

# GAY SUNSHINE

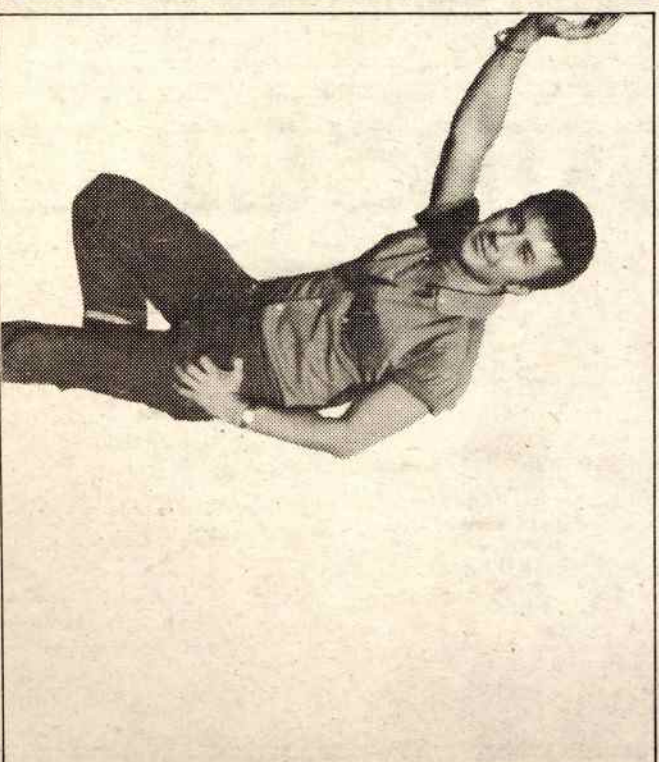
A JOURNAL OF GAY LIBERATION

Lou Harrison, 1965

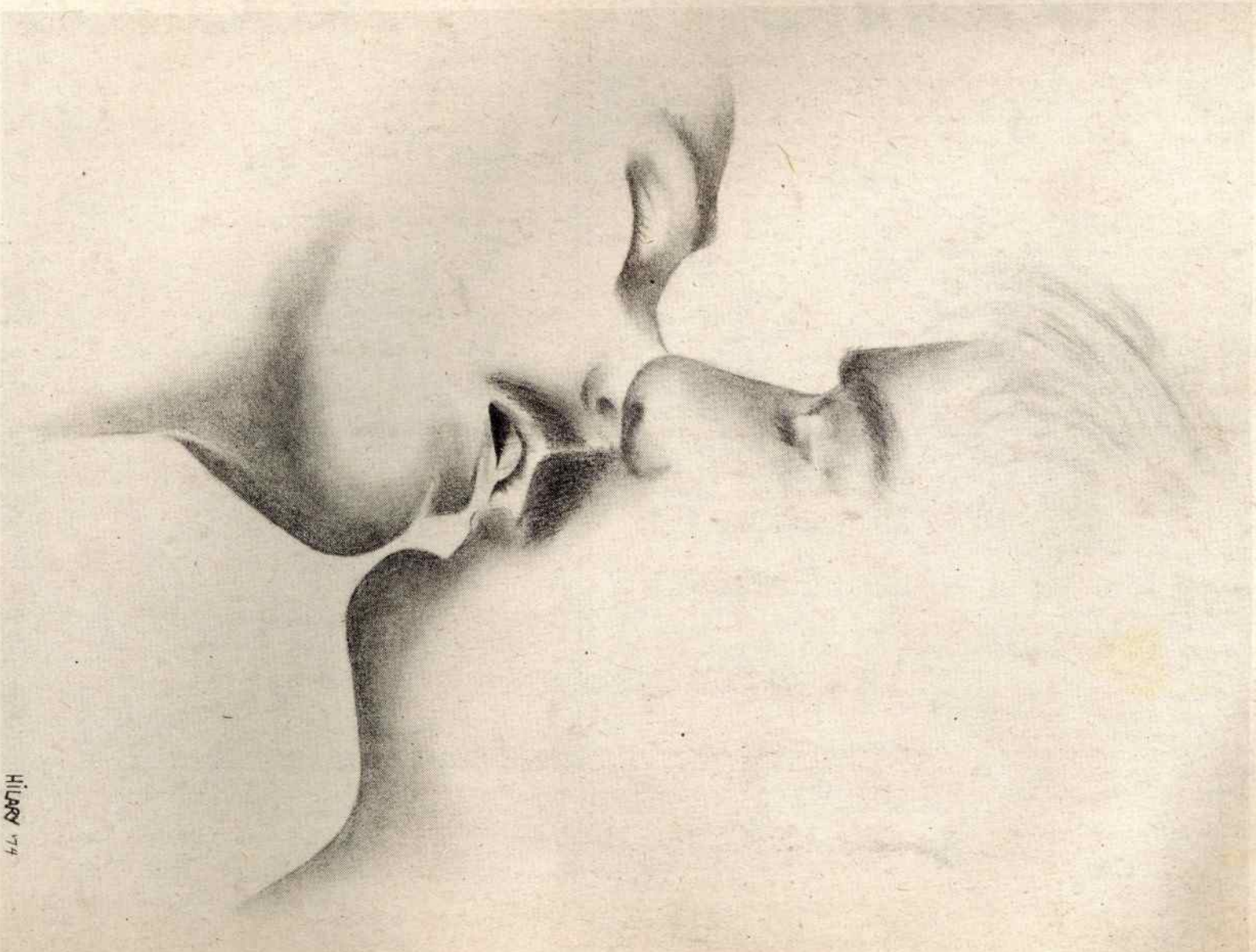


This Issue  
INTERVIEWS  
with

Lou Harrison  
&  
John Rechy



John Rechy, 1967



HILARY '74

NUMBER 23  
75 CENTS

# JOHN RECHY: AN INTERVIEW



John Rechy, Los Angeles, 1970  
Photo: R. Michael Kelley

GAY SUNSHINE No. 23  
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Novelist John Rechy was born in El Paso, Texas. He currently makes his home in Hollywood, California. He is the author of five novels, *City of Night* (1963), *Numbers* (1967), *This Day's Death* (1969), *The Vampires* (1971) and *The Fourth Angel* (1973). He is currently working on a book of non-fiction entitled *The Sexual Outlaw*.

