle of synchronicity, or coincidence. Things come together by Chance which is, however, subject to inscrutable divine laws. What we consider a random throw of the dice or yarrow stalks that fall in a certain pattern once, and once only, is not considered random but inevitable and unique, with meaning. The *I Ching* is still a great book of divination and oracular power. Anyone who has worked with it, as I have, cannot fail to be continually amazed by the rightness of its prophecies and the relevance of its answers to the current situation of the individual.

When Tristan Tzara cut up a newspaper in 1916 in Switzerland, threw the scraps into a hat and pulled each one out at random to create the first random dada poem, he subverted the rational approach that had led to the First World War. He made the first aesthetic revolutionary attempt as an act of defiance to be hurled into the teeth of the comfortable bourgeois who still accepted the world as a safe and sane place.

The rational approach is not the only one to reality. Since Freud, we know that the irrational dominates our behavior. I have observed that the most irrational people often consider themselves rationalists and put down astrology, ESP, zen, yoga, mystical experiences and so on. But if you press them you find that they may hold orthodox beliefs in God and generally behave irrationally in argument.

Burroughs saw the power and usefulness of the cut-up method to go beyond Dada, where poetry, as Lautremont and Rimbaud said, could be made by all.

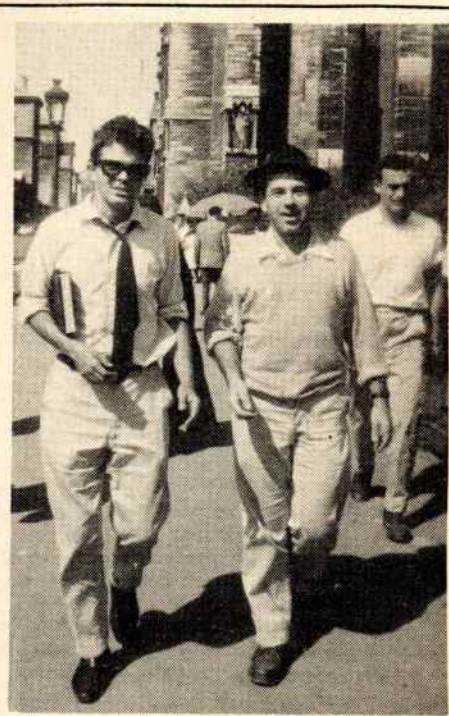
Take any page, cut it down the middle and then across. Do the same with any other pages, from Shakespeare, your friend, yourself, poetry, and do the same. Then at random put the pieces together and read across, and you'll have a message, a poem, something. A voice that is not your voice comes through. The words are not your words; they're everybody's words. They are words that belong to, come from, everybody, and, as Joyce wrote, here comes everybody. Is it art, is it a game, a pastime, or what? Will it shake up the habit patterns of the reader, turn him/her on, like dope, or meditation? It will do all these things. It will defuse the charges in language that have locked words into memory and memory into the body as muscle and nerve reflexes. It will release the ancient hold of stored-up negative memory charges by cutting words loose from their traditional referents. And you will get high, if you let go, let it happen.

There is a form of psychotherapy in practice today that uses only poetry to calm and heal patients. Just as in ancient times hexameters were said to have a ther-

Cut-Up

WINSTON: It was during your stay at the Beat Hotel that you yourself got involved in cut-up writing, wasn't it?

HAROLD: Yes. I began doing cut-ups and showed them to Bill Burroughs who was very impressed. I continued using it as a technique for years, until today. Apart from Gregory Corso, who aban-



Gregory Corso (left) & Harold Norse
Notre Dame, Paris, 1959

apeutic effect by the regularity of the rhythms. So why not cut-ups as therapy? It intensifies your perceptions, just as grass does. There are changes in brain-cell pattern on acid or mescaline or grass, and I am sure the same happens when doing or reading cut-up.

My first cut-ups at the Beat Hotel in 1961 alarmed me. I thought I'd gone crazy. There was no precedent for what I had written, or what was being written through me. At times I felt possessed, occupied by another being, someone else's voice speaking through me. There's some evidence for concluding that everything you see or read or hear makes some kind of permanent physical change in your brain cells and nervous system. Cut-up is akin to extrasensory perception states.

When I was first doing cut-ups in the Beat Hotel, I found out a month later that an English poet in the room next to me had been writing similar things. Whole phrases and words were identical, although we did not know each other at the time of writing. I had the same experience time and again with Burroughs, who lived upstairs. We felt we had reached levels of ESP where we shared a common voice. The walls themselves were acting strangely, like magnetic conductors.

Burroughs has devised various uses of cut-ups as counter-media agencies, like taking a tape recorder into a crowd of people and playing back what they are saying but cutting in different voices into each other, until what's played back is a mad mixture of everybody's voice into one voice and then speeded up into a Mickey Mouse/Donald Duck effect. This is one of the purposes of cut-up: to create panic among those who are so set in their ways that re-programming threatens their sanity. Essentially, its purpose is to create an alternative life to the one you're leading as a controlled, manipulated unit.

WINSTON: The most successful poems I've written over the past two or three years are the few in which I used a cut-up method. As you say, it's as if another message were coming to me, a message from the unknown.

HAROLD: If you tap the collective unconscious, a remarkable voice comes through, the voice of everyman. When we reach the time that all men are poets, we won't have to fear division and separation. We will then, of course, enter that era which I think all poets, at bottom, no matter how cynical and depressed, believe will happen: "The day of Universal language linking together all thought will come!" (Rimbaud) We will be free to express our love rather than our hate. That was the vision of Whitman and Rimbaud, two gay poets. Homoerotic love plays the greatest role in that, when it is no longer suppressed and ridiculed but brought out in everyone.

Before Gay Lib

WINSTON: Perhaps you'd like to rap about the gay dimensions of your own life.

HAROLD: I've always been attracted to young men. What I wanted was a life companion but never found one. I had various lovers before I left America but a lot of violence and jealousy came with them. I understand now that it was an internalization of self-hatred. It wasn't so much guilt — I never felt guilty about accepting, loving another human being — but I think we could not accept ourselves because we felt left out. Society defined us and said, if you love another of your own sex, you're criminal and degenerate. We were too young, in our teens, to argue and so we accepted it emotionally. Later we destroyed our relationships through a long habit of insecurity. Not loving ourselves, how could we love each other?

There was great fear of becoming that stereotype, the fairy. I myself was never the victim of the Fairy Princess syndrome. But in an environment that makes you automatically a criminal, it's useless to pretend that you can get good feelings when driven underground into secrecy and pretence. (I'm talking of a period long before the gay liberation movement, of course). When you're growing up in such an environment, you haven't the intellectual weapons to combat the false labels attached to you. Feelings of inadequacy cripple your relations with others and communication problems make things worse. So you drink, you fuck compulsively, you get yourself into dangerous situations with the law and with psychotic queer-haters and queer-killers. Every other friend of mine in New York was either being psychoanalyzed or psychoanalyzing. They were gay on both sides of the couch, so to speak.

An example is Paul Goodman. Paul had first wanted to make it with me. Then, after I had acquired a lover, he wanted him, too, besides having a wife and innumerable boy friends. We both declined the honor, Dick Stryker and I,



Harold Norse, Morocco 1962.
Photo by Paul Bowles

and Paul never let us forget it. I had met Paul in 1944 through Jimmy Baldwin, and Paul made a pass at me when we were alone, but I didn't respond. Rejection to Paul was unforgivable. Yet for the next decade, till I left America, we saw a lot of each other. He said that he enjoyed my company. Whenever Dick and I got to smashing glasses of booze against the wall or against each other or wrapped the lamps around our necks or chain-smoked endless packs of Chesterfields in endless discussions of our problems, we would phone Paul Goodman. He would say, "Why don't you both calm down and take it easy?" Not much help from a lay analyst. His boyfriends complained that he found their helpless condition on the couch so appealing that he could not resist blowing them right in the middle of a session. We went to Fritz Perls' therapy sessions conducted by his wife, Laura. This would usually result in playing the game of analyst — attributing to the other habits and behavior that we didn't like in ourselves. Also fantasies, repressed feelings.

So nothing was solved. Dick, who had spent three years in prison for pacifism and conscientious objection, would get drunk and bar me from going out the door, or behave in other ways, trying to make me hit him. He was usually successful. He was an ex-Catholic who had a self-punishing guilt trip that he laid on me. Dick would invite friends to come and watch the fun. Friends took sides. Judith Malina sympathized with Dick because she only heard his side of it. I kept my feelings to myself. Julian Beck was neutral, while Jimmy Baldwin, through whom I had met Dick, sided with me.

I couldn't handle the situation any longer. I had a cold water flat on Third Avenue with a Picasso gouache on the wall, *The Dancers*, 1921, the Cubist period, which nobody ripped off because they thought it was a reproduction. I sold it for \$400, which wasn't very practical, and used the money to get to Europe. Before I left there was an endless party at my flat financed by the gay millionaire who had given me the Picasso. Scotch flowed like water and hundreds of people drifted in and out for days, among them Allen Ginsberg (who mentioned it years later in Paris), Paul Goodman, Julian Beck and Judith Malina and what seemed like the entire literary and art world of New York. John Button arrived from the West Coast and helped get me to the boat. I couldn't remember much. I was smashed, confused and suicidal the whole time. It took me years to realize that you can like yourself. I couldn't understand that self-hatred was destroying me. This is what ultimately triggered off the attacks on me. I always found, of course, a partner who was equally self-rejecting and who would accuse me of his or her own self-hatred, a kind of intricate mirror leading down labyrinthine ways of twisted bullshit.

So I left America (1953-1968) and lived in countries like Italy, Morocco and Greece, where the sex "problem" as we know it does not exist. In a sense I might say somewhat jokingly that it's very much like what the Baths are here, a way of quick and easy sexual release. But it's much more than that. In those countries you find without difficulty men who are only too happy to share their lives with you without being cut off from the rest of society. With or without sex, men are intimate with each other, less so with their wives or other women.

Of course, it's a male oriented world in the Mediterranean. But it's truly bisexual, or more — melons will also do. In Arab countries or Southern Italy, it's very common to see two men, not necessarily lovers, walking down the street with their little fingers lovingly entwined. You see this also in Spain, under Arab domination for 800 years, where the Inquisition made the Spanish what I call the Puritans of the Mediterranean, just as Oliver Cromwell put an end to "Merrie

England," helping to create a people who "take their pleasures sadly," as Oscar Wilde observed. The Church bans sexual pleasure except to monks, priests and popes, as history reveals (I did not translate Belli for nothing.) Those bastards made the Spanish and English guilty about their bodies.

Machismo, grew out of the need for men to assert their balls because they secretly worried about their manhood. That's the reason Hemingway-types love bullfights. Risk your balls and you're a man. Well, it's a bigger risk, and more courageously manly, to say, "I'm a cocksucker." If the athletes and war-makers and tough guys were to admit their true desires about other men, I think we'd see a homosexual America. A homosexual planet.

In recent years America has contaminated the Mediterranean. For example, the *pissoirs* of Paris and Rome were pulled up by the roots while I was living there. They had existed unmolested for 2000 years, happy meeting grounds for cruising men in need of a satisfying quickie to soothe the soul. Their doom was sealed with the arrival of barbarian hordes from the West, those antiseptic American ladies reeking of chemical deodorants, alcohol and cosmetics that eat the skin away and cause cancer. But they complained of "the smell," not to mention that men were urinating in the streets! Shocking!

It reminds me of a story. It concerns the controversy over the scandal of Oscar Wilde's trial at the end of the last century. The Victorians were shocked not so much by homosexuality as the exposure of it. Ellen Terry, the famous actress, said she had nothing against homosexuals, "So long as they don't do it in the streets and frighten the horses!"

God knows why anybody in his right mind lives a whole lifetime in cold, duty-driven, pleasure-hating, God-punishing, unimaginative workaday mad countries where it rains and snows and life is regarded at best as penance and pain and they make damn sure that everyone else will enjoy it as little as they do. This is called Law n Order, and the chief, lunatic engineer throwing the switch that executes all beauty, joy, love, thought, and sex is the criminal President of the U.S.A. And his brainless, brainwashed, illiterate electorate vote against their own best interests on every issue because they are ruled by Fear.

Mohammed

WINSTON: Could you talk about your stay in Morocco and your affair with Mohammed. For instance, how it differed from an affair with a boy in a Western country.

HAROLD:

When I first got off the boat in Tangier and set foot on Moslem soil, the entire Christian world dropped from my shoulders like a filthy cloak that I'd been wearing all my life, a ragged, tattered, stinking, stained, itching, ugly, old rag that I couldn't get rid of because it had become part of me, like my skin. Guilt went with it and the contamination of pleasure by commandments against instinctive joy. Young men offered themselves or their sisters or a kilo of grass for \$5. They were not afraid of the police breathing down their necks.

My relationship with Mohammed explains a lot about the attitudes in different cultures towards sexuality, not just homosexuality. They don't draw the lines that tight.

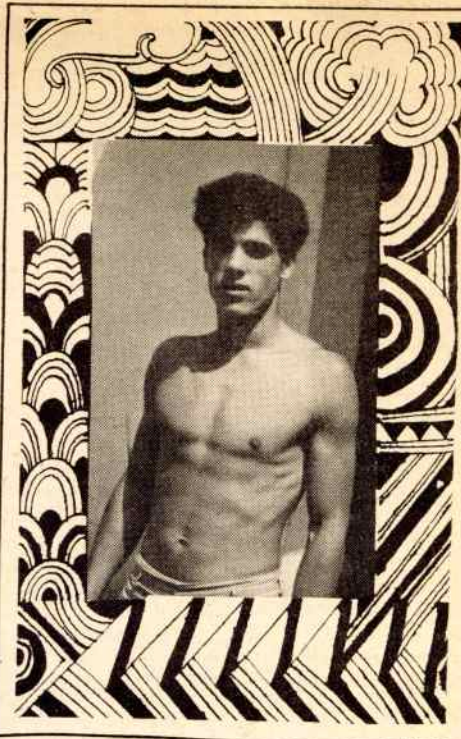
I met Mohammed at the Cafe Central in the Socco Chico, the small plaza in Tangier's Medina, also called the Casbah. I had been around for about a week or so and would sip green tea and watch the hustlers and "guides" ply their dis-

honest trade, as the moneychangers sat motionless, like lizards, not even blinking their eyes, waiting for who knows what.

One day Mohammed was sitting at the next table with his older brother, Alal, who was about 24, and the kid kept staring at me and smiling his slant smile. They started a conversation in Spanish, and soon Alal offered to go to my hotel with his brother. I said I'd like to bring Mohammed (who was 17) alone, and after that first time we remained inseparable during my year in Morocco.

When I first met Mohammed he was the most attractive and successful male hustler in Tangier. He had walked from the Rif mountains hundreds of miles barefoot to the Big City where his brother introduced him to hustling the foreign gays. He'd been at it for about three years or so when we met and seemed rather hard and professional until I got to know him. Then I saw that he was really very innocent, affectionate and loyal, a young Berber shepherd who had not changed. I taught him to read Spanish and brought out a latent talent for drawing in pastels and crayons. The results were remarkable enough to be sold to the International Set of writers, artists and dope fiends. Paul Bowles bought some, as I recall. It was Paul who suggested originally that Mohammed would enjoy this kind of creative outlet. The relationship was unlike any I had known in Europe or America because of the implicit assumption between us that what we were doing was perfectly normal.

The first time Mohammed and I went to a movie in the Medina he took out his kif pipe. I nudged him and said in Spanish — which was the language between us — "There are two policemen in back!" He blinked a moment and said, with a straight face, "Keep your eye on them!" I assumed he meant that while he was smoking I had to watch the cops to see they didn't come over and bust us both. So I kept my eye on them rather than on the film, worrying all the time. Then I saw both of them reach into their pockets and bring out sections of a kif pipe, which they assembled, stuffed with dope and turned on! Then they dismantled the pipes — Moroccan kif pipes come in sections to be fitted together when used — and put them back in their pockets. I said in astonishment to Mohammed, "They're smoking!" He laughed and said, "Of course! Everybody does!" So I turned on and the film seemed terrific, though I can't recall any film I ever saw in Morocco, I was so stoned the whole time.



Mohammed,
Garden of Villa Mouniria,
Tangier 1962

But the trouble, as usual, was money. My funds were limited and I could not, cheap as it was, stay there indefinitely. In the Arab world, or anywhere in the Mediterranean, you can spend your whole life free from persecution and contempt. But I couldn't stay a lifetime.

When I told Mohammed at the end of a year that I had to leave for Paris, I was not prepared for the way he took it. He went out on the terrace and bawled like a child, deep convulsive animal sounds. I was completely shaken, and soon there were two of us crying in the moonlight against the coping on the roof overlooking all Tangier and the bay below. From then on, although we continued to live together for another couple of months, his attitude toward me was more formal, more polite, a bit distant and somewhat more mysterious than usual. During the whole year we were together, living and traveling and almost never out of each other's sight, I felt there was something intangible about him that I could never reach. His eyes, at times, seemed ancient and dreaming far back into vast primitive depths of time, desert, stars, pan pipes. Hashish and grass had a lot to do with it.

but also the fact that he was a Moslem shepherd. There was a great gulf between us, psychologically, that I could never bridge. He was never abusive or nasty and had a dignity and poise you would hardly expect from a peasant, which put to shame many aristocrats I knew. Although he rarely entered a mosque, as a Moslem he accepted with natural simplicity the fatalism of his culture. *Mektoub* — It Is Written. Whatever happens is destined. They don't believe you make anything happen, which is directly opposite to Western thinking.

Once when there was only enough spaghetti for an evening meal, Mohammed, who was cooking, drained the spaghetti through a colander over a bucket on the floor. But he had forgotten to empty the slops in that bucket. When I saw the black, slimy, muddy spaghetti, I said for Chrissake, what the hell is this, what are we gonna eat tonight? Mohammed said, I didn't do it. I said, Huh? Who did it? There's just you and me here and you made the spaghetti. No, he said, I didn't do it. I thought he had gone nuts. So I said, ok, who did it? Allah, he answered. He meant it, he believed it. This was another world. It is hard for us to see that there are whole civilizations where the individual feels guiltlessly immersed in his sensuality.