Rechy's work has received critical acclaim: Herbert Gold: "*City of Night* is one of the most remarkable novels to appear in years...it illuminates, it stirs the heart, it is unforgettable." Christopher Isherwood: "John Rechy shows great comic and tragic talent. He is a truly gifted novelist." James Baldwin: "(Rechy's) tone rings absolutely true, is absolutely his own; and he has the kind of discipline which allows him a rare and beautiful recklessness...He tells the truth, and tells it with such passion that we are forced to share in the life he conveys. This is a most humbling and liberating achievement."

The following interview with John Rechy was taped by Winston Leyland, editor of *Gay Sunshine* since 1971, at Rechy's Hollywood home in April and July 1974. The interview was edited and revised in October, 1974. A photo of the interviewer appears in the *Fag Rag/Gay Sunshine* special Summer 1974 joint issue, page 29.

**Winston Leyland:** Perhaps we could start by talking about the background of your first novel, *City of Night*. Did *City of Night* spring out of your own experience traveling around the United States?

**John Rechy:** I think it's important to state that I never set out to do research on that world so that I could write about it. I never expected that I would. *City of Night* began as a letter that I wrote to a friend of mine after experiences during Mardi Gras in New Orleans. I came back to El Paso and wrote him a letter telling him what had happened. Instead of sending it to him I sent the letter off as a story to both *Evergreen Review* and *New Directions* and both of them accepted it. There was a great deal of interest in it. I was asked if I was doing a novel and I said yes. That's how *City of Night* began.

**W.L.:** Throughout some of your books, especially *City of Night* and *Numbers*, there is a streak of pathos, despair, compulsion. Do you feel that these were prominent in your own life at the time?

**J.R.:** The elements of despair were not only part of my own life but they continue to be part of my life. Indeed, I feel an element of despair is very real in gay life, and that isn't to criticize gay life. Considering the pressures that we have to live with—the imposed schizophrenia—many gay people

have to lead dual lives. It's like wearing a mask, putting it on and taking it off. Because of that, there is built-in despair in gay life. My first three books have been criticized because they give such a bleak, despondent picture of gay life. When I have given talks this criticism is presented to me. But I feel that I must tell what I experience. I think that no other gay writer has the experience, the ability to communicate the world of the streets, its feelings, that I know intimately. I feel that I want to convey that honestly as it is. In my speeches, in my non-fiction I can deal with things as they should be, things that must be changed. But first you begin with a realistic appraisal of that world. It's not an indictment of the gay world to say that it's a very despairing, lonely world in many aspects. I think anybody will agree with this. It is so with any other pressured minority. For example, it's fine to be black but the situations that surround being black certainly do not make it a totally joyous experience. I want to be honest in my books as indeed I have been. But I am criticized for it.

**W.L.:** I understand you are working on a new book which is going to be dealing with court cases against gay people and that you're taking a new approach.

**J.R.:** That book, *The Sexual Outlaw*, is going to be non-fiction. Only one chapter of the book deals with the actual transcript of a trial and follows through with verbatim testimony about the entrapment, the lying of the police. It follows through a case from the original arrest to the verdict. But the whole book deals with the whole spectrum of the so-called promiscuous homosexual who to me is the hero of the gay world. Many people would think this is outrageous, but I am appalled by "conservative" homosexuals who are not unlike the blacks of a few years ago wanting to be whiter than the whites. There are many homosexuals who want to be straighter than straight and just show the best part of our lives and keep everything cool so everything will work out right. I am constantly appalled by them. To me much of what is called promiscuous sex is the equivalent of what happened with the blacks when they suddenly sat-in publicly. One is breaking an unjust law in private, in the closet as it were; the other is confronting the enemy on the street and saying, "Look—we are breaking your unjust laws." That is what promiscuous homosexuals did; that is what freedom fighters and blacks did in the streets. I know many people will find the comparison outrageous but it's only because of sexual hang-ups. My book *The Sexual Outlaw* will explore the spectrum and try to define a very discernible homosexual sensibility, areas in which I think homosexuals are definitely superior because they have a dual awareness and sensitiv-

ity. So many of us have grown up hiding so that we have developed a dual persona. I think that in many areas the homosexual can feel more acutely because of that. I'll also deal with the liberated role of women in the context of homosexuality. There's a chapter in my book called "Beyond the Fag Hag". I try to put the sexual minority in the context of other minorities. One of the saddest things in the gay world is how we are supposed to be grateful for little crumbs. When the TV movie *That Certain Summer* was shown, homosexuals were so grateful: "Oh God, did you see it; it was so good, so kind, so compassionate." Bullshit, man; it was crumbs. It was safe. They chose the safest types; they didn't take a marvelous queen, a radical queen, a promiscuous homosexual. They chose the closest they could come to middle class America.

**W.L.:** They also managed to avoid showing the gay protagonists touching or embracing. Even when the guy was having a breakdown, there was no physical affection shown. Whereas you would not find that kind of thing in a heterosexual situation on television.

**J.R.:** The most pitiful thing I've heard recently was a case that was refused a hearing by the Supreme Court. In some southern town two men were busted for sodomy in a car and they were sentenced to eight years in prison; they made an appeal which said in part that their sex act had hurt no one (and this is what is most pitiful), they added the phrase "with the possible exception of themselves."

**W.L.:** In a recent interview you talk about some of the themes in your novels, one of which is "no substitute for salvation"—a theme which you feel appears in all your novels. Could you talk more about this, how this appears for example in *City of Night*?

**J.R.:** I mean the phrase in a very religious sense, that we are raised to expect that love, kindness prevails and that there will be indeed salvation; if you live well you will be rewarded—all that bullshit. Then we discover an existential void; that there is no such thing. And part of the contemporary neurosis, the existential nightmare is based on the fact that we try to substitute for that: some people by trying to make a lot of money; other people by acting compulsively in other areas—in sex, for instance. There is simply no substitute for that promise which was made and unfulfilled. Once you withdraw that promise, there is nothing to take its place.

**W.L.:** Do you mean "salvation" in a particular Christian sense or in a general spiritual sense?

**J.R.:** Both. Having been raised a Catholic I am bound to use that kind of wording that comes from a Christian Catholic

attitude. But this goes for other things. Psycho-analysis, drugs are all attempts to substitute for that unfulfilled promise.

W.L.: That theme, of course, is clearest in your book *The Fourth Angel*, although it runs through all your novels.

J.R.: Yes, it is a note of despair and runs through all my novels. It's very much in *City of Night* and extremely strong in *Numbers*. I think that Johnny Rio in *Numbers* is a real existential creature trying to thwart the certain knowledge of doom by collecting and counting sex acts. *Numbers* is a very misunderstood book. *City of Night* took four years and my other books a considerably longer time, but *Numbers* was written compulsively in three months. I began writing it as I split from Los Angeles. Part of its power is that the same franticness that had gone into the original sex trip was carried on into the writing. I wanted to convey compulsive franticness. I wrote it in a frenzy; I wrote every single day for three months. Some friends actually strongly recommended that I not have it published. But I went ahead. The reaction to it was outrage—but it's not a pornographic book. It's a book about a nightmare, about someone trying to avoid death. It's a beautifully structured book. (I'm not modest, incidentally, about myself or my work.) Unfortunately it is flawed; it is the one book of mine that I would like to rewrite someday, I hope. The opening chapter is terrific but before Johnny Rio enters the park there is a slowness that I do not want, a confusion. I would like the thing to move relentlessly as a sexual horror story, an existential nightmare, and I think it slows down. Nevertheless, even as it is now, it's a very powerful book.

W.L.: Were you going through an existential nightmare in your own life at this time?

J.R.: It's a very literal book. After several years of relative "seclusion" in El Paso after the publication of *City of Night*, I came back to Los Angeles and discovered Griffith Park. I found myself out of control and courting sexual encounters. You may be surprised to learn that years later I came back to break Johnny Rio's record and yet Johnny Rio was based on myself. So now I was beginning to compete with my own character!

W.L.: In your most recent novel, *The Fourth Angel*, one of the characters, Shell, says "To survive you've got to learn not to feel, even if you have to teach yourself." To what extent do you feel you have had to do this in your own life to survive?

J.R.: I'm a very feeling person. But I disguise that on the streets. I play a role.

W.L.: You've talked a little about the aura of hardness...

J.R.: I cultivate it on the streets. People who pick me up think I'm really tough and I'm actually very sensitive.

W.L.: Isn't an aura of toughness part of the gay defense?

J.R.: With me it enters an area of erecting barriers around myself.

W.L.: Were the characters in *The Fourth Angel* based on real persons? I gather from what you said about Shell that is at least partly the case.

J.R.: Yes, a curious thing happened in *The Fourth Angel*. I took adults and made them teenagers. I converted myself largely into Jerry. But I have aspects of Shell who was modelled in part also on a beautiful friend of mine.

W.L.: After reading *The Fourth Angel* I felt that it was in large part successful but not totally so. There were times when words you put into a sixteen year old person's mouth sounded as if they came from an adult, and it didn't ring completely true.

J.R.: Your criticism is very well taken. There are times when the children are not children. But that never concerned me. It was the thrust of the story of loss and despair that people are driven to that I was concerned with. I think that I captured very much of the children's world, because to a great extent I'm still there, and Shell is still there. But I think you're very right there are times when the children are adults, as indeed they really were.

W.L.: Did you feel that Gerard Malanga was unfair in his comments on Shell in the recent *Gay Sunshine* interview (Issue No. 20)?

J.R.: I thought Gerard was not only unfair but tacky. I think it was a very low life thing to do, certainly not worthy of what I call being a star in one's life, which I believe very strongly in. I think he misinterpreted what was happening. I certainly know that the remarks that he attributed to Shell were referring to a person that I am very close to. I think he did a very nasty thing. When he remarks that Shell's "gay friends" are indignant about some statement he attributed to her...that's bullshit. I am Shell's gay friend.

W.L.: You just mentioned the phrase "being a star in one's own life." What do you mean by that?

J.R.: I have a whole theory of one's life as autobiography, or as movie, or one's being a star in one's life. One's life is lived in such a way that there's almost a choreography to existence, everything matches one's own way of dressing, being. I believe in self consciousness, for example, when it comes out harmoniously. I believe the body is an instrument in one's becoming a star. I'm very much into bodybuilding and weight lifting. I like appearance and I like to construct it. I dress very self consciously. I want to look a certain way and so work for it. But it has to work, one's attitudes have to fit.

W.L.: Do you feel this sort of attitude towards one's body is something you can continue to develop as you grow older into middle and old age?

J.R.: Yes. I am convinced that I will never age, I want to become better all the time. I've always had a good body but I prefer to have a constructed body of developed muscles. I think narcissism can be a very healthy attitude. Again part of being a star is being pleased with oneself. The coyness of people when they're paid a compliment offends me. They say, "No, it's not really true." And of course that's fucked, that's hypocritical. I have friends who think I've overdone that matter of my body, who think I spend too much time on it. Then I point out that I spend many hours writing a book or an artist spends many hours painting a picture. And then you want it to be the best; you want as many people to accept and love it as possible. I don't find that different from spending hours on my body and then showing it off and wanting and accepting that kind of admiration.

W.L.: Do you feel a kinship with, say, Yukio Mishima, the Japanese novelist who was into a body building cult (apart from his rightist political views)?

J.R.: I've never read anything that he's written. I've read about him, and become intrigued. But his political views alienate me to such an extent that I can't feel anything that I would call kinship.

W.L.: His body building was tied in part to the ideal of the samurai.

J.R.: I do not like the military. Mine is not a political trip like Mishima's. I hate militarism.

W.L.: Perhaps we can talk a little more about this hint of violence and toughness in your work and whether or not it's true of your own life too.

J.R.: This is a very touchy area but one which I force myself to be open about. I'm really trying very hard to divest myself of poses and attitudes which I believe to be detrimental to me as an artist and a person. I do cultivate a certain tough appearance which attracts people sexually to me. I am often sought out by masochists. I often equate feelings of sex with feelings of power over someone. I often go out deliberately to encounter this sort of sexual experience. I think the most negative aspect in the gay world is the growth of S&M. I am completely opposed to it.



John Rechy, N.Y.C. 1963

W.L.: We have presented both sides of the S&M question in *Gay Sunshine* (Issues No. 15 and 16). I think that in many cases what you say is true: there can be a negativism in S&M relationships. On the other hand I think pain can be an added dimension in a relationship. I am not speaking from in-depth personal experience of S&M but this was one of the main arguments in Ian Young's S&M article (Issue No. 16).