I read in the San Francisco *Chronicle* that a survey showed that every American lies and steals. But Americans don't believe they do; they prefer to think self-righteously that only Italians and Arabs do.

Before we separated, we moved into a room at the Hotel Villa Mouniria on the ground floor facing the garden. When I told Paul Bowles about this, he said, "That's the room Bill Burroughs had. I used to go round to see him. It was a complete mess, hundreds of eukodol bottles scattered all over the place and pages and pages of writing on the floor, blowing out into the garden. I asked him what all those pages were and he said, laconically, 'That's my work.' It was the manuscript of *Naked Lunch*. He wrote it in the room you're living in."

The Mouniria was a big, pleasant, old-fashioned villa run by an aging Frenchwoman who once was a whorehouse madam in Shanghai. She was very fierce and one day she shouted, "Monsieur, monsieur! There is an American friend of yours who has been looking for you all day!" That evening Gregory Corso showed up — he was the American friend — and took the only other room on the ground floor next to mine. We had some good times there, got stoned and played fantastic verbal games. Once we were looking up at the stars at night and Gregory said, "Let's read the stars. Pick out two letters from the shape of the stars. I'll begin. I see G.C., my initials. What do you see?" "I see V.D.," I said. Gregory later played other verbal games that were less charming.

Through Gregory, I met Alan Anson, who had a room on the top floor. He said aggressively that he had heard a lot about me from an old "friend" of mine, Chester Kallman. I was annoyed by Anson's unmistakable innuendo. I can't say that Anson and I became friends, although we ran into each other a lot, years later, in Athens. He always had the same belligerent air.

WINSTON: Did you see Mohammed again after you left Morocco?

HAROLD: When I went back to Paris, Mohammed turned up a year later at the Beat Hotel. Before we broke up in Tangier, he said, "I can't go back to the life you took me from." I had taken a young boy out of prostitution and illiteracy and taught him to express himself, to communicate, to love. He was bound up with me because of the communication between us, in a language that neither of us had mastered (Spanish) but had transcended through body language. I said, "What are you gonna do?" And he said, "Go back to the Rif." I didn't believe him, but that's what he did. A year later, Mohammed was in Paris, heaving coal for fourteen to sixteen hours a day in the *banlieu*, where Arab workers were exploited. He said, "I don't want money from you, I just want to be with you." But there was no way I could handle it. I couldn't just freely move around at will. I had to go where I could teach or take a room or apartment offered by friends. So I left for Italy and never saw Mohammed again. I heard he returned to the Rif and got married.

Anyway, there's something I've never told anyone about some of these affairs with boys. In the Mediterranean especially, they often put a restriction on the amount and kind of sex they have with you: three orgasms a week, no kissing and you can't fuck them. Now I'm just not cut out for regulations of any kind on my libido. Mohammed made that kind of restriction and it became boring. This is how they probably justify their masculinity to themselves — by not allowing themselves to enjoy it too often. I'm more than ready now for a sensible

adult kind of turned-on thing without destructive games (dear reader, please note.)

WINSTON: You mean that you would be ready for a truly intimate affair rather than one based on false values?

HAROLD: Right. In all my past affairs there existed a fear of intimacy because of what we'd find under the mask. It was an unequal partnership with Mohammed, in the sense that we couldn't really know each other. Barriers of language, education, culture came between us. At times I felt incredibly close, but I never knew whom I was close to. I never knew what he was feeling and thinking. When stoned, you can get very freaked out in such a scene. At times I thought I was bewitched, magicked, by some kind of Arabian sorcery. We saw a lot of Paul Bowles, whose tales about westerners meeting with strange fates in the desert were not exactly reassuring.

A couple of years later I went to Greece, had an affair with an Irish Catholic ex-nun from Boston. A Greek boy I had made it with got jealous (he wanted her, too) and hexed me. Then I had a very intense affair with a Dutch boy for about two years.



Harold Norse,
Paris, France 1960

Love-Junk

WINSTON: You met him in Greece?

HAROLD: Yeah, on the boat from Piraeus to Hydra. He had looks, brains, beauty, talent. There was something of a *deja vu* about our meeting. We spent around fourteen hours rapping about poetry, the *I Ching*, coincidence, Zen, Hermann Hesse, Vedantic philosophy, modern painting, everything.

But from the start I saw the fatal split in him, gut-need versus head-trip rejecting each other. So whether it's an illiterate or a high IQ doesn't mean shit. If there's no acceptance of gut-level, instinctive self, you're a fraud. He was part Jewish, schizy and paranoid. Our raps were crazily super-charged with imagination and energy. It was just what I needed. What I didn't need were the stumbling blocks to intimate contact. Before sex he had to be seduced; after sex he was cold and hostile. OK, so I had run into this before, all too often. But, you know, I take risks; that's how I've always lived.

I had an old house without electricity or running water, where I didn't have to pay rent because Leonard Cohen told me about it; it was being rented by a friend of his who had left for America. Gerard, the Dutch boy, tried to nail a door shut between our rooms as a permanent barrier between us. I told him he had the choice of leaving. He stayed two years. He slept on the floor with about a dozen cats who shat all over the place. In the morning I would see him on the dirty mattress with cat turds and fish heads over his face and

body. He didn't bother to clean up or wash himself either. He never washed a dish or clothes or anything around the house. He hated everybody, including himself. He had studied karate and got mad all the time, enough to threaten killing people with karate kicks. When I'd ask for a cigarette — I bought the smokes — he'd say sarcastically, "What's this, the army?" He was surly, selfish, and parasitical. He was a compulsive liar and thief — but I was hooked; like a junkie I couldn't break the habit.

I was gambling on keeping communication open between us, to make changes. But I found that a high IQ is no match for psychosis. In the end I lost everything. I'd been stupid enough to believe his abstract con, because I wanted to believe it. When he came on about Truth and Love, he seemed to soften and lose some of his aggressiveness. For two years I kidded myself into believing that things would get better, especially when the early barriers broke down and he seemed to grow more human, less monstrous. I thought I'd succeeded in getting through the dishonesty. We took an oath in Athens that we'd always stick together, help each other, and that I would never leave him "in the desert", as he referred to life without me. I kept that oath but he didn't. He never even kept a promise

put him in touch with first-class editors like Carl Weissner.

I have the ability to bring out the best in young poets, to play more than a teacher role; it's like hypnotic suggestion I operate from. They pick it up, even the less talented, and do remarkable things while it's happening. But not after it ends. Instead of exploring new areas of poetry-space as he had begun to do while we were together, he landed back in Holland with a wife and kids and never got off the ground. But he made profitable use of every introduction and lead he had gotten from me to publish, through a press he started, some booklets and a record of other English-language poets. He paid me back for everything by not publishing me, although he'd started the whole thing with the purpose, as he said, of bringing out my work in Dutch. He was what he professed to despise, a Dutch bourgeois with a commercial goal disguised behind a facade of Art and Metaphysics.

But I did write some of my best work during that period: most of the poems that comprise *Karma Circuit* and my long poem, *Hotel Nirvana*, an emotional record of that affair. The swami I wrote about is Satchidananda, who had not yet gone to America and knew nobody in Greece except a few of us in the small Athens literary colony.

As for Gerard, he could never accept the homosexual side of himself which was overwhelming him. It was not his "submission" to me that he hated, but the submission in himself to this need that turned into rancor and hate. So I became the scapegoat. He couldn't stand the truth of his feelings — or any truth, for that matter — and so he walked out on his true feelings and, therefore, on poetry. The Muse and the Duende take their vengeance upon whoever betrays them. That's one kind of karmic punishment.

At the end of all this, I was physically and emotionally a wreck. I also had chronic hepatitis. I returned to the States in 1968 and tried to put all the pieces together again. Now I'm getting back to health and sanity.

Ambition Syndrome

WINSTON: In the magazine, *Holy Doors*, you have an article called "Coming Back," written after your return to the States. In that article you say that American writers tend to destroy each other. What did you mean by that exactly?

HAROLD: It's the same syndrome, ruthless ambition. When I returned I saw among writers here an internalization of the competitive capitalist system. Writers and poets were handling themselves no differently from deodorant manufacturers or oil men. Although they may not commercialize their work, they commercialize their relations with one another by cut-throat competition.

WINSTON: Do you think this is true of the writers of the Beat Movement also?

HAROLD: The Beat writers — Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, Ferlinghetti and others — regarded themselves as a group, who started a new way of feeling and behaving. They helped start a new life-style that became the hippie generation. Allen's work certainly was one of the chief forces that opened up gay consciousness, took it out of the closet and made Americans see that it was before their noses, in every family. Burroughs added to this when *Naked Lunch* became a success. They were identified as members of the same movement, although each was vastly different from the others in style, attitudes, approach.

The Beat Movement, like any other had competitive individuals. This is natural enough when you are representing a style opposed to the current fashion, but not when you are trying to cut your weaker competitors out of existence, like some big powerful oil company. This mentality seems to be operating among many poets and writers. In certain positions, editorial and publishing, this is done by suppressing or blocking the career of someone you don't like. I can understand, for example, a poet who represents a School, like the Surrealist School as a way of life, not as merely a literary vested interest but an entire philosophy which, like a religion, dominates the psyche of the adherent. I can understand the Olson-Creeley projective verse colloquial manner, or the confessional, academically-dominated tight-form, tight-assed, English, traditional, school of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath, based on meter and rhyme as it has been understood by professors for hundreds of years. But I am not talking about genres where the artists feel militant about their style over another style. I am

much less an oath.

He spoke of Spiritual Self-realization and brotherhood, while ripping me off, stealing books, energy, possessions, health, time, life. So what was wrong with me? Why didn't I pull out, stop being the "good guy" who could always be relied upon, preyed upon. He would have screamed bloody murder had I ended it and saved myself, but I had a compulsion to play the martyr. I'm not playing this game anymore; I've paid my dues, overpaid them. But the victim needs the executioner, and that was the name of the game. It seems preposterous, monstrous now. How could I have gotten into such a masochistic bind. His existential position was, "I am blameless," the stance of the criminal psychopath. His conscience just didn't exist. He could not admit he had stolen or lied. A lot of movement people are like this. Behind the LOVE button there beats a heart full of HATE.

WINSTON: Did his talent reinforce your overpowering need to risk so much on the affair?

HAROLD: Until we met he had only dabbled in poetry. He relied entirely on me for guidance and stimulation. We both wrote voluminously, mutually stimulated to a fever pitch. The quality and amount of work I was producing is what kept me hooked. There was constant feedback, and I had been lonely, needing a companion on this level. But I kept clinging and didn't know how to let go. Then, too, I created his career, introduced him to everybody I knew in Greece: Leonard Cohen, Gregory Corso, Sinclair Beiles, dozens of others. I got his work published in magazines that solicited mine,

talking rather about individual writers who have become gangsters, hardened themselves against other writers in petty warfare. They behave like rival Mafia hoodlums and defend this as realistic in an age where everyone acts like an animal.

Bukowski

WINSTON: I know some of your views on this stem from the bad experience you had with Charles Bukowski. Perhaps you'd like to expand on this.

HAROLD: Before I met Bukowski, he had praised me in his writings. In his volume of *Stories* he said, in a characteristic sweeping statement, that I was the best living American writer. He was then not well known. I had, in fact, put him in the *Penguin Modern Poets 13* Anthology, with myself and Philip Lamantia, and that got him his first international recognition. The Penguin Books editor had asked me who I wanted besides myself in the volume. He had never heard of Bukowski.

When I came to California Bukowski and I met. We had, I think, a good relationship. He was being careful not to antagonize me. But he's an alcoholic and plays alcoholic games. His life and his work are based on a compulsion to humiliate people, to eliminate friends and enemies alike; to make a fucking mess of everything and then blame them all for his aggressions and hostilities. He feels like a shit afterwards and begs forgiveness. But he'll do it every time. If you're the patsy or the good Joe — the role in which I had cast myself — he'll try harder next time to doublecross and destroy you, till you tell him, finally, that you've had enough. That, of course, confirms his own feelings of self-hatred and gives him the chance to put you down for not being big enough to let him destroy you! Very similar to my experiences with the Dutch boy. Catholics, drunks, gays, blacks behave like this when they've accepted the definition of themselves from others, from parents and society.

Bukowski didn't mess around with me until we'd known each other for two years. I was Prince Hal, the Greatest. But as his reputation increased, he became impossible. He used to say, "I love thee in my fashion." He has got to play the Pig, I believe, in order to push way down and out of sight the intimacy he will never get in touch with — an intimacy for men. He hates women much more than the stereotype homosexual is said to.

I see dishonest games of this kind among writers all the time. We can't really be better than those around us, since we are all really one on a certain level and responsible in the end for everybody. We can only change as individuals. We can change by meditation, by mind-expanding drugs, by therapy, by our own decision to change, by actually changing our behavior.

Gay Consciousness

WINSTON: You said to me some time ago that the rise of gay consciousness over the past few years has affected your work. Perhaps we could rap some more on this.

HAROLD: I remember Burroughs telling me in 1960 in Paris that he expected censorship to break down within five years. This is exactly what has happened. Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* were all test cases that won. Burroughs is a great prophet.

The poems I wrote twenty years ago about boys are now being published for the first time. I have been pulling them out of the obscurity to which they had been relegated in folders and notebooks and submitting them to editors like yourself. I've never been a closet case, but now I don't bother to conceal my own preferences as I used to under certain conditions, in a job situation, for instance, not that I've ever kept a job for long. I've always been aware that there's no such thing as "straight" in any case when sex is involved.

I've always been a more or less open person concerning my own erotic behavior. But after Christopher Street I thought, "Well, now I don't have to sneak around anymore." In my work there has been no change; I've always written about gay subjects. But I had never really noticed it until I began sending our poems to the gay anthologies and magazines. Then I realized I'd written a great many poems with gay themes. There's been a change only in the sense of now being more in the open.

WINSTON: There is the case of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. Ger-

trude and Alice were lovers for many years; it was a well known fact among their circle of friends. An appreciation of her gayness is crucial to an understanding of her writing, especially for a work like *GMP*. And yet the literary world has almost conspired to keep this aspect of Gertrude's life hidden. I read a biography of Gertrude Stein a few years ago which didn't even mention her homosexuality!

HAROLD: Yes, I just read a biography of Kerouac by Ann Charters. Not once does she mention that he had sex with other men. Yet, in his *Gay Sunshine* interview Ginsberg mentions having had sex with Kerouac over the years. And this disclosure about Kerouac's natural sex needs has already pissed off a lot of his followers who can't stand the truth.

How many people know that Henry James was homosexual? And until recently scholars had never made it overt about Walt Whitman. When I was at college, I had a crazy professor who said something about Whitman having a high-pitched voice, "like so many of his kind." And this comment was by an American literature specialist! You have to go through unbelievable contortions to make a heterosexual writer out of Whitman. The Good Gay Poet, as I've always called him.

WINSTON: Another example is John Addington Symonds, the Victorian writer, whose personal diary talks extensively about his gay sexual experiences with Venetian gondoliers and others. After Symonds' death his executor, Horatio Brown — who was also gay — put the diary under lock and key not to be opened until 1976.

HAROLD: I don't think in the Western world we've ever had anything similar to the Gay Lib Movement going on now in America — and taking root in Italy, France, Germany and other countries, too. It's the first time that gays have come out in the open, which confirms my belief that this is the showdown century. All repressed elements which have been persecuted, hounded, made to lead miserable, defensive, hidden lives of self-hatred have never spoken out militantly until now: the blacks, chicanos, Jews, gays and most recently the Native Americans.

This society is so rotten and destructive that only a total change could make it liveable for anybody. At the age of fourteen I was reading the Russian writers of the preceding century, including the nihilists, and was influenced by nihilist-anarchist views, and I am still an anarchist. I have never belonged to any political group or party. From the middle of the last century, with Marx primarily, something was set into motion that I feel got sold out in our own time. It's a bigger view of social change than the repressive petty-bourgeois socialist states of today represent, an early ideal that has been destroyed and almost forgotten in the power politics of modern states.

When I was fourteen I had my first experience of cosmic consciousness. I experienced astral projection. I left my body and went into the stars. They became a circle of light and I was that circle of light. I was out of Time and saw my previous lives and future lives and my death in this life. In that split second I also saw the ultimate universal brotherhood of all, through Love, and that we are all one being not separate beings. No matter how gloomy it all looked in subsequent years I never lost that vision. I've been depressed and cynical, have acted and written a good deal out of negative states, feeling immobilized by the oppression of the individual. But I still think the wheel is turning from hate to love. But the psychedelic and sexual revolution hasn't gone far enough.

If one isn't totally erotic, expressing all sides of the sexual nature in every human organism, no revolution can be complete. You're cutting yourself off from that real love experience that has something oceanic and all-embracing, mystical and vast, a soul experience of union with all life, and, through this, union with God. God is that Being in every one of us, in our bodies at the base of the spine, the serpent-power, kundalini force, the sexual drive towards the ultimate orgasm, the ultimate union, eventually to be raised up through the Chakras to the Third Eye-pineal-gland-explosion-of-light at the top of the skull in out-of-sight-spaced-out superconsciousness. Fear of this experience is fear of your own tenderness, softness, gentleness, femininity and contact with your own inner space.

Instead we have the reaction: tighttased macho violent dollar Pentagon warlike rigid suspicious hatred in American men that you don't see very often in Europe except in northern countries. The American's sexual role is pre-programmed. He is forced to declare it at the expense of his true feelings. Most of the violence in this country comes from insecure, shaky sex roles — fighting and killing are

more acceptable social activities than loving and touching other men. The American man would rather have a bayonet up his ass than a cock.

Journal of Insomnia

WINSTON: I understand you'll be figuring in the next volume of Anais Nin's *Diary*. When did you meet her?

HAROLD: We met in the early Fifties. She admired my first book of poetry, *The Undersea Mountain*, published in 1953, and we've been a mutual admiration society ever since. I enter in the fifth *Diary*. In the sixth *Diary* she will publish a long prose-poem of mine, "Journal of Insomnia" in the form of a *Diary*. It's never been published before. I sent it to her about a year ago for her opinion, since it had been violently attacked here in San Francisco by a group of poets. Her positive reaction was a vindication and reassurance. She wrote: "The *Diary* is beautiful, direct and unique. If you are not ready to publish, would you like me to include yours within mine, a diary within a diary...? Do you feel ready to face what I faced (and sometimes regret)? You share, and people love you. Others seek to destroy you. But the kind of love you attain by sharing (as you did when you wrote from England) is worth the price."

WINSTON: Why do you think the poem-diary caused so much controversy among the poets you read it to here in San Francisco?

HAROLD: I think it was because of the tone. It's a work which can be very easily misunderstood. It's in the French tradition. I had been reading Henri Michaux, whom I met years later in Rome and Paris. The tone and rhythm of the poem is apocalyptic and epic, far from what was prevalent in American poetry of the Forties and early Fifties and not at all acceptable to academic types. The San Francisco group were mostly professors of poetry in the academic tradition. It's ironic that I was accused of "apocalyptic bullshit" — they said they were tired of this after fifteen years of it. As I mentioned to you, the poem was written before the Beats had come on the scene. It has nothing in common with Beat language, although the tone is a precursor, you might say, of this approach.

There is a provincial hatred and suspicion of the French influence, although now it's fashionable in New York. My work is a grab-bag of influences from everywhere I've lived and everyone I've read and admired. I don't really fit into any "School."

The poets who were impressed by the poem in question were all Europeans. The local poets condemned it as being verbose, full of clichés, sentimental, a rape of language and poetry, a work based on hate instead of love and therefore "immoral" — which is missing the mark altogether.

WINSTON: Yes, of course. A criticism which rejects a poem as being based on hate instead of love is not a valid way to criticize any poem.

HAROLD: Right on! The man who condemned it on those grounds was himself so venomous that he was practically foaming at the mouth. Actually, it's a poem of love anyway. Nanos Valaoritis, the Greek poet and professor said (at that same meeting) that since the trial of *Fleurs du Mal* over a hundred years ago moral considerations of the kind being presented had no validity in art; and that in any case, the critic had missed the point, the irony being in the love behind the hate, as in Lautreaumont's *Maldoror*.

I wrote a poem about the incident but it's too long to quote here. It seems I am always putting my foot in it. As Henry Miller once wrote about himself, I don't even have to open my mouth in a phony bunch of people; they know at once, instinctively, that I'm not like them."

*Like a meeting of taxidermists
they were stuffing the winged horse
with straw*

*They had beaten Pegasus to death
for shitting on the livingroom floor.*

Gay Relationships

WINSTON: Perhaps you'd rap about your style of writing and also how your love affairs have affected your work.

HAROLD: My style changes as I change, and I hope I keep changing rather than remaining with one particular mode of writing or feeling. When my *Selected Poems* appears, it will be pretty evident

that I keep moving in poetry as well as in life.

I continue to write about what happens to me, inside and outside myself. I work best when I have a lover; otherwise I feel isolated and lonely and cut off from stimulation. Although I haven't been spectacularly successful in the past in maintaining a long-lived affair, in looking back I can see what there was in me that worked against a good relationship. I chose people like myself, with similar hang-ups. We couldn't solve them because we didn't know how. Perhaps you do have to get older to realize it's not merely sex and passion but that a very conscious effort must be made on both sides to get through to love and to avoid contempt and hatred, which are carried over from childhood reactions and spoil the adult situations. I no longer suffer from the self-hatred that was so devastating to me and others most of my life.

WINSTON: Do you think it is self-hatred that militated against your having a good relationship with a lover in the past?

HAROLD: Definitely. Lack of self-confidence is fatal. The partner you choose is invariably someone who complements your neurotic needs, so that you recognize at first sight, for example, someone who will play the role of victim to your executioner, or someone who will be the helper to your helpless, the martyr to your persecutor. The roles are interchangeable. All dependency relationships that exclude self-help and self-autonomy are headed for the trash can. I now recognize these compulsive roles after a few signs betray them in another or in myself, and I don't plunge into an affair just because it's been sexually stimulating. Sex is simply not enough as a basis for living together. This may not be news, but to people who spend most of their waking hours in the desire and pursuit of the penis, it's always a good reminder.

Gay people often dehumanize sex, separate it from the person they're making it with. It's always been first sex and then muddle through the personality problems. Now I would do it in reverse order. Communication has got to be kept in the open. By communication I don't mean talking about antiques, cars, clothes, movies or telling jokes — those are just pastimes. I think gay and straight people spend too much of their time in those pastimes and never confront the vital issues of living, namely, personality problems, existential problems. There's no way love can work without communication. You've got to be really vigilant about your psychological behavior, without feeling blame or guilt, but observing how you destroy your own best interests.

WINSTON: The Gay Liberation Movement has never addressed itself to some of these questions. We are only now really beginning to talk about gay interpersonal relationships, and it's extremely important that we do so. We've had a lot of rhetoric in the Movement; a lot of people have gotten involved in demonstrations and zaps, but they've never really dealt with their feelings toward other gay people. As a result relationships have often been fatally destructive. The viciousness, too, with which gay movement people have sometimes put down other gay movement people is a form of self-hatred not yet dealt with. It's easy to spout radical rhetoric but more difficult to deal with the basic issues of love and communication. In *Gay Sunshine* we are trying to get away from mere rhetoric in order to communicate on deeper personal levels. This is the direction in which I, as editor, have been trying to steer the paper over the past couple of years. And with some success, if I can judge from the beautiful letters that have been sent to us from gay brothers and sisters all over the country.

HAROLD: That's a very good observation. There's a lot of sex chauvinism among gay people; the butch contempt for faggy behavior is as bad as the straight contempt for it. On both sides understanding is minimal. The transvestite, the drag queen, the compulsive nelly are in many cases simply living out a fantasy buried deep in most people from childhood. The butch goes to the other extreme by suppressing these fantasies and becoming more masculine in behavior and appearance than ordinarily required for relaxed behavior. I think it's extremely important for gay movement (and non-movement) people to investigate the psychological aspects of their behavior with each other, and with the non-gay world as well.

There's also something wrong with the gay activist who doesn't look into his/her own psychological behavior and goes around offensively causing splits in the gay movement, just as in the straight radical left, because of disagreement or the desire for power. Power is oppressive whether you're black, Indian, Jewish, straight or gay, man or woman.

Ageism

WINSTON: Yes, I agree. I think most of the brothers and sisters involved in the gay lib movement are not power-driven, although there have been tendencies of this kind at times among some individuals.

Another important question that's only just beginning to be dealt with is that of age and ageism. We've printed a number of articles during the past few issues on ageism. The gay movement has been very much a youth movement, and older gay people have been relegated to the background in a second-class role, or usually just ignored. And in the current gay scene "older gay people" means almost anyone over 30. Of course, the ageism syndrome permeates our entire society.

HAROLD: I wish it were otherwise, speaking as an older gay person who was once guilty of the same ageism in youthful folly. The ageism syndrome goes through the whole American structure, more than any country I've ever lived in. America is youth-conscious and youth-struck and has a horror of wrinkles, grey hair and flabby figures. Of all nations the youth of this country let themselves go physically to an alarming extent, eating and drinking sheer crap and destroying their bodies with drugs.

The majority of youth in European and African countries, where I've lived, are far better looking than American youth and are not repelled by physical contact with older men and women. In the Mediterranean countries, youths are not put off by the looks of older people, because their culture still has a place for the usefulness and experience of the older ones. Young men are just as excited about making it with old women as with young, and many of them have admitted that they prefer older women. In countries like France it is customary for a boy just emerging into puberty to be taken in hand by an older woman and initiated into the love experience over a period of years.

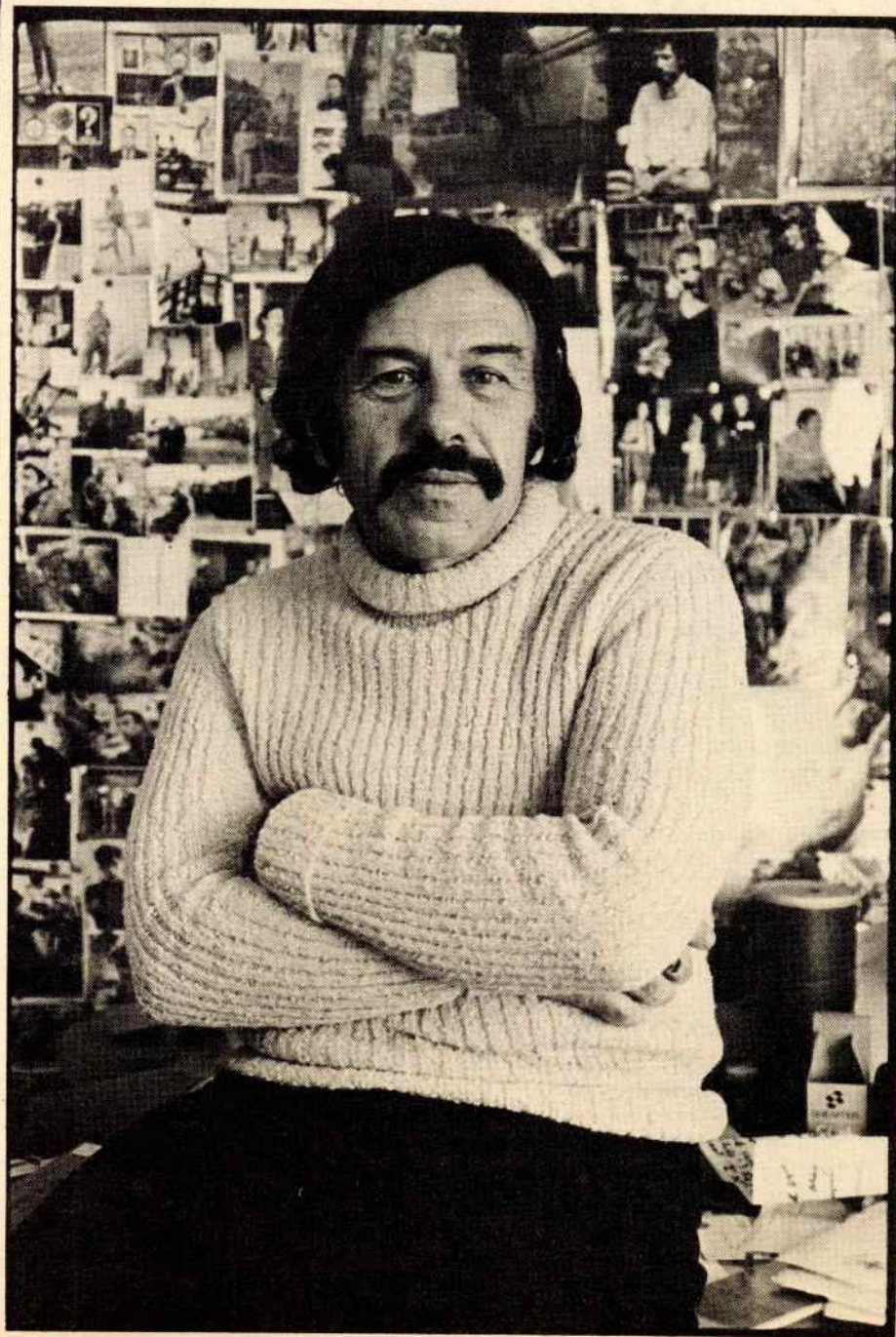
This is also common in many countries with homoerotic relationships: a very young boy and an older man. It must go back to ancient Greek times. The young men don't shrink from the touch of an old person. When I get really old, I hope to leave this country again and go back to the Mediterranean or the Far East where old people are admired, venerated, loved. You just can't tell the youth of this country to like, love, admire and have sex with older people. It would make them vomit.

WINSTON: I think it's a matter of raising gay consciousness gradually, something which will take many years. It is true that an older gay person can get youthful invigoration from a much younger person, as Allen Ginsberg has pointed out. At the same time, it is very self-destructive to search only for the very young and to be totally unwilling to make personal contact with people one's own age, or older.

HAROLD: Yeah, as you get older you realize that you can make contact with people of any age, because you're not looking only for ornamental types who look marvelous, like a new car, but for people who have a great deal to offer, to say. In general, it's more desirable to be open to people and to experience rather than to cut yourself off by a limited outlook. Beauty is always desirable at least to me, but the beast has qualities of loyalty and affection that beauty, in its narcissism and vanity, often lacks.

Beauty is very hard for a young person because in a way it bestows on the possessor a kind of godlike superhuman quality to be worshiped and admired rather than to be comfortable with. It's a gift like genius. The possessor can get away with almost anything. But the beauty must also get old and die. I've never been comfortable in the presence of great beauty. If I have sex with a great beauty, it is always followed by a kind of sadness, and I'm sure that this is because it could not continue forever.

Only when you go out to meet freely all kinds of people, without preconceived notion of aesthetic or sexual goals, can you enrich your life. You impoverish life by living in one modality only, such as looking exclusively for beauty and youth. I'm speaking from experience because that's what I did for many years. When I was young and beautiful, I was sought after. It was very easy to get what I wanted, but I was never satisfied. Nor did I find a lasting relationship on that basis.



Harold Norse, 1972

Photo by Gerard Malanga

Spiritual/Political

WINSTON: Would you care to comment on the spiritual revival that is very much evidence as one reaction to the intense crisis in Western Society on all levels, economic and social, with the constant threat of war and annihilation through technological achievements?

HAROLD: We recently had the interesting phenomenon of Rennie Davis, the New Left activist, one of the Chicago 8, who has become a disciple of Maharaji. Davis sees this 15-year old Indian guru as the only salvation. At first his attitude was, "What! be converted by some fat little rich kid with jewels all over his body?" Not only that, but Maharaji's older brother is supposed to be Jesus Christ — the Second Coming, no less! And as a second-class messiah, too, because it's the kid who's the big shot, the hottest messiah on the scene since Buddha and Christ. And this is what Rennie Davis believes. Don't forget that political activism is not necessarily exclusive of spiritual premises, witness Malcolm X and his guru, Elijah Muhammad.

America is at the very nadir of material decay and the corruption of spiritual values by the most materialistic society that has existed since ancient Rome. This country is now in the throes of a giant schizophrenia: you go either into the materialistic life or into spiritual illumination. Rennie Davis gave up the political solution in favor of the spiritual, but he had probably been suppressing his spiritual side and it had to come out one way or another.

I've been through both sides myself. I had left America in a completely cynical condition, nihilistic. When I left America in 1953 I got involved with occult and metaphysical concerns. In Europe I met a whole bunch of clairvoyants, yogis, swamis, cabbalists, Christian mystics, witches, warlocks, white and black magicians, Arabian sorcerers, theosophists, anthroposophists, and so on. There was almost no period during those fifteen years that I wasn't in touch with some of those occultists and magicians. I've had some wierd experiences. Once at a circle in Rome conducted by an Indian yogi, I

had the experience of the kundalini force suddenly rising and my heart and chakra opening up, which manifested as a feeling of a great wind in my back, on both sides of my spine, like the sprouting of wings. And once, through practising Buddhist exercises in Spain, I went out of my body.

I wrote about the Aquarian Age back in 1960 in Paris, in several poems. Now everybody knows about it. Good, the mysteries are revealed. This is the time for it, as prophesied in the distant past. The people are now to assume, to become God. What is happening *en masse* is what we, as individuals, pursued 15 or 20 years ago.

WINSTON: While there are beautiful and deep elements in many spiritual approaches, there are also a lot of emotional excesses in the name of spirituality. There is an imbalance in saying that the final answer is in this or that particular guru. If a guru helps you to transform your inner life and your external relationships as well so that a dichotomy is not set up between the political and the spiritual, then all well and good. But I think there are a lot of phony "spiritual leaders" around, taking advantage of the genuine spiritual needs of young Americans who have broken away from a materialistic culture.

HAROLD: There'll be rich pickings among them! There are all kinds of fortune tellers, tea-leaf and palm-reading gypsies, astrologers, ESP and clairvoyant mediums, psychics of all types. Many are phony, just as there are phony gurus. But some are not. I've had some unbelievable experiences in Europe with clairvoyants who knew all about me *at first sight*.

Now it's perfectly possible in Rennie Davis' case that he has flipped or is a double agent or loves power so much that he finds it at the left hand of God, in the person of young fatso, who's riding around in a Rolls Royce and is sheltered by parents making a fortune on him while the Indian people starve. My attitude is this: whether or not you have a profound spiritual experience makes no difference whatsoever to the masses of mankind who are suffering from oppression because power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of a few. If you are enlightened or not, your role should remain more or less the same with regard to social action: under no circumstances can you allow yourself to withdraw

from the commitment to change the world. Transformation of self is transformation of society only to the extent that you raise the consciousness of all by ceaseless activities in that direction.

It is true that there has been a mad dash for esoterica. On the other hand, most people are starved in a materialistic desert where the multiplication of goods and possessions is supposed to bring the highest happiness. Quite the reverse has happened: it's brought alcoholism, cigarette smoking, loneliness, lack of identity, TV and movie watching (because you can't relate to live people and must live vicariously) and a superficial mechanistic determinism that produces the Ugly American riding in his big fat slimy automobile or plane while the world starves. From this there's no way to go but to start looking for the source of all values, within yourself.

WINSTON: I think that too many people make a dichotomy between the spiritual and the political. Why can't we have both? That is the most balanced approach. Deep change will only occur when there is a union between the political and spiritual approaches.