J.R.: One can justify eating dirt and say, it intensifies my closeness to the earth. However dirt will be full of germs and will do destructive things to your body. So, naturally people who are into this reactionary area of the gay world, which is the S&M world, the Uncle-Toms, the self-haters of the gay world, will justify anything. There would be greater honesty if someone would say, "I want to be hurt, I want to be humiliated." But the hypocrisy comes in when they call it love. To say that pain can bring somebody closer to love, I find totally repugnant. I'm honest with myself: when I indulge as the "S" in S&M relationships, I know what is going on. I know that I want to assert my sexual power over someone else, to humiliate that person. This is not something in my past; this is something I contend with now. I am excited by it. But I want to call it what it is. I am not going to say, I love the guy who is grovelling and doing everything that I want. It is not love. It has to do with humiliating the other person.

W.L.: But don't you think it's possible in an on-going relationship that pain, humiliation can be an added dimension? I have no reason to disbelieve the people who have experienced it as such.

J.R.: I do disbelieve it entirely. Pain and humiliation have nothing to do with love and respect.

W.L.: Your novel *City of Night* was the first novel to deal with gay hustling. What do you feel about subsequent attempts?

J.R.: I think that *Midnight Cowboy* was a very dishonest book and an even more dishonest movie. Yet people flocked to see this movie and said "That's exactly what it's like." The "low-life" emerges as filtered for *Vogue* magazine. It's also very sadistic to the hustler. Nevertheless, Jon Voight gave an inspired performance; he really got into it.

W.L.: Perhaps you could talk about the dynamic of this hustling in your own life.

J.R.: I have a ferocious need to hustle. There's no rush in my life like it. I know that it's not a liberated world; it's as unliberated as the S&M world. I would be a hypocrite if I put down the S&M world without upfront pointing out that hustling deals with a similar relationship.

W.L.: Do you feel there is a conflict between your feelings about gay liberation and your attraction to the hustling, S&M world? Do you feel the two can be reconciled to some extent?

J.R.: I objected earlier to the statement that pain brings people closer. I would be doing the same thing if I said, there is a form of love that happens between the person who is paying and the person who gets paid.

W.L.: But there could be at least in some cases. Does the fact that money is paid mean that there will only be a non-loving encounter? In some cases can there not be a combination of pure sex and love?

J.R.: I would like to be able to say yes, but...

W.L.: Are you speaking only of yourself?

J.R.: Yes, about myself, but I'm speaking also about the other hustlers that I know on the street. I think that because

of my determined awareness of what happens in these relationships, I convey more warmth than most hustlers. For me, after the sex is over and after I've been paid there's a moment in which I want to be super kind to the person. I want to establish some kind of human contact with them, to know something about them; sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I've hung around with other hustlers on the street, and I don't think this is the ordinary. You see, there is a tendency to romanticize the world of hustling as there's a tendency to romanticize the world of S&M. You can draw parallels.

W.L.: What sort of sexual experiences have you had outside of hustling?

J.R.: I am what is called promiscuous and I love having contacts with one person after another. Now I have at one time or another had hints of possibilities with one person. But I freak out. I become frightened and finally I fuck it up. I have great difficulty coping with one person. My reaction is that I'll go on a binge of promiscuity and hustling, as if to assert nothing has changed.

W.L.: What do you feel will happen in your life? Do you feel you will continue to have most of your sexual experience through hustling? Or do you feel a driving need for something else?

J.R.: I feel a need for growth. For myself I have to define what growth is. I feel almost traumatized in a child level of gratification. It's very difficult for me to be giving. In my non-sexual life I am giving but in a sexual sense, or in an emotional sense, with males. I find it terrible difficult to be giving. I want to be in control, in power. But I want, I need the thought of growth and I know the patterns I make for myself are circular.

W.L.: I understand that a film is being made, based on your novel *City of Night*.

J.R.: I'm working on the screenplay now—and it's beautiful. While being faithful to the novel—all the main characters will be in the film—I'm updating the time to now. That's not difficult because I've never left that world. The main changes on the hustling scene have come about through the emergence of drugs and gay liberation.

W.L.: How do you feel that this happened?

J.R.: First of all drugs have changed the style of dressing. In attitudes: there's more homogeneity among subcultures now than there were in the fifties or early sixties. The gay scene is not as much of an isolated subculture now as it used to be; whereas at the time of *City of Night* it was underground; and I think a lot of the cause of that has been the exchange of drugs and styles that overlap the straight and gay worlds.

W.L.: What about the attitudes of hustlers now towards people they relate with in sex as compared to the fifties.

J.R.: Yes, that would be the major change. Hustlers used to be "strictly straight." We weren't, of course. That was bullshit but bullshit we were doing ourselves. But that's what was expected of us. And we wore the uniform of blue jeans, white T shirt and there was the myth of the hustler as straight. Gay liberation has changed that on both sides: that of the hustler and that of the client. On the hustler's side there are now four distinct breeds: one is the extremely effeminate queen and/or transsexual; second there is the androgynous young, usually blond, slender boy. This is a new breed of hustler. In my first hustling trip all hustlers were quite masculine wanting to flex our muscles and so on. But now this young androgynous type has become very sought after. Again I think that drugs have done this in a sense, because it is a very youthful culture that is blending male and female in appearance. And it has spilled into the streets so that a large number of hustlers are this young, not necessarily effeminate, but androgynous type.

When I first came back to hustling after my years of reclusiveness in El Paso, Winston, and went back to the streets, I was surprised to see this breed of hustler. And I thought: what are they doing on the streets; they will never make out. I was very isolated in El Paso after my original hustling trip. There is a third type of hustler that I'm sure has come out with gay liberation: the more masculine but openly proclaiming himself as bisexual. The fourth type is still the self-proclaimed "straight".

W.L.: But didn't some hustlers even fifteen years ago consider themselves bisexual?

J.R.: Years ago in Hollywood, downtown L.A., Pershing Square, we were all so-called "stud" or butch hustlers with the exception of the drag queens. We would say to each other that we were straight. That was a pose.

W.L.: It was straight in appearance but bisexual in reality?

J.R.: Exactly! People often come looking for one of the other types now, whereas before it was just the butch stud type. A curious development has been the attitudes of the clients. They used to be more of a stereotype: close to middle-age, conservative, married and totally closeted. Now some of the clients are younger than some of the hustlers; some of them are very attractive.

W.L.: You will be doing a program at UCLA with gay artists. Would you talk about that.

J.R.: We'll be doing it next year. We have a tentative title, "Extravagant Elegance, Sensual Sensitivity". The subtitle is "The Gay Sensibility in the Arts". I'm working on it with my friend and film critic Marsha Kinder and with Bill Moritz. It's seven evenings, and UCLA will offer it as a course. But each evening will be a separate performance. The first evening will be visual arts; the other evenings are: on poetry, prose, theater, underground films, underground films, mixed gay media, which for the first time will include drag as art form. The visual arts program will be slides of painters from Michelangelo and da Vinci to contemporary painters, and we are going to have readings from Michelangelo's letters, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* while the slides are being shown. The second half of each program will be a discussion. Critics and painters and so on will try to define what the gay sensibility is.

W.L.: What is the criterion for who will take part in these programs?

J.R.: You don't have to be gay. The content of every program will be gay; the works that will be exhibited and examined will be gay. The content of it is the exploration of gay art. The participants will be gay, straight, bisexual, trisexual, polysexual, pansexual, whatever. We want to open it up; we don't want it to be like a gay conference. We don't want to have any psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers,

etc. It's a celebration to open up to everybody. In the theater evening we are going to do a scene from Oscar Wilde's play *Lady Windermere's Fan*, but performed by men. It's going to explore the real beautiful aspects of gay art—and some ugly ones.

W.L.: What will be the role of the non-gay participants?

J.R.: To see how they perceive it, how it comes across to them. In other words what we are trying to do is to see if there really is such a thing as a gay sensibility. I think there really is, quite definitely, and I think it's a very special one. I think one of the sad things is that most gay people are not aware of the specialness, the sensitivity. We are still so bound up in hatred shame, staying in the closet. One of the main purposes of it is to display the beautiful side of gay.

W.L.: There's a theory going round that much gay creativity has come from the pressures of the oppression of society from outside, and that if these pressures were not there the creativity would dry up. I disagree very strongly with that theory.

J.R.: One of the theories in *The Gay Outlaw* is that pressures have created the gay sensibility. You begin by being gay and have to be an excellent actor because you have to do two roles.

W.L.: But with changing consciousness over the past two or three years many gay people are not faced with exactly the same pressures, the same schizophrenia. Many people are now coming out earlier without those heavy pressures. I think a gay art can also come from that. Creativity does not always come from oppression/pressure.

J.R.: I was merely saying that a certain type of art had been produced by that. But with liberation the same marvelous dual sensibility, now freed will produce an even more liberated art. I certainly do not think it would dry up.

W.L.: I think that the theory of gay creativity as springing basically from oppression is a pet theory of liberal straights who like to peg gay people into a category: "Oh, gay people are so sensitive! So creative!" This categorization is a simplification for them so that they can understand gay creativity.

J.R.: I think you're absolutely right, Winston, but I also think that that theory is correct to a point. But if you allow the theory to end there then you've trapped yourself and you end up justifying pressure and persecution on the basis of allowing the art to flourish. And that simply isn't so. The art that will be produced from homosexuals in the future will not have to deal with it.

W.L.: Oppressions of one form or another are still going to be coming down on gay people and straight people and creativity will continue to spring out of that. I think there will be lessening of these pressures and gay art will continue in large part as celebration. This is not to denigrate work which springs directly out of oppression. Your own novels *City of Night*, *Numbers*, spring out of oppression. And such novels will continue to be important.

J.R.: Don't you think the analogy would be if you explored it from the point of any minority and the powerful, illuminating work they have produced under oppression. Incidentally, you used the word celebration. This is what I want the program at UCLA to be: a celebration. You're right Winston: sensibility is not only produced by oppression (although that has a lot to do with style), but a new kind of style will develop from it. I think some gay writers write in drag; some write in butch.

W.L.: I think this is especially happening in poetry. Take a poet like John Wieners. His poems of the late 50's sprang out of deep oppression and even now many of his poems spring out of the oppression he's gone through in mental institutions and so forth. His new style (his most recent poems) is changing somewhat from that but there is that basic continuity in his writing. But there are newer younger poets writing for whom this is not the case. For instance in John Giorno's poetry sex is a celebration, whereas for Wieners sex is often a lonely, hunting searching. How do you think the change in your sensibility is affecting your creativity?

J.R.: For me there is a beautiful abstract choreography in the sexual hunt. I know, however, that the beauty of the promiscuous sex hunt is almost balletic, symphonic; it is choreographed, it is tremendously beautiful. And I'm going to move it into the area of the art to be produced. Nevertheless, I have a love/hate relationship for the promiscuous hunt. Sometimes after a night of hustling and then moving to dark cruising alleys, I come home and literally think of nothing but suicide. Other times, when I'm caught in it, I think: "Jesus, God this is the most exciting thing in the world." So I have a vast ambivalence about it.

W.L.: Don't you think that promiscuity as celebration can be a revolutionary thing?

J.R.: This is one of the aspects that I'm dealing with in my new book *The Sexual Outlaw*: Promiscuity as one of the few political actions that gays are taking. To me there is a lack of gay heroes and for me the promiscuous homosexuals are the heroic homosexuals. And also transsexuals and queens: the latter because it takes so much courage to come out on the street in drag. When the black woman in the bus in Alabama refused to move to the back of the bus, that was truly a revolutionary act. I think that gay people make a very strong political statement when they take the sexual revolution to the streets. That is where one is confronted with the bigotry of society and the oppressive ignorance of the law. Otherwise one would never confront them, never question them.

W.L.: This of course is the big bogey of conservative homosexuals.

J.R.: Yes, and aren't they odious. Like the blacks who wanted to straighten their hair. Often I'm faced with very uptight, middle class homosexuals. I had a heavy truth once when someone said to me during one of my talks, "look, if we move in the direction of permissiveness you are advocating, we will have sex in the streets." I thought to myself, "don't cop out" and I said to the man, "Yes, precisely. So what?" I was questioned by several people who said, "what an outrageous thing for you to say." So I got it together in my head about sex in the streets. There's nothing wrong per se with sex in the streets. I think it's a matter of style and taste. Most people couldn't do it even if it became legal. Societal attitudes are strong enough to act as a deterrent. There's no law against painting yourself blue or yellow—but few people do it.