HAROLD: Yes. From my understanding, Gandhi was someone who combined the two and so was Sri Aurobindo, who in the first part of his life was a successful lawyer jailed for his role in the Indian independence movement. In jail Aurobindo had time to read and study. He began practicing yoga and became the greatest living yogi in India. In India today what he left behind as his heritage is the most important of all that country's ashrams, or spiritual centers. I've read some of his works and there's no doubt about the quality of his mind and power of vision and, under it all, unmistakably, the force of Love. Maybe the movement of the young guru Maharaji is going to rival Aurobindo's in numbers, but I doubt you can compare this kid and his family, which is more like a theatrical act of some kind, a big circus show on the road, with something as genuine as Aurobindo's teachings.

I mention Aurobindo and Gandhi because I don't think there has to be a split between social action and inner light unless you make one. Rennie Davis has made a dichotomy. He may have a special problem. Time will tell. I suspect that anybody who has such a split within him is suppressing one element at the expense of another in himself. Just as a straight may be suppressing his or her own gay tendencies or vice versa. The harm comes from the suppression, not from the expression of it. Hatred comes from suppression.

WINSTON: Not many people have integrated both the spiritual and the political. One person who has is Daniel Berrigan — poet, writer, Christian mystic, political activist, who has been in jail for his activism. He wrote mystical poems while in jail for burning draft records to protest the Vietnam War.

Another such person was Thomas Merton. His first few years as a Trappist monk were spent just in spiritual development. But he emerged from that first period and wrote activist material infused with the spiritual. He had integrated the two. I think he was on the verge of making even deeper breakthroughs before his untimely death in 1968 while visiting Buddhist monasteries in the Far East.

HAROLD: If you suppress or repress a part of you that you consider unworthy or shameful, then you are going to be that kind of person who is a hater and who wants to kill others. Whether you're a mystic or a materialist doesn't matter; the same problems operate in the same way. If we do violence to any part of ourselves, we do violence to other people. We all need to express the different forces in us: materialistic, mystic, sexual. If we keep down any one of these, it will come back as contempt, hatred, the desire to kill. We have got to express, as individuals, our homoerotic urges without shame or guilt, and our heterosexual urges likewise. Suppression of one harms the other, does violence to your own personality and to other people. We also suppress the mystical at the expense of the materialistic, or vice versa, and produce monsters. "The dream of reason produces monsters," said Goya.

From the psychological point of view, all people are alike. We cry, we laugh, we need attention and affection. Our whole life is a quest for affection, for love. It's recently been discovered by neurologists that without constant handling and touching, the newborn infant begins to withdraw into itself and dies. Or if the infant grows up, he becomes the autistic child who cannot relate to anybody. All of us are like that; if we don't get constant feedback by physical and social contact, touch, attention, we begin literally to shrivel up. This lack of attention is the source of a great many illnesses. We cannot as organisms continue living in a state of sensory deprivation.

As homosexuals we are looking for someone who will give us tender, loving care, and receive it from us. But it's illegal for us to look for love. I find this barbarous, monstrous, worse than the excesses of witch-hunting in the Middle Ages and in early American society, from which our persecution derives.

WINSTON: I think that women in this oppressive, capitalist, macho society are subject to the same kind of oppression as gay people.

HAROLD: Exactly. Women and gay people have no real rights. The sexist male-chauvinist laws have relegated women to the position of goods and chattels, and this is also true of children under legal age. Without women's lib there can be no gay lib and vice versa. And until the blacks realize that their lot lies with the women and the gays, they're not going to get very far either. I think that the fault of minority militancy is in this fragmentation. That's one of the fallacies of being just politically oriented; you need a broader base of operations, a spiritual base.

WINSTON: Blacks and Chicanos have organized, and gay people must do the same if we are to wrest control of our own lives from the Establishment bureaucracies. This is what we are beginning to do. We have to keep in mind the spiritual, too, I agree. There has to be an integration between the political and the spiritual. This is what I'm trying to do in my own life.

HAROLD: Yes. Otherwise, you're operating from too narrow a base of consciousness. If you are open to mind-expanding experiences, you have a better chance of understanding the issues at stake. I define politics as the art of making the simple complex. With a greater grasp of the issues, we can fight for our autonomy more successfully. Gandhi and Aurobindo defeated the British Empire because they had a spiritual base; but they fought in the economic/political arena. You cannot beat that kind of combination. Until such men or women arise in this country, I think we will always be pawns in the game of master and slave.

Old Age Does Not Happen Slowly

Old age does not happen slowly
but all at once, in the head. The body takes its time
getting there, but the mind, clinging to youth
flashes suddenly — behaving as if you were still
careless! — flashes on sagging skin, discolored hair.
If you're a woman you probably cry.
Your face is set in sour lines about the mouth
at the corners, and you've an ailment that's killing you.
The ailment is Time.
If you're a man you joke about not getting it up
so often but doing it long and slow and women like it
better that way haha and you talk about the good old days
of football and war.
But if you're gay you're dead.
Nobody wants you, old friends think you're pathetic
and leave you alone with brief visits.
You eye the beauties like some leftover dinosaur
hovering in silence, terrified
of those hard men you used to have.
For if they go with you now it may be your funeral.

[May 1973]

previously unpublished

I WOULD NOT RECOMMEND LOVE

I felt as if the top of my head had got caught in barbed wire
and wrote endlessly in little notebooks comparing myself to Christ
and Van Gogh after reading about them in popular fiction
like LUST FOR LIFE and THE BIBLE

my head felt painfully stabbed
by a crown of thorns but I joked and rode the subway
and ducked into school john to masturbate a few times daily
told wilder jokes and wrote more secretly about my secret life
of teenage hell because I was DIFFERENT a freak of nature
the first and last of my kind in the world
smothering acute sensations of ecstatic love
in swimming pools and locker rooms
admiring lips genitals buttocks feet
that William Blake and Whitman admired
and Lorca and Shakespeare and Marlowe and
Michelangelo

da Vinci

Socrates

friends

I would not recommend LOVE
if you wish to survive

[previously unpublished]

HAROLD NORSE: POEMS

LOVE-JUNK

1

waking after 3 goofballs
with vague hard on directed
at nobody — I reach for 2 more
& gulp them hoping
they won't be the final
apocalyptic darkness

your image keeps probing
with sharp insistence
like a rotten molar's dying nerve

I cannot uproot absence
& sleep is no answer

+

I am at the end of empty roads
that stretch for years
(humming a sad tune) to you
unknown identity who
takes shape
to fuck me into paranoia
of losing
you

my body weakens
with terror
& hatred of all desire
knowing
how hard to destroy
persistent need
that kept us
(once)
so close

2

another country
& what is left
of the few familiar
possessions a
handful of old jazz &
francois couperin
on the
portable philips
I lamp
a few unmatched socks
some fotos
of you & other ex-loves
whom now you have
joined
I sit fumbling in a
tiny kitchen
stumbling
over garbage heaps in cartons
dreaming back to
our best times together
knowing
my blood cannot discharge
what poisons have
gathered there

3

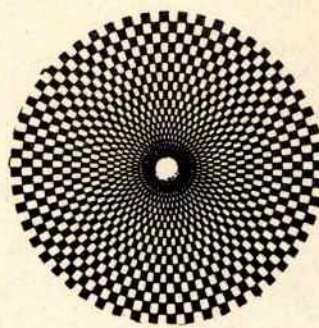
waiting to swallow me
THIS BIG BLOODY BLACKNESS

an unknown language
drowns my ear
LANGUAGE OF BLACK
impenetrable
snowfall of gutturals
BLACK SNOW OF NO
sound

I am engulfed!
sleepless & unawake
I stare at a hawk's feather stuck on the wall
from New Mexico
snow slips over the hill like a bandage
falls & falls but no relief
goofballs turn me on awhile
then I sleep sleep
restless like screaming
but wake too soon in a rush of doubt
BLACK POURS IN FROM THE COSMOS! VOID-BLACK!
my yellow eyes fall on black newsprint
it crawls towards me like an insect
on a pair of black boots
thru wax ear plugs

STOP STOP

STOP



ONE OF THOSE MORNINGS

& everything is suddenly a beautiful garden
with birds in it & angels & trees
made out of wings
a crazy doodle of a garden
& you don't understand anything
but there you are
making a poem of it
the most hopeless poem in the universe
oh god how my toe itches!
that beautiful garden
friends
it is not there.

[From Penguin Modern Poets No. 13]

4

I have been thru orthodox halls
of hospitals
stinking of men dying
of errors
& clinical madmen with the best reputations
in white smocks of ignorance
the unorthodox too lack the magic
the inside information
for none of them know anything
of the fire that I have stolen
none of them hold
the instruments that can measure feeling
the apple has nothing to say
about good and evil
about isolation and broken vows
but only reminds me
of something that is not health
that is not money
that is not success
something that once held a little truth
in it
something I let slip
out of my life
& has now become a long-distance call
ending
in silence

5

the tape recorder sings: *her sin*
is her lifelessness by Dylan &
again I'm running running
like hell from city to city
thru freezing streets
of shut-in faces & garbage cans
& the latest news full of chaos & futility
& love is a punch in the mouth
no attempt to communicate
words rasp like a scratch
tearing skin from bone
raw meat torn
cut off from self
as metal birds burn down the skies
into a rubble of cripples
exposing a gap where the face should be

what fire & lies have done
to second-hand people!

I look at them & see
myself
camera shutters & dead tongues
clicking

6

there is only the one
fix? why?
the whole world heaves
like a dream reeling
down the street & in spite
of kissing couples & lonely
pad with postcards of Blake & Bosch
there's surely someone who'll show
with the works — strip down
at the right time w/out too much fuss
& maybe even share this
isolation
— fill it with laughs!

I throw 3 coins to know
when it will happen
& hang in like an old pro
against the ropes
refusing
to be counted out

[England, 1968]

[previously unpublished]

THE MOHAMMED POEMS

by Harold Norse

[All these poems previously unpublished, except for "To Mohammed in the Hotel of Palms" which appeared in *Penguin Modern Poets* 13]

TO MOHAMMED AT THE CAFE CENTRAL

Tangier
sun and wind
strike the medina mosque

Mohammed
seventeen years old
puffs his kif pipe
sipping green mint tea
where blue phallic arches
rise among white walls
and berber rugs

the muezzin traces ALLAH
thru the moon's
loudspeaker
over casbah roofs
of Socco Chico

moneylenders
also sip mint tea
but Mohammed's eye
brilliant and black
darts among gray tourists
for a simpatico friend
and glances at transistors
covetously
and tattooed mammas
you-young
papoosed in laundrybags
peeping
thru djellabas

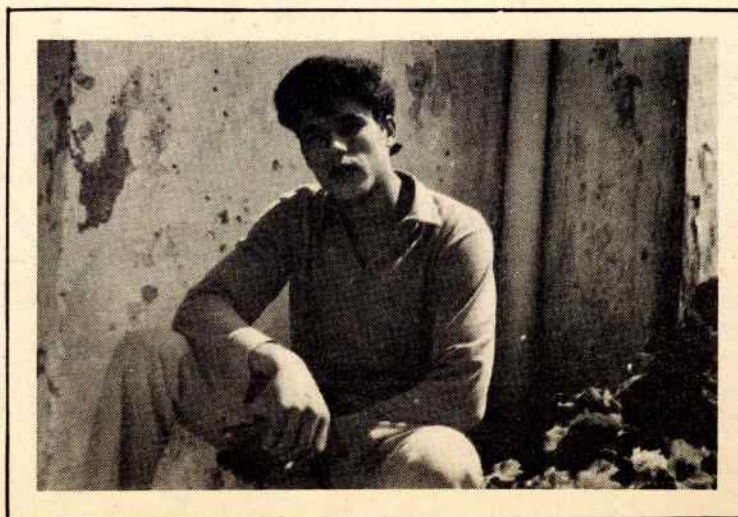
the crescent sun plucks rugs
on lightning terraces
and dries
ten thousand years
in a second!

TO MOHAMMED AT THE MOUNIRIA*

the moment widens — your voice
VAST across the room — my
head explodes into con-
scious speed an ache
shoots along the
nerve of my left eye pushing to
the center above my nose
your browngold skin
dance flute laugh
yes
everything lives

ALL
levels
at once
brain flickers
nosebridge pinches
bright cells full of happening
this can not
END

*Hotel Villa Mouniria in Tangier



Mohammed,
Garden of Villa Mouniria,
Tangier, 1962
Photo by Harold Norse

TO MOHAMMED IN THE HOTEL OF THE PALMS

behind the glass wall
fluctuant
crumble away
thighs kneecaps
i see blue limbs
black fungus noses
"i have the taste of the infinite"

ylem
primordial squinch
the universe crushed into
a seed

nothing will satisfy me
i write green ballets & hollow journeys
caught in the etheric web of yr crotch
a hairy ocean of darkness
dawamesc doors of pearl
open to fiery radiance

majoun madness
down marrakech alleys
the djemaa el fna
squirring with snakes
in carbide glow

black gnaoua dancers! lash sword! flash teeth!
under the barrow
broiling in sleep mouth
& nostrils buzzing with flies
genitals thick swollen out
of big tear in pants
derelict 14 yr old street arab
cameras snapping
like teeth/great souk
swarms for dirhams

and who
are you little arab
i shared my visions
and ate
black hasheesh candy with
the doors of yr body flung
open we twitched in spasms
muscular convulsions
heavenly epilepsy on the bed
in the hotel of the palms
prolonged orgasm
uncontrollable joy
of leaving the mind

TO MOHAMMED ON OUR JOURNEYS

I was the tourist
el simpatico
and your brother offered you
and also himself

I forgot about your brother
and we took a flat in the Marshan
with reed mats and one water tap
about a foot from the floor
and we smoked hasheesh
and ate well
and left for the south
Essaouira, Fez, Marrakech
and got to Taroudant
thru the mountains
and bought alabaster kif bowls
for a few dirhams and watched
the dancing boys in desert cafes
kissing old Arabs and sitting on their
laps, dancing with kohl eyes, and
heard the music down in Joujouka
in the hills under the stars
the ancient ceremony, Pan pipes
fierce in white moonlight
and white walls with hooded figures
stoned on kif for eight nights
and the goatboy in a floppy hat
scared us, beating the air
with a stick, beating whoever came close,
the Father of Skins, the goat god,
and the flutes maddened us
and we slept together in huts

TO MOHAMMED AT THE END

the boat
slid from the
dock into
nothing
i
watched
the
wake
churn green
silk water
peaks till
mist
twisted the
white town — a
face
followed
flashing sand
& wind & cheap
hotels — a face
will follow
voices
cities
& after
a year
or two i'll
grab a boat
a boat
on a water
chain
pulling
me back
to turn me
on
again

TO MOHAMMED AT PARTING

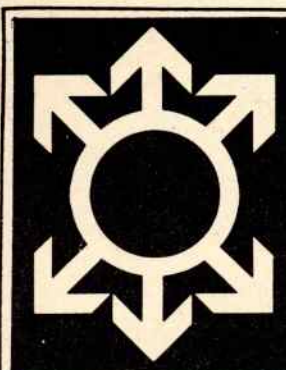
the wind hurls through the straits
white ruffs on greenblue
water I will cross
to Spain

your bag is packed for the bus
to Melilla
back to the Rif

I see your mountain hut
the scrawny sheep
rugged Berber tribesmen
scrape in the fields
you will scrape

bye bye Mouniria

so long, kid



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The following article is written by a former inmate of Atascadero State Hospital (Calif.). Atascadero is a maximum security facility designed to treat "sex offenders, sociopaths and cultural deviants." See the articles in previous issues of *Gay Sunshine* detailing the oppression of gay people in this and other facilities: "Dachau in America" (Issue No. 3); "We Are All Fugitives" (Issue No. 10); "Behavioral Fascism" (Issue No. 11); and articles on Psychosurgery in Issues No. 13 and 14.

A sheriff's car drove up at dawn to take the boy away. Inside the youth-jail, his nightmare blinked thru blood-shot eyes, he turned burrowing deeper in bed till a key in the metal door twisted his head awake. "It's time for you to go," is all they said tossing in his street-clothes, staying at the door while the naked boy dressed in silence. They showed him the commitment papers, the judge's name and other grey men's names, stopping at his father's name then his mother's; Two years of his future signed away in his blood. Handcuffs clicked, cutting into 15-year old wrists, there were goodbyes now, good luck and good riddance as the waiting deputy took charge. The walls opened up into a sullen morning.

The car sped south along the California coast stretching, snapping the ties of family and home. Sitting, watching his childhood fading thru the rear-view mirror into mile-long years of fog behind. Reminding himself to not let them know they'd hurt him; his defiance shackled to the back seat. Imprisoned by names he'd been labeled with: *Incorrigible, truant, vagrant, queer, faggot, punk.* "A Menace to Society," he recalled them saying; a crime whose only victim was himself.

Atascadero, read the highway sign. The car slowing, stopping, jolting his mind aware; his eyes stared up high concrete-reality walls. A blurred, damp, grey building glared back at him thru the black-eyed barred windows on its beaten face. White-uniformed guards approached, escorting him into the hospital lobby...Stripped, searched, questioned, all remains of his past lay in a heap on the cold floor. Ward of the state, case no. 11302, young, thin and bare; sentenced into a khaki uniform. Briefed and warned on what he should expect: "Go along with the program, keep your back to the wall." Thru one closing barred gate, pausing, photographed, thru another gate, this final seal slamming shut behind.

Entering into the main L-shaped hallway with one guard. Lunchtime; lines of grim-faced men crowding towards mass dining halls, following them. After months of Juvenile halls and court hearings he had reached the end of his line. Several hundred hungry men surrounding him swarming on the food. Outcasts, criminals, psychotics eating their ration of society's vengeance. Sensing wonder in their eyes at his being the youngest among them; there was kindness here struggling mutely into smiles. The guards having counted all the forks, spoons and knives led his group back to their ward, thru the hallway past states and whispers of: "The new one that's come in." Sly-wolf calls roused behind him howling out another hunger. Arriving at the ward he was brought to the office, interviewed by the doctor and ward charge. They seemed prisoners also, locking themselves inside a barred, hard glass cage; a key separating them from their patients. Afterwards he was allowed a shower; for the first time in days he felt some of his tensions pouring out of him, running down his body, splashing onto the shower floor, draining off his mind.

The afternoon dimmed past suppertime into evening. The day room, a shadow play, all of them being the actors, learning their roles, performing for the eye in the cage. Murderers, rapists, homosexuals, sado-masochists, child molesters, voyeurs, exhibitionists; every twist and turn of sex ended here. A theater of the perverse; stagelights shining thru drugged, psychotic eyes illuminating the darker sides of men.

A voice growled from behind the cage announcing bedtime. The technician guards opening each patient's room locking them in for the night. Lights shutting off, clinking keys fading down the hall, sheets snuggling around his weary mind. This would be his home for the next few years. A home sick fever began sweating from his brain. His childhood tottering on the tight-rope of divorce his parents had spun between themselves; shuttling thru schools and foster homes. His mother suckling all the curdled anger of her life into him, pushing him away to his father for monthly alimony and weekends of reluctant affection. He had jumped off that tight-rope plunging onto the city streets, into strange men's beds; finally sinking in this stranger bed he now found himself. A flashlight sliced thru his cell, cutting in his face,



INSIDE ATASCADERO

a guards's mouth in the small window on the door snarled: "Go to sleep boy."

Second day, the regimen beginning at dawn. rousted up, dressing, eating breakfast, back to the ward, each inmate cleaning his room, beds stripped down, rooms locked. Assigned into work crews to scour the ward: the dayroom, hallway, shower and latrine till everything was as shiny as the technician-guards boots. This was a closed ward, a closed world; life revolving around the dayroom under observation from the guard cage. A human zoo of men crowding, pacing the ward; scheming, taut frustrations bulging, poising for the prey. Later while walking down the ward hall unaware that some of the rooms were still unlocked, reaching the end turning back till four rough hands grabbed out dragging him into a room where other inmates waited.

"In Seclusion for his own protection" the office report read. Manhandled, black eyed, bruised from where he'd been kicked to the floor, he had fought back, hadn't given in to them. He remembered his first bust, last year, that night spent in city jail when they had taken their turns on him; his crying protest muffled under a pillow, strong arms and a jailer's deaf indifference. He couldn't yield to rape again, he must fight, if not with strength then with cunning; the prey must outwit the beast. Secluded in his room all day except for mealtimes; seeing his new world thru the wire-webbed glass in the door, the routine ebbed and flowed past thru bewildering days. He saw the electric shock box wheeling down the hall stopping at someone else's room; the guards taunting him with the threat, "Your turn next." A new terror shot thru his thoughts as the overhead light flickered while each jolt burned into some unfortunate brain. He was under the thumb of medication now, his youth saving him from the fist of electric shock; instead, the numbing hand of intimidation had pills in it. Throughout the stoned nights into each new day the weeks strung-out together like links on a chain; the lives of every man crushed one upon the other within ever shrinking walls.

The months staggered by till he was transferred to an open-ward. The shock ward slowly wearing off, the hunted look relaxing into wariness; he was becoming adjusted to the Program. Life was tolerable here: rooms were left open, the inmates were younger, there were fewer psychotics. There were privileges to be earned here if he could squeeze thru petty rules and regulations. Hall cards allowed him to leave the ward to explore: the main hallway, courtyard, auditorium, gym canteen or visit other wards.

This was the pervasive therapeutic community of psychological testing and mandatory group therapy.

He had turned 16, the afternoons were warming into summer. He was learning the rough give and take of an all male world; the games of Rank and Pressure. He was taught the furtive need among men confined to each other.

He discovered brothers, fathers and friends behind the labels of *Sexual Psychopath* and *Criminally Insane*; revealing to him the men behind the crime. There were free men here, men in white, men in business suits who chose to be here, who were here for pay, doing a job. Men who never questioned their own sanity, who never got caught. These men caught up with him and a brother with their pants down taking care of each other. "You're sick, queer boy," the guards invoking the curse of guilt inherited from the ignorant centuries.

He found himself in *Isolation* with only his shorts on; this time a smaller, windowless cell, a thin mat and blanket on the floor, his meals brought in on a tray. A prison within a prison within a prison. An airless, dark eternity, a sliver of light from beneath the door; only his own smell to keep him company while huddled against the concrete closet walls. Boredom seeping in thru the crack, smothering him, pacing off his days, jerking off his nights; monotony ticking, ticking, ticking towards an implosion. Hearing guards coming down the hall stopping at his door, boots scattering shadows across the floor, moving wordlessly away back to their cage; he wouldn't beg them to let him out as he had heard others plead-screaming. Seconds, seconds, seconds, minutes, minutes, minutes, hours, hours, hours, hours, days, days, days, days, weeks, weeks, weeks, weeks. After a month a pale face emerging from the gloom, the sad, strange, sweet smile of madness slashed across his lips. The guards returned him to his ward; his rebellion lay buried back in that cell smoldering within the walls of Sexual Intolerance.

The months moved relentlessly on into winter. Waiting, waiting, waiting; his youth straining at the seams of this straight jacket existence. He was lucky, others here were doing dead-time still having to go back to court and trial; brooding in a tomb of *Indeterminate Sentence*. The months coming in with newly arrived faces staring bleakly into their own future; months going out with release papers into the free-world. His months slipping by, sinking down his 17th year.

Mental Hygiene, scrubbing his brain with hard-bristled, psychiatric logic; shrinking his head to fit the social norm. Compulsory therapy groups; the blind leading the blind, the deaf speaking to the deaf. Doctors, doctors, doctors slurping at the public trough lest they starve in private practice; authoritarian psychiatry strutting down hospital halls brandishing their sanity over the patient's heads. Lock-ups, shake-downs, skin-checks, maximum security; all done in the name of *Society*.

A short time before he was to be released he joined some friends in the main courtyard; the patch of grass covered with sunning bodies, reading, rapping, laughing, despairing, sharing the camaraderie of their outcast life. The lawn edged by an asphalt walkway, surrounded on 3 sides by peering windows and the unseen eyes constantly watching, noting; at the far end of the yard was the wall and a barbed wire fence beyond reach. He was drawn to this square of earth, this heartbeat constricted by steel and concrete; he had brought along a pencil and paper, he began to write.

An idea was rippling thru his mind a fragile hope burst into words:

To *Society*, great God of the masses.
To *Heterosexualus*, great Goddess of normalcy.
We who have deviated from your grace remain unblessed.
We are your sons, we are your brothers.
We are your fathers and uncles and cousins.
We are your neighbors and friends.
We are strangers passing in your nights.
We are your children.
Whether we sit on the thrones of Kings
or in modern day dungeons;
we are inevitable.
We have given you our art
for your beauty, for your glory.
We have fought on your battlefields for your freedom.
We have seen your wrath and suffered your whims.
We have endured your laws and survived your justice.
We are your dead victims.
We are your future unborn generations.
We are inevitable.

There is no cure that can make us well in your eyes,
there is no humiliation that can keep us on our knees;
We are inevitable.

TOMORROW....FREEDOM

He will be released tomorrow, his case transferred back to court; he had lived in this same building for 2 years; the staff of doctors taking that long to decide he was "unamenable to treatment." He stood by his window looking out over the courtyard, watching the faces of men doing time; faces he hoped never to see again. Faces of men who had been here his first day, who would be here after he'd been forgotten; faces of men who die here lonely, disgraced, neglected. His thoughts stirred above the faces in the courtyard, straying over the wall, escaping into the clouds; unchained white wings drifting in blue freedom. TOMORROW....FREEDOM

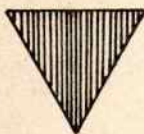
Atascadero State Hospital
Gene Ampon No.11302

Written: San Francisco, Cal. 1973

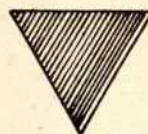
Dedicated to all homosexual prisoners who must daily endure heterosexual justice-oppression.

Prisoner Distinguishing Marks at Auschwitz

Homosexual



Professional criminal



GAYS AND NAZI OPPRESSION

The day before Remembrance Sunday, last year, I was walking past Westminster Abbey on my way to a meeting of the Conservation Society. In the gardens of the Abbey, a field of remembrance crosses had been set out. Many of these were for specific named groups and the field did its job—that is, it set me remembering. I thought in particular of the thousands of homosexuals who were interned and executed by the Nazis. No one knows exactly how many—because no one has ever bothered to count. Like the Jews, they were made to wear special identifying marks. I subsequently managed to find this complete list. It makes grim reading. The following passage from a book called *The Theory and Practice of Hell* by Eugen Kogan, gives an idea of what it was like for homosexual internees:

"Homosexual practices were actually very widespread in the camps. The prisoners, however, ostracized only those whom the SS marked with the pink triangle. The fate of the homosexuals in the concentration camps can only be described as ghastly. They were often segregated in special barracks and work details. Such segregation offered ample opportunity to unscrupulous elements in positions of power to engage in extortion and maltreatment.... In October 1938, [the homosexuals in Buchenwald] were transferred to the penal company in a body and had to slave in the quarry. This consigned them to the lowest caste in camp during the most difficult years. In shipments to extermination camps, such as Nordhausen, Natzweiler and Gross-Rosen, they furnished the highest proportionate share, for the camp had an understandable tendency to slough off all elements considered least valuable or worthless. If anything could save them at all, it was to enter into sordid relationships within the camp, but this was as likely to endanger their lives as to save them. There was an insoluble predicament and virtually all of them perished."

Unlike the Jews, these victims of Nazi persecution have no memorials and are not remembered or mourned by society. Indeed there has been such a conspiracy of silence that few people even know that these events even occurred. On this particular November Saturday, thinking about all these things, I was moved to buy a cross with a poppy on it, like the hundreds of others that had already been set down. If I had a pink triangle, I would have put that on it, but this was a spontaneous act and all I had with me to identify the cross with those it specially commemorated was a CLF badge. I fixed this to it and put it in the ground.

(Reprinted from *Come Together*, England)

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Visconti's LUDWIG

The cinema's special aristocratic genius, Luchino Visconti, once drawn to studies of peasant life in the manner of Italian neo-realists, but tending more towards operatic historical romanticism, has moved squarely into his German Romantic Period with *Ludwig*, his most recent film. The heavy, opulent, often morbid style of *Gottterdammerung* (The Damned) finds its artistic apotheosis in the naturally florid and extravagant life style of one of Europe's most eccentric Romantics, Ludwig II, King of Bavaria. Whereas Visconti's theatrical atmosphere, rococo richness in costume and decor, and flamboyant *mise-en-scene* appeared *applique* in his study of a powerful German steel family (*The Damned*), and decadently expressive in *Death in Venice*, here his personal visual sensitivity hardly needs elaborate on an already extravagant historical reality.

The intriguing mixture of fancy and fact surrounding Ludwig's life, as the senior representative of the thousand year old Wittelsbach dynasty, unravels like the scenario for a true romantic tragedy. There were sufficient contradictions and neurotic compulsions to invite much pseudo-psychiatry, but these were not greatly amplified until the latter part of his life, which many "political" historians view as disastrous.

Born in 1845, just when Romantic literature and art were at their apogee, Ludwig acquired, through the tastes of his father, Maximilian, a love of German legends and heroes, especially the swan-knight Lohengrin. At the age of 16 he attended a performance of Wagner's opera, and totally enraptured he acquired the composer's librettos, and thereafter was a confirmed Wagnerian. With the death of his father in 1864, Ludwig ascended the Bavarian throne at the age of 19. Already he had the reputation of a sensitive, emotional youth, endowed with exceptional physical beauty and an aloof royal demeanor.

Remaining almost exclusively on a personal level, *Ludwig* is a study of power ironically invested in a man who failed to exercise his power in a customary, conventional way. In the opening scene, surrounding the coronation ritual, Ludwig confesses to Father Hoffman one of his cardinal convictions: to live according to his own truth as king and not to let anything or anyone dissuade him from that truth.

Thus his first request as king is devoted to promoting the art of his idol Richard Wagner, then in hiding from debtors in Stuttgart. Though Ludwig professed an undying love for his Beloved Friend in the most sentimental way, the relationship between himself and the 51 year-old Wagner remained purely platonic, confined mostly to copious, passionate correspondence. Actually, it was his expansive musical gift that overwhelmed Ludwig's romantic senses rather than the man himself. Visconti makes this clear in casting Trevor Howard as Wagner, an eloquent yet physically blemished countenance. However, the force and duration of this "creative alliance" that soon became equated in the minds of some Bavarian subjects with Ludwig I's scandalous liaison with the famous courtesan Lola Montez and resulted in reference to Wagner as "Lolus" by his detractors, is not presented with sufficient impact by Visconti. Wagner's departure from Munich and his confrontation with Ludwig over the notoriety of Wagner's clandestine relationship with Cosima von Bulow (Sylvana Mangano in the movie) occur quite early in the narrative. Strangely there are no depictions of Wagner's spectacular opera productions or of their significant emotional effect on Ludwig. MGM has excised about 50 minutes of footage from the definitive European version, feeling the Visconti version a bit unwieldy. This may account for the foreshortening in this important relationship.

Ludwig's infatuation with Wagner and his lavish support of his art is contrasted with the king's intimate friendship with the charming Empress Elizabeth of Austria (played by Romy Schneider) who emerges as a subtle temptress and mother image,

consoling the king in his increasing distaste for formal court etiquette and in sharing candid moments of secluded happiness. Elizabeth — who instinctively sensed Ludwig's repressed homosexuality — remained an unobtainable ideal like Wagner. Naturally, Ludwig was expected to marry and perpetuate the dynasty that had remained unbroken for almost a thousand years, and ultimately with the persuasion of Elizabeth, he announces his engagement to her sister, the 17 year-old Princess Sophie, a pretty, but not particularly clever or talented girl.

Helmut Berger's bitchy, often arrogant etching of Ludwig emphasizes his uneasiness and aloofness from his mother, Queen Marie, but never so pointedly as in his announcement of the engagement to her when he plainly rejects her offer of spontaneous congratulation. It does not take long for Ludwig to realize that he cannot honestly go through with the marriage.



Ludwig II of Bavaria (Helmut Berger), left, with one of the young favorites from his court, as depicted in Luchino Visconti's *Ludwig*.

The tearful, rejected Sophie, is counselled by Elizabeth to muster strength and assert independence in order to regain Ludwig's affections. His lack of interest in women is seen as a "developmental stage" of his delicate nature from which Sophie can "save him." In spite of strong opposition, Ludwig defiantly refuses to marry, just as he refused to personally involve himself in the war against Prussia in 1866, though his brother Otto begs him to support the military. Like many repressed homosexuals, Ludwig tended to worship strong individuals as compensation for dealing with a real world; consequently he retreated into a dream-like fantasy world. Historical accounts prove that Ludwig was not incapable in the political arena; in fact he was quite skilled and was not initially as indifferent to official duties as the film suggests. He nevertheless felt that as a monarch he was destined to achieve greatness in other pursuits.

I don't mean to suggest that Ludwig was even potentially an "ideal ruler," but he did possess many positive qualities, aside from the oppressive code of royal behavior which guided much of his life. In the present film there is little indication of the characteristics. Though mercilessly exacting with his immediate court and attendants, Ludwig was known to consort freely with commoners and peasants on his occasional country excursions, and demonstrated an unusually pleasant, affable disposition. While gaining notoriety for his lavish spending on his architectural ambitions, the king also bestowed gifts on the lowliest of his subjects whose honest admiration and love impressed him.

What seems to have repulsed Ludwig most about affairs of state was the fund of deceit and scheming he encountered at every turn. Clearly traditional values of honor and forthrightness were no longer respected, and he could see that the Europe which once enchanted him was being transformed into another battleground.

Failing in his attempt at marriage, Ludwig began to give substance to his dreams in the construction of opulent castles and

palaces throughout the country in remote, lush settings. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "Oh! It is essential to create such paradises, such poetical sanctuaries where one can forget for a while the dreadful age in which we live. Few royal castles or palaces can match the spectacle of Neuschwanstein, full of Wagnerian motifs and inspired by medieval and baroque models; or the rich French and Bavarian rococo of Linderhof; or the elegant sumptuousness of Herrenchiemsee, based on the design of Versailles. Visconti has voiced contemporary sentiment by crediting Ludwig with a monumental lack of taste in these creations. But as Michael Petzet notes, the art must be seen as part of a world-wide revival of interest in earlier artistic forms, and like Ludwig, must be understood as a product of the times, filtered through the king's special personality. Occasionally one feels that Visconti creates visual parodies, gently mocking the over-wrought decor.

Ludwig's homosexuality is treated by Visconti with more frankness and directness than one might expect from previous

confidant and friend of both Otto and Ludwig.

Ludwig is known to have been infatuated with a number of handsome young actors, but the one who most strongly captivated him during the last few years of his life was the Hungarian *jeune premier* Josef Kainz. Although he was not especially handsome, Kainz exuded an unmistakable magnetism in the theatre, and Ludwig commanded a private performance for his personal edification. In the film Visconti has oddly substituted *Romeo and Juliet* for the actual historical piece, Victor Hugo's *Marion de Larme*; it is from the role of Didier, however, that Kainz (Folker Bohnet) recites later in the film. Ludwig invited Kainz to a three day visit at Linderhof, where, early in the morning, he met Ludwig in the exotic grotto of Venus, an incredible Wagnerian creation best described as "Disneyland baroque." In Ludwig's gilded rococo bedroom Kainz is not made love to, but is rather forced to recite long passages from stage roles eliciting rapturous smiles from the king. (Thomas Mann, reflecting on a visit to Linderhof, remarks, "All the rooms, even the bedroom were small, which signifies for Ludwig, as for any solitary man, a continual regression, a constant retreat always a little more into himself. The bed is significant as a big cradle to which a man returns when he hasn't found anything better.")