W.L.: Many conservative gay people are geared to the

question of acceptance by and assimilation into straight society. Conservative gays think that public sex is outré, that it is drawing attention to oneself. I'm curious about the socio-economic backgrounds of gay people who make it say in the parks.

J.R.: When you enter the park there is a spectrum from one degree to 180 degrees. My point is that it is ridiculous to outlaw sex. But one of the things about which I despair (and I've talked to Morris Kight often about this and he tells me I'm wrong) is that nothing really profound is happening any more. Sure, there are people like yourself...

W.L.: I think consciousness has changed in varying degrees among multitudes of gay people. For some gay people who are openly up front change is more obvious, but I think similar kinds of deep changes are happening among gay people as a whole. Deep change in consciousness has certainly only happened to a small minority of gay people in this country (perhaps 15 or 20%). Another change in consciousness, perhaps not as deep, has happened to perhaps another 35 to 50% of gay people. But I think every homosexual in this country has been affected to one degree or another by the change in climate over the past few years, even if they did not want to be.

J.R.: I hope very much that you are right because this is the sort of thing that I long for. In my vision I don't see that happening and that is one source of my despair. Winston, I see incidents like say a group of five or six homosexuals going up to Griffith Park on a Sunday afternoon when everyone is cruising. They know what is happening. But this time they have gone to see it, aloof and distant and ridiculing. They drive around and yell things like, "Look at that one over there. Hi miss honey, don't break your heel." These comments express such a loathsome attitude towards ourselves.

W.L.: There is a certain amount of self hatred in all this. And there are still elements of self hatred, greater or lesser, among gay people. This has not disappeared with gay liberation or the change in consciousness. I just think that this self hatred has lessened with the onset of gay liberation. Look at the situation in 1960 and compare that with the situation in 1974. In 1974 we have gay community centers, gay counseling, film groups; there are gay people expressing creativity in various fields. There are certainly more gay people into traditional life styles. Of course the fact that one is into a traditional life style doesn't mean that one is ipso facto oppressed. There are perhaps many gay people whose life style has not changed much from the fifties, but there are also large numbers of gay people whose life has changed with the change in consciousness, whose creativity has been affected. Certainly mine has. And compare all this with the gay scene in 1960.

J.R.: I'm talking about what to me makes a true revolution, the kind of dynamic revolution that I would like to see happen with gay people. I agree with you about these groups and gay liberation has done some fantastic things. *Gay Sunshine*, *Fag Rag*, publications like that. But Winston, I'm talking about the vast majority of gay people that go to bars and cruise; they are indifferent.

W.L.: But they are being exposed to some of what is happening one way or another, John. Through radio, TV, magazines or whatever.



John Rechy, Los Angeles, Oct. 1974

J.R.: For cops to move into a potentially violent situation in the black community there must be a good cause. They now move with some caution because blacks have protested. But cops can move into a gay area and do whatever the fuck they want and not one gay person asks, "What right do you have to do what you are doing?" I am not even talking about any vastly revolutionary act. What we do is run! I have seen two cops go into an area where perhaps there are 40 gay people and hassle the hell out of these same forty people who then stand still frozen at the prospect of two cops. This would not happen with other minorities.

W.L.: I think the change in consciousness does take time. It did happen at Stonewall in 1969.

J.R.: Yes, and there haven't been any others. There was one Stonewall.

W.L.: You can't expect a minority which is just emerging to do as much as, say, the black minority which has hundreds of years of community behind them.

J.R.: I'm talking about untapped energy. We could be the most powerful minority in the world because we have some of the most powerful, sensitive, creative people of any minority.

W.L.: We have the dual situation: on one hand a kind of defeatist attitude. Gay liberation consciousness has not yet permeated enough so that gay people in some of these circumstances will be willing to stand up. But on the other hand we do have some beautiful things happening too (community centers, etc.). So there's kind of a balance. It will take time before some of these ideas permeate to the point where people will act upon them. Ideas are being put out, action is happening through various gay groups. These things are bringing about a gradual change of consciousness. At the same time I believe there has to be a basic revolution in this country, too, in the governmental structure as a whole. And Gay capitalism is nonetheless capitalism.

J.R.: But it's happening too slowly. That it's happening to some people is definitely beautiful. Gay Community Centers are fine, I think. But let's just say that on the battlefield we were surrendering. In the gay community when someone is busted, if everybody would pour out from an adjoining bar and say "we're doing the same thing" then the police would be faced with a truly radical statement. Instead we run away.

W.L.: Perhaps you could talk a little more about your early life.

J.R.: I was born in El Paso, Texas, and went to school there. My mother was a beautiful Mexican woman whom I adored and who adored me, and my father was Scotch. Spanish is my native language and I didn't learn to speak English until I went to school. I also went to college there on a scholarship. After college I was in the army, a period that evaporates thankfully like a dream, and then I took off for New York. I had no intention of writing down my experiences. I will tell you a curious story: when I was a little kid I wanted to be a painter and I drew beautifully. I had forgotten that my mother did not throw away some drawings that I had made when I was about twelve years old. I drew this woman, obviously a prostitute, but the opposite of butch standing under a streetlight. And I called the street "Salem". (Which is the exact opposite of Selma) [Ed. note: the letters also read "males" when rearranged]. Much of my writing is autobiographical.

Oh, I believe in exhibitionism as art, like dancing or writing or whatever. It was beautiful to go to the beaches and go under the pier and sunbathe nude, always expecting the perfect voyeur to materialize from the shadows. There was a definite love relation that happened. But now there's so much ugly nudity on the beaches, anybody can do it. It's as if everyone wanted to get on the stage and do a ballet. And so those of us who are really elegant exhibitionists really resent the amateurs, man. You know, those that go around displaying without style—without anything to display—and the voyeurs that stand around ogling. It used to be symphonic, very beautiful.

W.L.: What has been the attitude of students on campuses when you lecture about homosexuality and how this enters into your writing?