Thinking that he had at last found the long sought-after Friend, Ludwig embarked on an affair, hoping to elevate the young Kainz to the pinnacle of fame as he had done with Wagner. But Ludwig's enthusiasm waned when Kainz demonstrated lapses in respect, though the friendship was never completely severed.

Soon after, Ludwig entered into a long period of seclusion, obsessed with study and planning his castles. Dissatisfaction with him in the court culminated in a conspiracy to have him deposed. Visconti unravels the plot in all its melodramatic candor. An enormous Medical Report, largely consisting of what later appeared to be gross exaggeration and misinformation, certified the ruler insane. It is on this basis that popular history has labeled him "The Mad King of Bavaria," an appendage added to the film's title by its American distributor.

Following his confinement at Schloss Berg near Lake Starnberg, Ludwig seems to have calmly deliberated his unfortunate situation, and on a late afternoon walk with his psychiatrist Dr. Gudden he mysteriously met his death by drowning in a lake; whether as accident, suicide or murder is uncertain, although a combination of the latter two seems to be correct. Visconti's conclusion leaves us with ambiguity, but like scholar Ernest Newman he believes that Ludwig was not insane before his death. In the film Ludwig muses just before his fatal walk: "I want to remain forever an enigma — to myself and to others."

Possibly for the first time in years he was able to see himself clearly, and in the final days of his life he regained his noble composure and clarity of thought. On hearing of his death, Empress Elizabeth is reported to have said: "The king was not mad; he was just an eccentric living in a world of dreams. They might have treated him more gently, and thus perhaps have spared him so terrible an end."

Ludwig is not in the rank of Visconti's *Death in Venice*. Like almost all biographical films, it is plagued with the necessity of including basic events, often skimping on details that can vivify complex characters and situations. Notwithstanding this structural problem, there remains a true mark of directorial genius in the design of Mario Chari, the prodigal costuming of revolutionary fashion designer Piero Tosi, all brought to bear in the supple images. Like Ludwig, Visconti scrupulously supervises the work of others into one personal expression; and here the inspiration is the last of the great royal patrons of art, who for all his weaknesses and unhappiness, enriched the spiritual life of the world. And that cannot be said of many kings in recorded history.

— Lee Atwell

REVIEW

"His voice has incubated space; he has been a geodesic dome for millions — a call to freedom, expansion and existence. To think Allen Ginsberg is to be enlarged.....[He] is weak in his understanding of 'sexism.'We would say that the madness for Cassady-Kerouac keeps the dollar floating as much as eating scab lettuce or smoking cigarettes."



Allen Ginsberg, 1969
at Kerouac's funeral

The Fall of America, Poems of these states 1965-1971 by Allen Ginsberg. City Lights pocket poets series no. 30. San Francisco, 1972. \$2.50 paper 188 pages.

Iron Horse by Allen Ginsberg. Coach House Press. Toronto Canada, 1972. \$1.50 paper, 52 pages.

Bixby Canyon/Ocean Path/Word Breeze by Allen Ginsberg. Gotham Book Mart, New York, 1972. \$3 paper, 15 pages with photographs.

The Gates of Wrath, Rhymed Poems: 1948-1952 by Allen Ginsberg. Grey Fox Press, Bolinas, California, 1972. \$2.50 paper, 56 pages.

Reviewed by Charles Shively.

Charles Olson, who himself gave so much to poesy, began *Call Me Ishmael, A Study of Melville* (1947) saying: "I take space to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes alrge here. Large and without mercy." For gay people this space (sometimes called "America" in disregard of twenty-other nations) has been all the more merciless because of its straightness. Across and against those straight lines, run like bull dozers into our lives, traintracks over our hearts, Allen Ginsberg has ridden, has gone by auto, train, jet plane, steamer, thumb, bus and truck to do battle for marijuana reform, free speech, Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, ashrams, Biafra, Vietnam peace, ecology, Bangladesh, and the right to love and to be. His voice has incubated space; he has been a geodesic dome for millions — a call to freedom, expansion and existence. To think Allen Ginsberg is to be enlarged.

Allen's campaign extends to the very geography as well as sentient beings in these states: enlightenment seems to come as he sings across the landscape in deep, awe-full breaths. Bixby Canyon is "beautiful" — on the scene, in the photographs and as a poem; "breathtaking" is the word. ("Bixby Canyon" is also printed without artwork in *The Fall of America*). And the simple "Eclogue" written from Cherry Valley, New York, is filled with calmness and beauty. Yet, all this rural loveliness is laced with the sorrow of funerary memories of Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac, war, murdered chicken corpse inspector dog tags lost in fluted morning glories among automobile bones.

"Ugly" landscape reeks no less with sobs of joy and ecstasy than the "pretty" ones with tears of sorrow. The road from Kansas City to St. Louis is well paved:

*I lay in bed naked in the guest room
my mouth found his cock
my hand under his behind
Till the whole body stiffened
and sperm choked my throat*

(*Fall of America*, page 29)

Denver, Los Angeles, Wichita, Omaha,
Pittsburgh Shitsburg, Bloomington, Al-
buquerque, Chicago and even Newark
become Ginsberg's:

*I was born there in Newark
Public Service sign of the 'Twenties
visible miles away through smoke
grey night over electric fields
My aunts and uncles died in hospitals,
are buried in graves surrounded by
Railroad Tracks*

(*Fall of America*, page 36)

Cityscapes lay out visionary pools for the poet: "Close your eyes on Chicago and be God/ all Chicago is, is what you see." (*Fall of America*, p. 63) Or less mystical but as well to the point, Gregory Corso sang (in a poem for McGovern's election): "you are what you dream America to be."

Essential here is an understanding of the mantram (plural, mantra) which Ginsberg has explained: "a short verbal formula like Rolling Stones' 'I'm going home,' or Gertrude Stein's 'A rose is a rose is a rose,' which is repeated as a form of prayer meditation over and over until the original thin-conscious association with meaning disappears and the words become pure physical sounds uttered in a frankly physical universe; the word or sound or utterance then takes on a new density as a kind of magic language spell and becomes a solid object introduced into the science fiction space-time place where the worshipper finds himself, surrounded by jutting mountain crags or city buildings." An interesting example is "Hum Bom!" in *The Fall of America* which begins "we bomb them" and ends "you bomb you!"

Ginsberg's poems/prayers must be spoken, heard, meditated upon — never read alone. They are experiences, mantra, chants, improvisations, which have by chance been captured into print. Like the mystical songs of Blake or communal chants of Whitman, they are points in a greater life, greater enlightenment, greater experience. Ginsberg (or you and i) can sing similarly anywhere, anytime: to ward off evil, bring calm, enlightenment to ourselves and others. For instance, at the Democratic Convention last summer, when power went off on the stage, a fundamentalist was heckling our gay caucus as we danced. Ginsberg, sitting on stage with his harmonium, chanted a fantastic mantram-prayer-improvisation-exhortation. And it worked; peace descended upon us. In such places, words have their own magic. You do not ask their meaning any more than you ask a moaning lover to explain, "Oh, I'm coming, coming. I'm coming. I'm coming. I'm coming."

Among the ways to enlightenment the Tantric path may be most misunderstood in Ginsberg's poetry. This path leads to an exploration and celebration of sensual pleasure — not a simple wallowing in lust (as Christians might say in their pornographic, one-way way) although that is not excluded. "Even Tantric path (exploration of sensory limits) leads to liberation (relaxation) from sensory grasping (i.e. desire). Because senses are mechanical and repetitious." (Ginsberg's preface to *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is*. In repeating the sexual acts like mantra the person is released from an overweening desire for more. Regression never stops

the desire for more, the obsession; repression closes off more than it opens.

But what about Neal Cassady? I suspect he was just another free-wheelin stud — who brought out love in both Kerouac and Ginsberg because he was himself incapable of love. Nothing is so blind to judgement as fantasy-love: for instance, was the buddha enlightened as Ginsberg claims in his *Howl* dedication, by reading Cassady's *Autobiography*? What are we to say about our mad, divine impassioned loves for these superstud he-men such as Neal or Jack? In *The Fall of America* the elegies for Neal Cassady are haunting and beautiful, and Ginsberg's elegy for Kerouac, "Memory Gardens" is a high part of the book:

*I threw a kissed handful of damp earth
down on the stone lid
& sighed
looking in Creeley's one eye
Peter sweet holding a flower*

.....
*Well, while I'm here I'll
do the work —
and what's the Work?
To ease the pain of living.
Everything else, drunken
dumbshow.*

At this point Ginsberg throws in the line "& Time has a ten-page spread on/ Homosexual Fairies!" They obviously don't inspire his respect nor engender quite the poetry Cassady or Kerouac do. Nor does Herbert Huncke and William Burroughs, bold and clear homosexuals who were also early companions of Ginsberg and from whom he probably picked up more poetry and insight than from the straight studs. Huncke and Burroughs get ample praise from Ginsberg, but they have never inspired the intimate love, devotion, ecstasy and poetry of Cassady or Kerouac images (even in decay and ashes.) Nor has Peter Orlovsky (who is evidently now settled down with a woman but with whom Allen still shares his life) ever brought out such beautiful poems as the blondish demigods — Kerouac and Cassady.

Why is it that the stud image can bring us faggots sooner to poetry and tears than few other things? Had Ginsberg refused to love Neal or remember or worship that beautiful body would he have fought in all the battles he has? Would he have written half the poems he has? Would they have been half so powerful and moving? ("and all the times I came to myself alone in the dark dreaming of Neal or Billy Budd" — *Fall of America*, p. 130) I feel myself that some of my best poems have come from the trials of unrequited loves. Being guilty is no way out at all: shouting mea culpa, mea culpa and enjoying the sinning all the more. I don't know the answer, but I do respect Allen Ginsberg's struggle with the memories of Cassady and Kerouac; in the quiet peace of the Eclogue he comes near to transcending while living in their images.

Allen Ginsberg is weak in his understanding of "sexism." Many in the women's and gay movement would argue that the money nexus is less at the root of "the fall of America" than male supremacy. We would say that the madness for Cassady-Kerouac keeps the dollar floating as much as eating scab lettuce or smoking cigarettes. Much of the butch disrespect for women in Cassady and Kerouac has rubbed off onto Ginsberg. (We'll pass over the unkind things he says about "closet queens" and "teacup faggots.") In Ginsberg's poetry and conversation, women are always called "girls" and their names are seldom used. In the vast array of beatdom, almost no reference is ever made to such poets as Diane di Prima or Lenore Kandel. Although Allen's entourage through the years has included many women, they (unlike the men) are seldom if ever named in the poems. The move to Vedic and Buddhist wisdom has often been a way of forestalling not facing the issues of sexual politics (e.g. Gary Snyder or Rennie Davis).

Iron Horse is partly a tantric meditation following masturbation in a train. The words are printed over railroad pic-

tures — illuminations in half-tone laying under the tracks of the song, bringing it all back home. The poet sees and hears soldiers, their white bellies arousing, their crotches turning on a man who knows these are the killers of the Vietnamese whom he should enlighten not worship. "Ninety nine air force boys/ lined up with their pants down forever." (*Iron Horse*, p. 26) But the "prophet on the electric Networks" cannot speak to them in person so well as he can masturbate to their singing flesh, so different from their nauseating words — and the monied network of death in which these studs are encased. Seeing, feeling this disparity between the freshness and beauty of their bodies and the hideousness of their network sponsors, in detumescence, Ginsberg sings, seeing:

*same electric lightening South
follows this train
Apocalypse prophesied —
the Fall of America
signalled from heaven.*

(*Iron Horse*, p. 30;

Through the electric networks, networks through the train, there is only one hope: "I wept, How soft flesh is —" (*Iron Horse*, p. 17) "only boys' flesh singing/ can show the warless way —/ or miracle" (*Iron Horse*, p. 44) "open yr ass to my mouth—/ a poem to thee!" (*Iron Horse*, p. 10)

Most people can follow *Iron Horse* — filled as it is with diversions, apercu, images and what some call "socially redeeming qualities." But they choke on or misunderstand the pure tantric expression, such as the poem "Please Master." (See *Gay Sunshine* No. 16) This poem is much more than a Bondage/Discipline fantasy; it is an exorcism — a prayer, a magic formula to encompass the beautiful memory/body of Neal Cassady and all the young blue jeaned blond lovers of fantasy: "Please master call me a dog, an ass beast, a wet asshole, / & fuck me more violent, my eyes hid with your palms around my skull/ & plunge down in a brutal hard lash thru soft drip-flesh/ & throb thru five seconds to spurt out your semen heat/ over & over, bammimg it in while I cry out your name I do love you/ please Master."

The haunting repetition of "please master" goes beyond any person, goes back from specific phenomenon into the root, reality of existence. The chant is a magic formula — it is more than scratches on a page or words as abstractions; the chant "works." I tried it the other night with someone who was slow coming a second time. I sang to myself (my throat already full of throbbing cock) a version of "please master" and it worked right away. Liberationists (not to mention moralists) will be scandalized to find so much attention paid to cocks, to coming, to bondage, to fantasy. But any liberation which would only generate guilt and not build a passage out of imperfection is fraudulent. Freedom and liberation can come in passing through the sensations, dwelling there & liberating oneself through the tantric path as well as (if not better than) through denial and renunciation.

"Please master" is included in a section of *The Fall of America* titled "Elegies for Neal Cassady, 1968." Much of Ginsberg's poetry has been a struggle through flesh and song to find a liberation from the haunting master-images of Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac. In *The Gates of Wrath, Rhymed Poems: 1948-1952* there is a whole section of love poems from 1947 for Neal Cassady. These are mostly interesting for historical purposes; they show the immense imprint of Blake's visionary verses on Ginsberg. There are some interesting lines predicting more to come: "Behold thy myth incarnate in my flesh/ Now made incarnate in Thy Psalm, O Lord." (p. 18) — a good summary of Ginsberg's whole body of poetry. And there are interesting experiments (called bop lyrics) like Fie My Fum: funny, happy, playing with language, "Pull my daisy/ Tip, my cup/ Cut my thoughts/ for coconuts" which really sounds great when sung.

I can cite one recent example of Allen Ginsberg's sexism which is probably not atypical. At a reading in Salem, Massachusetts (a Jack Kerouac symposium-memorial-festival), one woman in the audience said, during a question period, that among the performers (Peter Orlovsky, Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg) only Peter in his spiel against smoking and drinking had shown any real concern for the people there. Allen shut her up saying that she was just on an ego trip. While that may be true, little had been said to the klunk studs with their canteens of wine whose long-winded and irrelevant questions had been entertained patiently.

This question of faggots and women as against the blue-eyed blond stud, such as Neal Cassady, raises a hard question about the communal comradeship love prophesized by Whitman and others. *The Fall of America* is dedicated to Walt Whitman and begins with a quotation from *Democratic Vistas*: "It is to the development, identification and general prevalence of that fervid comradeship, (the adhesive love, at least rivaling the amative love hitherto possessing imaginative literature, if not going beyond it,) that I look for the counterbalance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy, and for the spiritualization thereof." Fine, but can everyone be included in this circle, or will it just be beautiful, young blonds? Will brunettes be in? Fat people? Bald? Jews? Sioux? Faggots? Old? Children? In celebrating so much adhesive love for the on-the-road companions, Ginsberg leaves someone like me outside — a faggot, and I drive just like a woman, as Kerouac pointed out about someone in derision in *On The Road*. Whitman's love theory is hardly adequate for an androgynous society — he views it all from a male man's viewpoint: amative love (love of men for women) should be balanced by adhesive love (male bonding, love of man for man). No provision is really made for women as active lovers, choosing their own love "objects."

Another objection to the adhesive love is its link to "America." We must break ourselves of the habit of nations and nationhood. Those map lines were not drawn by the landscape; they were drawn across America by straight white men, agents of Western civilization. I see national lines (for instance, those between Canada, Mexico, the United States and Cuba) to be "real" — but real in the way prisons are real. Celebrating "America" in "these states" is no good, not liberating; it perpetuates the nation-myth which is totally anti-people, anti-adhesive love, anti-amative love. For example, it is a national vanity (a very real imperialism) to assume that these United States are responsible for every evil befalling the earth — as in the poem "Jessore Road" in *The Fall of America*. The poem is a work of perfection in probing starvation and horror, but the failures on Jessore Road and the Indian sub-continent are at least partly the work of Pakistani and Indian "leaders." It is arrogant to presume "our" country controls everything. Thinking in "national" categories perpetuates "these states" and prevents any real community from forming.

Ginsberg is imperfect, he's human, he's a man — that's not news. Faggots shouldn't let his "mistakes" go by without objection, but we must never forget, he is a poet. He is not just a cultural phenomenon, not just a prophet, not just a beatnik, not just a liberator, not just a grand old man for us to play our fantasies on — he is a poet. And it's no easier being a poet in these states, than it is being a woman, or being a Cherokee, or being a faggot, or being Black, or being anything that doesn't fit the straight network. Poets have no more license to commit crime than anyone else, but they should have a special claim to our love, understanding, help and (in Allen Ginsberg's sense of the word) "prayers."

Arunothai Somskul



IMMEDIATELY

immediately

his nipples rose
his moustache shone
his eyes opened
his thigh tightened
his hair cut loose
his pants were down
his penis purple

he groped me
we formed rings
making semen
in kazoo mud.

— Charley Shively

THE FULL

We found ourselves together; it was judgement day. The dance began, continuing from part too. The essence of love is love, says I. Love requiring nothing, says he. Nothing nothing like the full measure of an old gregorian hymn, says she. Him, the Christ, I have found you in Him, he says. Her, the Christ, I have found him in you he says. We climbed on, up the mountain, up up to the ocean where the gods of the sea were enmeshed, soulfully, with poets of the earth. I asked God's forgiveness for the sins of my future, and she enfolded me in her arms, my beard a glorious contrast to her milky white breasts and her soft black skin. Jesus, Jesus, I cried, look at me, see your love and your grace in the movement of my body. Lay your cock against mine and know compassion, do you remember our meeting on forty-second street with the wind catching all germs of warfare and the street lamps brightly lit signalling the beginning of a new era? Ah, my beloved, he said, it's so good with you. So good. And as you passed by with the cross nearly double your capacity, the smile in your heart radiated through to mine and we came together for the first time. Thank you, he said; thank you, says I; thank you, she will say when she at last inherits the earth.

We found ourselves together; it is judgement day. The dance, unrehearsed, bewitches those who watch. Your body, he says, truly the vibration that answers my question. Tell me again. Yes, says I, yes. Oh yes. And I lift my arms slowly and the light is glorious and my hands go together fingertips touching, and I offer them to him, and her tongue delicately touches. Tell me again. Yes, yes. Oh yes, dear lord. I lovingly offer my ass, and his strong hands reach out and the light is glorious, and the hands fit perfectly on my ass. As he again molds the perfect light, she sings a tune, celebrating her creation, celebrating the day when the earth is hers.

We found ourselves together; it is judgement day. The dance begins. All is calm, silence reigns. The silence of understanding of agreement. Deep into your eyes I look and our tears fall freely from our eyes, down the path around our nose, into our beard. Our womb holds the rebirth of humanity, our breasts are enlarged for the giving of wisdom, and our cocks touch again, outward and inward, learning, giving and receiving, your sweat mixed with mine as we stand together before God in the men's room of a subway somewhere.

Our father who art in her heaven, hallowed by his name, her kingdom come, her will is done, heaven and earth are one. Om

—Larry Brinkin

JAMES DEAN BI UES

The tightness of downwardly pointed nipple
Darkens whitest skin of his blonde intention
Method t-shirt macho night-time blossoms coolest
Glance from crotch to thigh & troubled eye
Oh red-nyloned jacket Galahad!
United in tragedy with '47 Mercury or '55 Ford,
Surrendered perfect youth
Somewhere just west of town
Where all lonesome motel pornography
Killed the best & fucked the rest.

—John Iozia

THE EXPERIENCE

Walking past the meat rack
along the river, across
the Japanese bridge
to the other side, I played
a game of Lock Eyes
with strangers in black
coats, short coats, fur coats;
kept on walking
until I was alone
with snow and ice.

In soft white, I scratched:

Unlike you,
Cavafy,
I can not thank
the experience
for having exceeded the previous one.

—Salvatore Farinella
(from Hearse)

"I think the new teacher's a queer,"

I turned around
and saw that
they were talking about me,

one false move
and it would be over,
I could not drop my wrists
or raise my voice

so I stood there up against the board
arms folded
pressed against my chest
and looked out without seeing
or hearing until
the children became a noiseless pattern

and all those years
from when I sat among them
stopped dead and I feared
that they'd beat me up

in the boy's room.

—Perry Brass
Feb. 1973

Sports & the Macho Male

CONTINUED FROM BACK COVER

crushing if the team made its collective decisions through equal amounts of participation. But no. There is a captain and a co-captain (certainly up through college sports), and there is always the coach, the higher authority, usually an older man to whom "the boys" are subservient.

Competitive sports mimic the military in this regard, among others. And why not? Good athletes make good soldiers. Both are conditioned "properly." Both are characterized by the perverted behavior demanded of macho masculinity models.

The boys on the team wear uniforms, whereas the coach is not required to. The coach rarely gets dirty, sweaty, or actively involved. He is the father figure on the sidelines, representing a patriarchy in the process of perpetuating itself. This, I suggest, is the classic pattern of how males must relate to other males in a culture of repressed homosexuality.

The main reason for two teams to be meeting on the field or court is so that one may beat the other. To beat one's opponent is the culmination of all other aspects of macho straight attitudes and behavior, a clear establishment of power. Hence the importance of "standings." In our macho-obsessed society, in which males enforce a pecking order concept of the thoroughness of one's masculinity, standings are very important.

The game is essentially one of power. The professional clubs may have begun with what was once an amusement for participants, but they perverted its purpose and offered it up as the litmus paper test for affiliation with macho straightness.

Professional team sports are short-order comparatively neat, highly stylized forms of organized violence. As violence, they again mimic the military. In this active physical encounter, whether restrained or brawling, those patterns of behavior most adored by straight macho poseurs come to the fore.

Among the mass spectator sports, we can observe a definite order of preference. The recent sharp rise in the popularity of professional football can be partly explained by the physical violence promoted by the rules of that game. The astonishing number of injuries, routine disabilities and even death that result from the game's brutal demands, as well as the public's indifference to these, only enhance its hold over macho straights as the "sport" which best represents their idea of American Manhood.

Similarly, the tremendous expansion in the professional hockey leagues in recent years further testifies to the male's appetite for fast-moving, body contact, sports, seasoned with a heavy measure of stylized artifice. The simultaneous leveling off (and relative decline) of interest in professional baseball—"America's National Pasttime"—shows just how our society's tastes are changing.

The "tougher," the more violent the sports with which a sports straightist identifies, the more macho will he want to appear. In fact, one could forward this rule of thumb: The more machismo displayed in a sport with which a fan identifies, the more repressed he is likely to be as a human individual. He is satisfied with *abstracted* Macho Straightness; he is a sideliners. We can find some interesting examples of this repressed approach. President Nixon, surely one of the most physically uncoordinated of the recent occupants of the White House—ever notice how frequently he *drops* things (other than bombs, of course)? Baseballs, medals. And how, like Dr. Strangelove, he seems to lose control over the motions of his arms and hands? His spastic face?—has called himself "America's No. 1 Football Fan." Never a bride but always a bride's maid,

Nixon was a second string benchwarmer at Whittier College for four years. No "touch" football games on the White House lawn a la JFK (to whom athletic prowess and "toughness" in world affairs went hand-in-hand; remember the 50-mile hikes?). No horse riding or speeding in cars like LBJ. Hell, Nixon doesn't even play golf like Eisenhower. He just watches football games maniacally, phones congratulatory messages to naked players in the locker room, provides coaches with specific plays.

Nixon has even taken over the lingo of the playing field and applied it to domestic and international policy. Hence, a cabinet is a "team," emphasizing its subservience to its "coach," rather than accenting the integrity to these men who should be leaders. Imperialist diplomacy becomes "game plans." Elections are the Super-Bowl of politics. Nixon, apparently, still lusts after inclusion in that circle of "real men," sexy but repressed, violent yet submissive to established authority.

Also interesting to note is that both football and hockey involve apparel which make men appear considerably larger than they are naturally, visually reenforcing the association between "manliness" and sheer physical size. Men in football or hockey uniforms recall the huge papier-mache dummies in Jean-Claude van Itallie's play *America, Hurrah*. The larger the man or his appearance, the greater it is assumed is his potential for violence, and the greater the "respect" he commands in our society. With football uniforms particularly, most traces of individuation among the players are hidden under bulky helmets, shoulder pads, numbered jerseys, and padded pants. At most one can glimpse a stray stretch of flesh.

Sports are always presented as "non-political." In the last few years, there have been many groans over the "introduction of politics"—gaspl—into athletic games, as though "sports" should be exempt while all the other institutions of our society are scrutinized! When two American black athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, gave a raised fist salute during the national anthem at the 1968 summer Olympics in Mexico City, "sports fans" were outraged. Their reactions were merciless; they wanted to punish the athletes, seek revenge and retribution. When Arab terrorists kidnapped and killed members of the Israeli team at the summer Olympics in Munich in 1972, the conventional leaders and press clucked over the intrusion of international hatreds into the "sporting arena." What amazed me at the time was how people failed to understand the Olympics as extensions of nationalist competitions. After all, weren't the teams representing *states*? They did not represent interest groups, athletic associations, peoples, nations, or least of all themselves; they were carrying the flags and hopes of *political states*.

More clucking, too, was heard when team men like Jim Bouton and Dave Meggyesy wrote books detailing the extent of human exploitation and brutalization owners and coaches inflict on players which spectators consume without protest.

Much of the resentment against men like Bouton and Meggyesy was occasioned by their public disclosures of the damage this "entertainment" takes on the men involved and how *contrary* professional sports actually were to the image they projected. They told of the administration of amphetamines and/or other pain-killing drugs before games, the degrading personal discipline imposed on the players, the disregard for serious physical injury and illness sustained while in the game, the high fatality rate in a game like football, and the general "burning out" of men in professional sports by age forty. Owners and managers

But the bosses are right in a way. The fans—even in their sports obsession—prefer not to know the actuality of a team member's life in professional sports, especially pro football. They content themselves with the sportswriters' jibberish.

If the truth were generally admitted about life in college and professional sports, the macho attachment of the fans might be thwarted, hurting sales.

Part of Lance Rentzel's ignominious fall from favor can be understood with these concepts. Rentzel became an overnight pariah in the sports world and an object of pity—the very antithesis of what macho straightness aims for—when he was arrested after exposing himself to pre-teen girls. Granted, this is not the healthiest kind of sexual behavior on the market, but it is surely not uncommon among males, especially those who are sexually repressed. Other well-known and well-loved ball players have stranger interests than Rentzel's. Rentzel was a victim of hypocrisy more than anything else. As a pretty boy, glamor guy in uniform, he had to represent to fans not what men actually *are* in their behavior but rather how they wanted to see themselves. Had Rentzel been hired for the team just to play ball, his having exposed himself to girls would have in no way altered his skill in the game. By being apprehended, however, he gave the fans grounds to revoke their belief in him as an embodiment of the butch ideal of macho masculinity.

Put any two American males in a closed room and it is more than likely that within minutes they will start discussing sports. Hand an American male a daily newspaper and he will probably turn to the sports pages first. It is a fundamental assumption in our society that "sports" figures foremost in the minds of American males.

Once again our President provides us with an excellent example of this single-mindedness. After the American invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and the murders of Kent State University, and during the siege of Washington that followed, Nixon met with student demonstrators at the Lincoln Memorial at the unconventional hour of 4 a.m. After finding out which universities they came from, he asked them how the football teams did that year. Nixon even remarked that had he his life to live over again—grim thought—he'd like to end up as a sportswriter! Sportswriters remind me of drag queens in beauty contests; both tramp from town to town carrying little overnight bags, the sportsman his typewriter, the drag his cosmetics, each in search of some elusive ideal, two sides of a coin given currency by those fleeing eroticism into superficial stylization.

One needn't actually *be* interested in spectator sports, one must only admit to it and appear tolerably well informed so as to be able to participate in the sports banter expected of the macho American male.

But, then, this is the pattern of much behavior in our land. The function of hypocrisy is to allow one to appear to be what one *isn't*. This is necessary because our society proscribes some very reasonable and expectable components of human behavior. One needn't really be heterosexual, say, in one's desire or regular behavior. It is only required to *appear* to be heterosexual. Likewise with the sports obsession.

These two alienations easily go side-by-side; both reflect the tolls of conformity and the social benefits one can gain through hypocrisy.

Better still to be involved in *some* team sport at whatever level, so that one may be publicly identified in this capacity. Sports straightists love to wear jackets with their bowling league name stitched over their tits. Their status is more secure if they've actually *defeated* someone, other males. Then they can have "champs" added to their butch identity.

A word should be offered in explanation of the recent self-awareness of macho straights as "jocks." The word "jock" when used to refer to a sports-obsessed guy was not too long ago con-

sidered an insult, belittling, if not a low derogatory slur, reducing the characterization of a person to a very superficial level. But in the last few years the word has become respectable. Sports-obsessed macho straights proudly refer to magazine, called *Jock*, began publication. Headline writers now use the word without second thoughts.

The elevation of the word to acceptable usage came about because sports obsessed macho straights grew to the realization that they were on the defensive. Incredible as it seemed to them, and despite all the forces working to produce more young men like their fathers, theirs was no longer The Absolute Lifestyle by the late 1960's. Large minorities had developed which were indifferent to the system of macho sports values. Anti-war demonstrators, though not actually opposed to sports per se, did attack war—and "sports" is but the farm system to war; they share a common underpinning. To attack war is getting awfully close to home. What next?

Hippies. Drug-takers. Pot-smokers. The social order was mass-producing its antithesis in the "counterculture." Then came the feminist wave, challenging masculine prerogative itself. And then gay liberation!

One by one the assumptions of the sports-military macho straightist system met assailants striking closer and closer at its very core with reasoned arguments on their side. Sports obsessed macho straightists retrenched and made a more brazen, more forward declaration of just *where they stood*. They became *jocks* almost with a vengeance—self admitted, proud, pushy, trying to defend something (they didn't know quite what) which they knew was under attack. Their position became more self consciously defensive, since now they were only one of many factions. They retained the behavior of absolutists even though in fact their attitudes were being challenged from many directions. It's hell for repressed straightists to have to defend themselves against criticism once the traditional supports fall away.

Possessing no argument, they fell back on posturing, and *that's* something jocks have always done well. Now that the absolute reign of macho has been publicly challenged, the jock has admitted to the changing circumstances, which, in itself becomes an undermining of his repressed identity. Macho straightism has failed to impose *totality*. Hence, its magic is gone forever.

"Buddy-ism" is simply a rudimentary, adolescent form of homo-eroticism in a very covert plane, packaged in the vein of butch tough-guyism. That's the only way society will tolerate homosexual connections in the male. Men gather with other men *because they like to do so*. They usually find some excuse to give "purpose" to their assembly, but that's only an imposition society requires. That they frequently choose "sports" as their excuse is the final paradox of the sportsman's interest in other males; his interest can only approximate expression as long as some males are striving to conquer other men. It boils down to this: a boy or a man can be interested in another man so long as that man exerts his physical powers of force to overcome men designated as "opponents."

Opposite to the majority culture of repressed macho straights, gay males have virtually no interest in organized competitive sports. Of course, there is a certain interest in superstar professional athletes themselves, partly as conversation items resulting from the massive publicity given them, partly because they are attractive, well built men who are presented as symbols of sexual potency, although repressed. They are never, however, presented as agents of self-serving eroticism.

There is nothing particularly odd or eccentric in this lust for athletes by gay males where it exists. After all, the men who select athletes for professional teams are just as conscious as are overt gay men that they need pretty faces to fill their teams. What has accelerated this process of selecting handsome men for professional sports is television with its mer-

cleiss close-up and its demands on a celebrity's private life. The expanding press coverage of sports, photos especially, can be best exploited by a team's owner through good looking players. Physically or facially repugnant men, no matter the extent of their athletic achievement, will simply not make the team.

The requirement that ball players be attractive physically is becoming an open secret among the players and the public at large. The February, 1973 issue of *Pageant* magazine features a cover story: "We Pick The Ten Sexiest Men in Sports!" Several of the men, including cover guy Terry Bradshaw, were photographed unclothed to the waist. Said Bradshaw, as a means of hiding his tracks: "People might say I've gone to the dogs! But it's all for fun. I don't think women will be trying to grab me!" What???

As an example of how Exploited Eros attracts new recruits for the sports ethic, Victoria Pellegrino, who edits *Pageant*, says, after selecting and interviewing these ten sexy sports superstars: "I've never been a big sports buff, but now I've become a fan!" Yet she continues: "Interestingly, during our interviews it emerged that practically all of their attitudes toward women were on the conservative side...Almost all of them felt they wanted to dominate *their* [my italics] women and that women, indeed, *want* [her italics] to be dominated."

Pellegrino finds these attitudes surprising. Why? A representative of the macho sports-obsessed ethic couldn't think or believe otherwise. And of her ten sexy superstars a majority, six, are unmarried! And this is, not necessarily a peculiarity of their profession. The sports ethic is exclusive of women, and the repression of sex energy and its rechanneling into team sports favors a spartan life. That's why young boys have such an enormous affinity towards the "lifestyle" of teammates as presented by professional sports. There are no women around; women, they assume, would require "civilized" behavior of them, and that's a compromise. And though this lifestyle is fundamentally homosexual (i.e. "all-male" in its orientation) the team's raison d'être prevents them from having to deal reasonably with the real questions of *how* men behave in groups, and, more importantly, *why*.

The channeling and molding of erotic energy is a way of maintaining a specific order of authority, either for the benefit of an individual or a hierarchy of individuals. One can enhance the power of a system of values by connecting with and manipulating the erotic responses of the masses, if one can stimulate them in the right way. Sports heroes play a major role in containing the libidinal energies within the established system of values. They act as lightning rods for attracting males and then as conduits for absorbing them into the celebration of the sports ethic. If a man can be made to fear for his masculinity, you can get him to do just about anything to save himself from being thought "unmanly."

The power of stimulated eroticism is mobilized for violence in at least two ways in team spectator sports. It is made precious by the rules of the game which impose formal limits on the ways men may connect. Violence becomes erotically charged when it is constrained in a controlled set of circumstances like courtship or a ritualistic deflowering. We know, too, that at the outset of the game one team will win and the other will lose (God forbid they should tie). In our culture the encounter of men against men on the playing field, sweating in physical exertion to overcome one another is as obvious a substitute for passionate sexual intercourse as we could find anywhere, the substitute society happens to permit.

The uniforms that athletes wear are another means of drawing the erotic interest of spectators into the brutal competition of men. The uniform stimulates us to a certain degree (we all, alas, have this Prussian streak in us), but this erotic stimulation — which under more healthy conditions would be permitted a creative, self-fulfilling expression — is subsumed by

the culture's imperative of ritual violence. The more articulated the uniform (while still maintaining a close detailing of the male physiognomy) the more the uniform will successfully cover the personal individuation of the team members and the more it becomes a focal point for repressed sexuality. Sexual involvement is invited, but it is not on an overt level.

The erotic stimulation caused by athletes in their uniforms becomes conscious among gay men, though it remains repressed and even subconscious to macho types. To these latter the uniform is not so much a symbol of repressed and re-channelled sexuality as it is a manifestation of conformity and acceptance of the sports system. To them the uniform represents the quality of *banding* together to defeat others. The thrill for them is not the erotic charge made conscious but rather the power of the brotherhood to humiliate others. The professional team becomes the male equivalent of a chorus line, decorated and disciplined into becoming an instrument for arousing sexuality without offering any release. The repressed sexuality of athletics becomes subservience. Anyone among males who hasn't been in a uniform and felt a tingle in his prick when ordered about by a beefy older man in authority (until, of course the tingle rises and becomes anger) is terribly obtuse, conditioned to abuse, or lying.