J.R.: The reactions have been super, Winston. I spoke to a group recently and was being brought on as the expert on male street prostitution. And I must admit I was a little uptight; it's a heavy title to hang on you, when you're going to be badgered by sociological students. I was amazed by the reaction; it was liberated and beautiful. Rarely do I meet hostility. The morning of the day I was to speak at Duke University I got up late for breakfast at the Holiday Inn where I was staying. A group of red neck businessmen were talking and I was tuning in and out, because they were talking loudly. And then they mentioned the hall where I was going to speak and they said "Yes, and can you imagine, they expect a large crowd." And it was obvious disapproving. One of them said, "at least it's good to know who they are." I was torn between going up to them and inviting them to come listen to me and ignoring them. I don't know which was the right way. I ignored them, because I felt nothing would change.

W.L.: Where do you see yourself moving in your own writing?

J.R.: If I may adapt the question and say "in my own life". I would very much like to move in my life and my writing to where I would be completely free. Marsha Kinder, a friend of mine who knows me very very well, recently read an interview with me and said, "My God, anybody reading this interview would think you are one of the most liberated gay people. And those of us who know you know that's simply not so." I don't want that kind of hypocrisy. I'm intellectually totally liberated, yet in my own life I am still ruled by all those horrible repressions and I want to shed them, believe in sexual revolution, in confronting people on the streets. But my mind is not liberated because I still play these abominable roles, although I can rationalize it. But that's the worst pitfall when you start rationalizing for yourself. So, to look at it honestly: when I hustle, I still do that same bullshit subterfuge of playing straight. And yet the rationalization is: that's why the person picked me up in the first place, so I'm fulfilling the role. But the rationalization does not hold up if you want to liberate yourself and others. Because the same radical statement that I am talking about for others is the kind of radical statement that I could make for myself on the street, when a man, say, picks me up wanting me to be straight and starts coming on with all this bullshit about my girlfriends. I could make a truly radical statement for myself and for him by saying on the spot: (though I would not get paid and he would freak out; but how much further ahead I would be!) "Look man, this is a myth, a myth that's made all this bullshit possible."

W.L.: What do you think prevents you from doing this?

J.R.: I don't know. Images of myself...

W.L.: In relating sexually, do you at times put out a bisexual image?

J.R.: Yes, and that would be cool. I love beautiful women, and it's beautiful to be with them. But I'm talking about doing the most repressed number in the gay world. Playing straight.

W.L.: Do you verbally say you are straight?

J.R.: No, that I could not do. I go along with the assumptions and contribute to them. In hustling I'm often picked up by someone who wants me to be straight and I get the message right away. If the person says, for example, have you been married, then I get the signals. And not only

will I say yes (which is not true), but I will elaborate on it and say I am living with my girlfriend somewhere.

W.L.: Do you hesitate to make a definite statement about your gayness, because you are afraid of a sexual rejection in this kind of encounter?

J.R.: Probably. I have on occasion made a definite statement, and the person has lost interest in me.

W.L.: Do you feel that most of your sexual encounters fall into this pattern?

J.R.: The vast majority of my sexual encounters are in that area. When I'm hustling virtually all are. But beyond that in the majority of the other sexual contacts I am what used to be called "trade". There are the times when I respond mutually but still guardedly. So the preponderance of my sexual experiences are on the side of assuming control and power.

W.L.: Perhaps you should try to search for a balance in your sexual encounters.

J.R.: I never say to people, "I am not gay". When the situation comes up and the person offers that interpretation, then I will build on it. The curious thing is that I want to purge myself of things that I don't consider liberated. I want to be really totally liberated. But those two areas are the ones that disturb me the most. In the S&M area I feel the rush of power in my being the "S", I know that there's a transference of hatred to the other. I hate that. There is a similarity in hustling when one pretends to be straight, because I can tell you from my own feelings and from having hung around other hustlers as a street-friend (and other hustlers talk to each other with openness) that their attitudes

are generally the same: far from affection for the client. It's a very brutal thing—hustlers talking about their clients in derisive terms, but it's very prevalent.

W.L.: Do you think that it's possible that one of the changes of gay liberation is that this derisive attitude may no longer be present in at least some of the "new" hustlers?

J.R.: It could be but I really don't think so!

W.L.: What about the androgynous hustler?

J.R.: I really don't know; but I think it's the same contempt. Sometimes on a particularly slow evening when there are ten hustlers to every client, there's an overt meanness that happens. Hustlers of all types begin hassling people driving around too long without picking anybody up. And there's a general hostility.

W.L.: But that's understandable! It's hardly indicative of the meanness in the hustler towards his customer.

J.R.: Yeah, right; not necessarily... Let me tell you what happened to me recently. I was on a hustling corner; it was warm and I was showing off without a shirt. A very good looking queen in drag made a great remark about my body. I, of course, dug it, but I was also annoyed because there was somebody who was about to pick me up and she was taking up time. If I mumbled anything in answer to her compliment, it was just a couple of words, and I turned around. This pissed her off very much, and she said something very heavy to me. She said, "Your muscles are as gay as my drag." I was depressed for the evening; but you know, there's something to what she said in anger. Of course many bodybuilders are gay. I love the muscular aspect of myself. Yet, in effect, though different, it's similar

in reversed purpose to drag. It's the opposite side but from almost the same source. The queen protects herself by dressing in women's clothes and the body builder protects himself in muscles—so-called "men's clothes".

W.L.: In genderfuck there's not only the question of protection, there are other elements present, too. There are elements of celebration and revolution in genderfuck—an approach which goes beyond just self protection. Perhaps the same can be true for body building too.

J.R.: As I mentioned earlier, one of the evenings of the UCLA program will include drag as art.

W.L.: Why not body building as celebration, as gay liberation too?

J.R.: Laughter. Oh yes, I agree. Fantastic idea. Body building as art. It's funny I haven't connected it when I do raps about it all the time.

W.L.: I'm curious if attitudes towards all these things are changing among the new breed of hustlers.

J.R.: There's a sort of tribe mentality with hustlers; masculine hustlers hang out together, androgynous hustlers hang out together, and so on. So I would know best about my area—and I think the attitudes remain those of contempt, hustler to client. But I don't think that the client likes the hustler much more either, finally. But remember that as in my books I'm speaking about things as they are; or as I see them, not as they should be or as I would want them to be.