The overtly homosexual sado-masochistic encounter is partially a distillation of this experience, though admittedly it is wholly voluntary and outside social approval. It is comprised of many of the same inputs: boys in uniforms or costumes which designate roles, some sort of stylized physical exertion, a dominator and the dominated. But in the refining process, the impurities have been removed.

The obstructions have been pared away and we are left with the essence of homosexual behavior become affectionate, though left in forms which appear to the uninitiated antithetical to affection. It is a transcendence of the taboo. It is a kind of homosexual behavior made overt, finally recognized as an end in itself. As Gore Vidal has sagaciously pointed out, the locker room after the game is the most ideal setting for a homosexual orgy. A lovely thought but highly improbable because the same attitudes which put the men in the locker room in the first place are the attitudes which prevent them from sharing overt intra-sexual acts with their buddies and coaches. The team itself is a way for them to share what they see as their *strengths*. How could they violate that spirit by openly sharing what they perceive as weakness, i.e. tender homosexual passion?

It might seem that the homosexual S & M experience and the macho straight's sports obsession are not that far apart. Both are overwhelmingly masculine-oriented in conventional terms. Both apparently seek the Butch Ideal of manliness. It might even appear that the S & M encounter or relationship is only a further evolution of the sports-military-fetish.

But in fact there is a qualitative difference between the two which puts them in separate worlds — certainly as far as the macho straight is concerned. The homosexual S & M encounter is an overt recognition of the pleasure to be taken in honest, open sex between men, and the roles they assume are no inhibition to this pleasure. (Often to the contrary, in fact). The many who enjoy S & M come to the experience already aware of the erotic charges in uniforms, leather, military customs, forms of dominance and subservience. The more specifically detailed the experience the greater is the totality of the pleasure.

The partners stimulate each other on many other levels than the merely physical. The uniforms, the discipline, and the methods of the sports-military world are turned into props over which the partners have control for the expression of intra-male sensory pleasure. The props are just instruments in satisfying the human need for contact through sympathetic self expression. They are not means for

reducing one's individuality, as they are for the players on the field or GIs. They are no longer the macho male's manifestations of self-expression to the end of destruction, his outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual corruptions. Rather they are metamorphized into devices for increasing pleasure; and creative pleasure cannot long be subservient to any outside master. For those who accept overt homosexual affection as a part of every man's life, these props are used to bring release for sexual stimulation and excitement. The game is played with all participants aware of their roles as roles, the props as props, the game as transitory. Afterwards, a social equilibrium is regained.

To the sportsman — be he spectator or athlete — the uniforms, the discipline and the specifics of macho male behavior are forms required by the *ethic* of the sports-military system. The cornerstone of this ethic is the demand for the repression of overt, unfettered, intra-male sexual possibilities and the rechannelization of this energy into approved forms of social and personal aggression. The ethic forbids the recognition of affectionate, non-brutal homosexual possibilities.

There is a determined and deliberate effort to de-eroticize and/or repress the recognition and the impulse of the homosexual aspects of "sportsmanship" that yearn for genuine, satisfactory release. There is the fear among those who maintain the present system that homosexual acts, if allowed to flourish, would lead to homosexual affection, and *that* would undermine the macho masculine producing enterprises. Team owners, managers, and athletes are not in business to encourage men to be affectionate with each other and deal responsibly with the erotic feelings they arouse in other men. The prosperity of those behind the status quo is contingent on the continued repression of homosexual impulses. Their profit is generated by pandering to the distorted personality of the straight macho male, encouraging him to believe he is complete. The knowledge must never surface that, in truth, the repression of urges for tender homosexual contacts leaves an open scar across the breadth of a man's personality.

The sports ethic demands lust for power over others. It requires constant encounters to reassert macho masculinity through conquest. The sports ethic is a screen which blocks awareness of intra-sex libidinal release. Others as well as I can testify that sexual contact with a "sportsman" is never very satisfying. Men who are team members or boosters are rarely good sex partners. Unlike gay men, an interest in the pleasure-maximizing specifics of sex is not part of the stuff of their lives. Nor are they thoroughly comfortable with the idea of making a coupling equally satisfying for both partners, homosexual or heterosexual. Sex for them is largely a matter of swift orgasmic gratification, with a soupçon of humiliation inflicted on the partner if possible. They are restrained from being comfortable in homosexual contacts (even while having them) by their macho masculinity which insists they are heterosexual in their behavior — though you'll never catch a "regular guy" using a big word like that to describe himself! Hence, your typical sports fan requires large quantities of alcohol before he can temporarily circumvent the repressed state of his sexual identity. This is one reason why the greatest amount of actual physical contact between macho straightists occurs in men's taverns — or in other places where alcohol is served. This also gives them a safety valve cop-out if they should proceed too far in an overt homosexual direction. They can cover over their homosexual gaffe to their buddy with the classic ruse of: "Boy, was I drunk last night. I don't remember a goddamn thing..."

Yet, just as a point of behavioral interest, whenever it is suggested to sports fan types that it is repressed homosexuality which accounts for much of their sports obsession, they immediately issue a loud raucous laugh or threaten to punch you in the mouth;

Matters of sex remain deeply embar-

assing for the macho straightist and contrary to his sports obsessed lifestyle. He has some dim awareness that he is inadequate in his sexual expression. But rather than begin to change, he zips up, forgets his inadequacies and joins with other sports fans who prefer the routine violence of the playing field.

If a member of the sports-military ethic is really supposed to be highly attached to the macho butch ideal in all of its power and force why is he afraid to express outwardly a love for this quality when it appears in other men? Is it because the macho community of men is not one based on love — or even genuine interest — but on the power of intimidation? Surely a macho straightist prefers the company of other repressed macho aspirants. The presence of an "effeminate male" makes Mr. Sports Type very nervous. The straight macho male's ethic — and sports in the best place to find it on a large civilian scale — is one of exclusion and hierarchy.

By contrast, the gay alternative is one of open, honest self-expression. The acknowledgement of homosexual eroticism and the insertion of this phenomenon in a place of dignity in our society, if permitted to express itself honestly in a place of dignity in our society, if permitted to express itself honestly in a healthy fashion can't help but make the *standard* of intra-male activity affectionate and friendly..

Institutions which profit in money and power from the fragmented, alienated, repressed macho personality — the Roman Catholic Church, the military, the State, economic bossism — often come together for good reason, to praise competitive team sports as universally desirable activities for men to be engaged in, as players and spectators. Representatives from these coercive institutions gladly crow about the "apolitical function" of sports. Spectator sports act as a unifying symbol for *them*, but that's because they all share a common disregard for individual development, democratic methods of social organization and the need to construct cooperative means in maintaining and improving society.

We accuse these institutions of encouraging and upholding the systematic repression of the natural urge for affectionate homosexual relations between men. Sports and the sports obsession are not a healthy unifying symbol for a good life; they are rituals in celebration of a repression which fosters hypocrisy, exclusion and manipulation enforced through brutality, coercion and the perversion of benign social behavior.

Were we to rid our society of this soul-blight of the macho straightist sports obsession, males would have to come to terms with this happy fact:

ALL MEN ARE FAGGOTS!

John Mitzel



GAY SUNSHINE No. 18

Winston Leyland, Editor

Regular Contributors

Jim Reed	Allen Young
Jim Hicks	Perry Brass
Lee Atwell	Charley Shively
Steve Barton	Arunothai Somskul

Member of Liberation
News Service and COSMEP

If you are gay you have something beautiful to say. Submit an article, a poem, a letter, a drawing, a photograph. Add your energy to the community by letting the community in on your creativity. Deadline for the next issue (no. 19) is July 20. Address all mail to GAY SUNSHINE, P.O. Box 40397, San Francisco, Ca. 94140 Please double space all MSS. We need creative gays to work with us on the paper. Call 824-3184.

OPEN LETTER

The following Open Letter is in response to articles which were published in Double-F No. 2 (Winter-Spring 1973), a New York male effeminist journal. These articles consisted in large part of personal attacks on various gay people deeply involved in the Gay Movement. The authors of this Open Letter, Lesbian Feminists Karla Jay and June Rook, live in New York City. Karla Jay is co-editor of the recent anthology, Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation.

The authors state that this Open Letter is not intended as a condemnation of Effeminism but is a "feminist viewpoint on the ravings of a certain wing of the Effeminist movement."

This open letter was rejected by the editors of Double-F for publication in their magazine.

Dear Editors of Double-F:

Although we feel that the magazine Double-F contains some ideas which constitute an important step towards the liberation of humankind, and women in particular, some of the statements, particularly in Steve Dansky's article "The Gay Enemy," are riddled with contradictions and dangerous male chauvinism.

To begin with, Steve attacks various gay men including Allen Young, Perry

Brass, Craig Rodwell *et al.*, and has the gall to put them in the same category as an arch-sexist pig, such as Norman Mailer. Most of the gay men mentioned, despite their failings, have at least attempted to work towards revolution and liberation; whereas Mailer has worked only towards the construction of a larger bank account and larger male ego (although not necessarily in that order).

The attack upon the gay men is both ironic and chauvinistic. Both Ken Pitchford and Steve Dansky attack Allen Young for his male chauvinism and for seeking power. Yet, we have both known Allen well and we recognize his ongoing struggle with male privilege and the power male privilege calls for. It is our experience that Allen is a sensitive and highly conscious individual in his dealings with us and with our sisters. We only hope that some of the individuals responsible for the self-righteous attacks on him in these articles can make as much progress in their struggles with male privilege. And while these individuals attack Allen so furiously, they have no scruple about quoting a statement by him to promote Double-F — both on the back of the magazine and in a slick flyer sent to liberation people.

Another "Gay Enemy" is supposedly Perry Brass, partly for his work on *Come Out!* But as Steve Dansky himself admits, he too contributed to *Come Out!* and if Steve is entitled to beat his breast to the tune of mea culpa and repent, then why does he assume that other men are not as likely to change?

The final irony is that while Steve attacks Norman Mailer, Ken Pitchford [an editor of *Double-F*] is having his forthcoming book of poems published by Little, Brown & Company — the same company which has a million dollar contract with Mailer! The contradiction here needs no explanation!

We could go on and on about the sophomoric way both Ken Pitchford and Steve Dansky have twisted words and hypocritically knifed everyone around them, while admitting a certain amount of guilt on their own part to give an appearance of raw honesty, but we would like to get on with our second point. This is that you define "Gay Enemies" in terms of their male chauvinism. We have already pointed out how you did this to Allen Young. Another example is Perry Brass, who Steve defines as a "Gay Enemy" because of what he did to the women on *Come Out!*, and Craig Rodwell is an enemy because his Oscar Wilde Bookstore has a "token-lesbian-shelf." (Of course, you forgot to mention the lesbian manager and the lesbian part-time cashier, but are two-thirds of a staff a token?) Naturally you refused to let Oscar Wilde sell *Double-F* and we had to buy our copy at a neighborhood bookstore which sells far more sexist books than Oscar Wilde's will ever see!

The real point, however, is that you are naming gay people as "enemies" because they are primarily women's enemies, and who are you as *men* to judge who our enemies are? You are doing in a more subtle way what male psychiatrists,

male sociologists, and the entire male power structure has been doing for centuries: that is, you are telling women (or at least subtly suggesting) who their friends are, who their enemies are. You have not so subtly decided what is right for women. By pointing out the chauvinist enemy (even though your readership is purportedly male), you are being patronizing to women. Aren't we capable of finding our enemies?

Did women appoint you to be the harbingers of feminism to gay men or have you decided on your own what women will think of your efforts? As you yourself point out "all men are the enemies" (and one of us, Karla, was one of the Redstockings who formulated that theory), so in the end you are as much of an enemy as the rest. All the male privileges you so eagerly give up are immediately handed back to you by the male power structure. You admit that you are male chauvinists, but you spend the greater part of your magazine attacking others instead of examining the ways in which you yourselves are male chauvinists. For example, your magazine reeks of violence, and what could be more macho than a bloody solution to a problem? Hasn't that always been the way of The Man?

A final point. You attack Gay Liberation as if it were a cohesive group, when in fact, Gay Liberation is no more of an ideological unity than Women's Liberation. And if you condemn the entire Gay Liberation Movement, then remember that some of those people in Gay Liberation are *women*, our sisters. It's more than a bit chauvinistic to assume that a movement is entirely male.

We think your magazine would be far more valuable if you used your pages to develop and examine your own experiences and ideologies instead of tearing down Gay Liberationists, even though we agree that some of the men you mention are more than objectionable. Instead of dumping on gay men who are, after all, as oppressed as you are, you should attack only our real enemy — white, male heterosexuals. We feel that criticism of gay men is warranted only if it has some constructive point and that your frothing denunciations, which are in many cases unsubstantiated and ridiculous, tend to make one want to reject all your ideas as paranoid and irresponsible.

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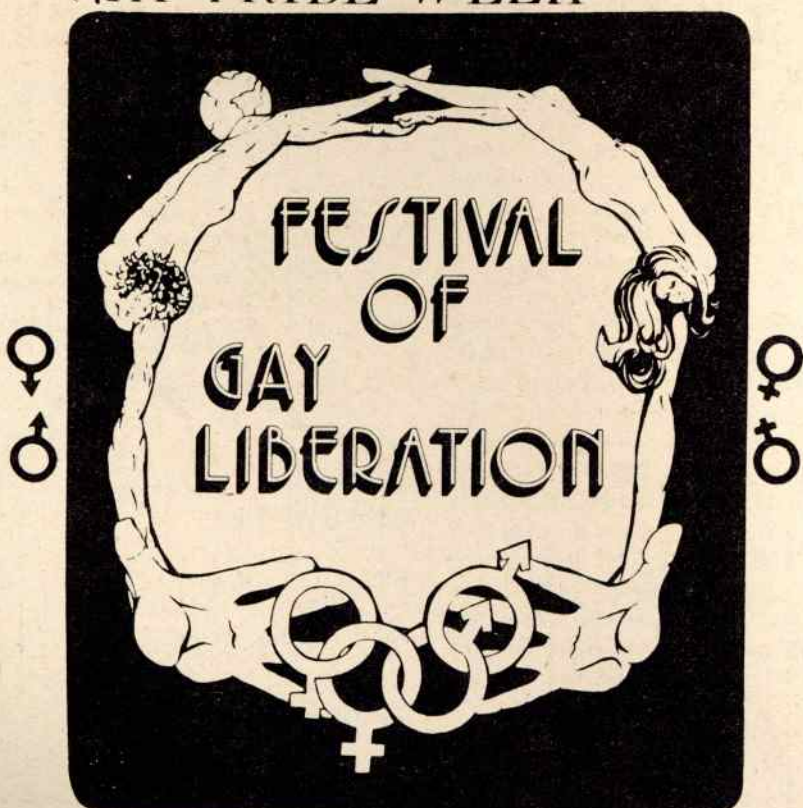
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GAY SUNSHINE

A Newspaper of Gay Liberation



Sports & the

Macho Male

I have always loathed compulsory sports. The kinds of behavior most highly whether the game of "catch" my brother valued in straight macho male society prodded me into as a youth, or the re-are found in clear, uncomplicated form in quired courses in "physical education" team, competitive sports. Sports are a in high school, or the obsessed chatter projection of the collective idea of how of "men" about sports.

Competitive team athletics are used by selves. By examining the attitudes and macho straight men to concentrate, stereo- values which support professional sports, type and enforce their superficially-orient- those which fire the macho male's sports ted heterosexuality, their actual sexual obsession, we will get a better under- repression, and their power-obsessed in- standing of why men behave as they do the extent terpretation of masculinity. Sports are in our society-or misbehave to the extent important instruments which daily re- they do. In this way, sports become a kindle the repression and competitive symbol for all those aspects of macho Team. The team is a place where one's drive a macho man needs to fend off masculinity American men seek to em- individuality is subsumed to the welfare fears about the kind of masculinity he body or at least identify themselves with. of the whole. That wouldn't be so has so tightly adopted for himself. Since most men are unable-either

through sheer laziness or consumed with the pursuit of the dollar--to make it a full-time job possessing these macho masculine qualities in developed forms, they settle for displaying an attraction to these qualities as they are embodied by other "professional men" and I mean profes- sional men.

I certainly do not criticize voluntary, participatory sports when they are held in the right spirit and not simply as one more manifestation of compulsory aggressive competitiveness to assert a sexually-repressed form of masculinity. I believe in physical culture and the necessity of regular exercise. But exercise need not be "sports" and it need not be competitive. Athletic activity shouldn't be streamlined to become merely a feeder system for profit-making concerns that exploit their players as the instruments for generating revenue while having their consumers believe they are expressing their masculinity.

My targets are (to list them in concentric circles starting at the center and moving out): A) the professional team itself, its players, coaches, managers, owners, and all they aim to represent in society; B) the dedicated fanatics who attach great importance to everything that happens to the team; C) the system which establishes macho straightness as the only acceptable form of masculine identity and then exploits the demand that all men associate themselves with this form by repeated challenges to them to respond in a proper way; and D) the inter-related, mutually backstroking ass-licking network of press, broadcasters, schools, politics, and churches which celebrate the values proffered by competitive team sports.

By "straight" and/or "straightist" I do not refer to the incidental fact that someone appears heterosexually oriented in his desires. (This fact, by the way, is more an effect if anything, of one's being a straightist.) The words "gay" and "straight" are not exactly interchangeable with "homosexual" and "heterosexual," despite the common incorrect usage to the contrary. Actual sexual activity is not so important to the macho straight man; he is more concerned with power and appearing powerful.

What are some of the specifics so appealing about the way sports depicts symbolized macho masculinity to its audience?

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