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## LETTERS

Dear Gay Sunshine:

Craig Hanson's article "Gay Liberation Without Marx or Jesus" (Stone-wall Issue June 1974) contains some shallow and misleading arguments chosen to support what I feel is a narrow-minded and generalized view of what the gay movement is about. This is especially obvious in his treatment of the subject of feminism. He says "While libertarianism, feminism, and especially the counter culture have ideas useful to our movement, none of the three really fills our needs. They have failed to give the gay movement a clear sense of direction..."

Perhaps the reason the gay movement, as Hanson sees it, has no "clear sense of direction" is the failure of the majority of gay men to incorporate the principles and aspirations of feminism into their lives instead of viewing feminism as a separate phenomenon. Feminism is the core of Gay Liberation and all gay women and men should realize that our oppression as lesbians and homosexuals is an outgrowth of the oppression of women.

It is, perhaps, this very refusal to realize the roots of our oppression that causes gay men like Hanson to see lesbian feminists as a threat and to feel such "disgust" for the "rhetoric of man-hating." If Hanson had continued quoting Robin Morgan's speech he would have found in the same paragraph, in fact, in the same sentence, adequate explanations as to why Morgan feels that "man-hating is a viable political act"—including the citing of many instances in which our gay brother acted to invalidate us and render us invisible. Hanson also states that the June 1973 issue of *The Lesbian Tide* "reported that some radical lesbians were working with a woman chemist to exterminate men." This taken out of context and distorted—it was part of an article reporting on the West Coast Lesbian Conference of 1973 in which one woman stated her extremist and purely hypothetical vision—Hanson states as if it were an actuality.

It is this reactionary and narrow-minded attitude on the part of so many gay men which is the reason why so many lesbians have given up wasting our energies trying to communicate with them, and in some instances have developed an intense hatred of those who seek to perpetuate male supremacy on any level—and that includes gay male supremacy.

The gay movement can not have a clear sense of direction so long as the majority of gay men see it as "our

movement"—meaning essentially male. It is my belief that the gay movement will be stronger and have a clearer sense of purpose when women are no longer invalidated, ignored, and rendered invisible by our gay brothers.

There may very well be gay liberation without the philosophies of Marx or Jesus, but there will never be gay liberation without a feminist consciousness.

In struggle,  
June Rook  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Gay Sunshine:

Last night I went to see "Passing Strangers." It was a first for me in several ways. It was the first film about Gay life I've seen, the first time I've seen men balling, making love, fucking etc. on screen and the first time I've paid \$4 to see a movie. For all those reasons I feel I want to write about my reactions to it.

I read a review of the film in the *Fag Rag/Gay Sunshine* while in a Gay group in Santa Cruz and several of us decided we'd like to see it. I've never had much incentive to see a gay fuck film...probably due to some Puritanism left over from my past and also their unavailability where I lived; but more so because of my experience with straight fuck films I saw 10 years or so ago, where after the first 5 or 10 minutes I ceased to be excited and the "people as sexual objects" ethic and its ensuing boring, restless feelings became obvious. The feelings I usually ended up with were either feeling good about the real intimate relationships I had and if I didn't, desperately lonely and alienated. Knowing how I felt about fuck films, I knew my reason for going to this film was primarily to be able to identify in a personal way with the struggles we as men have in relating intimately with one another. This is where the movie fell short for me. The review dedicated exactly one sentence to how *Passing Strangers* "avoids any kind of conflict" and three columns of praise of how this picture is a "landmark" in gay cinema and how it gives gay sexuality a true human dimension as an honest expression of giving and receiving physical pleasure. I feel the latter is probably true but what it doesn't contain is equally if not more important.

Is the Gay movement still at the point of "we have a right to enjoy each other physically" and not also concerned with the exploitative, sexist, non-intimate ways of relating we have adopted from straight society? Do we need more encouragement to emphasize our sexuality in our relationships? Everything from the bushes to the baths is a statement of the overuse of that approach.

The two main characters seemed if anything to represent the sad and inadequate preparation that we as men—as gay men in this society—have in trying to achieve intimate relationships with each other. The character of Robert did express the frustrating, lonely position that 18 years of repression and feeling bad about oneself and one's sexuality produces in our heterosexist society. He also depicts how his need for contact with other men is only couched in sexual fantasies. Even after they've spent time together—have gotten it on—Robert's flashbacks and strongest connection to Tom is the fuck scene. I feel that while that was a true representation of how many of us enter into our relationships, to glorify it as the film did and not follow it through and show the disillusioning effects of that approach is to feed into the falling-in-love-live-happily-ever-after bullshit this society feeds us. It also tends to lead a person to where Tom finds himself, namely spending most of his social hours going from one sexual encounter to another in search for some elusive intimacy. I'm not making a moral judgement on

Tom's activities but a statement that his needs "for something more substantial" and his approach to getting it met do not synchronize.

Tom came across typically male, one up, out of touch with his feelings (to say nothing about expressing them) and not an encouraging prospect for a relationship. I don't remember him expressing any insecurity, any fears or making himself vulnerable in any way (unless the fuck scene was to represent that?)

This is not a movie I would recommend people who have worked past some of the love-sex fantasy levels to see. I felt it was, in an over-all sense, boring. The feeling I left with was like an incompleting sneeze. I kept waiting for something to happen.

Movies like *Passing Strangers* as books like *The Lord Won't Mind* are more like stumbling blocks on the road of Gay revolution than incentives and shouldn't be mistaken as "landmarks" in Gay consciousness.

Gay Love 'n Power  
Anthony Eschbach  
San Francisco, CA

### GAY SUNSHINE No. 23 (November-December 1974)

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Cover Design: JAMES REED

US ISSN 0046-550X

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 submission of material for the next issue of *Gay Sunshine* (No. 24) is January 15. Send material to *Gay Sunshine*, P. O. Box 40397, San Francisco, CA 94140; (415) 824-3184. Please type and double-space all manuscripts.



# European Diary

## An Unexpected Evolution

This past year has been one of wandering and of a search for new identities. I went from San Francisco to Provincetown, to New York, then to Amsterdam, Paris, Italy (where I lived for two months in Positano, a small coastal town south of Naples), Tunisia, London, to Boston, and finally I returned to San Francisco. These are excerpts from a journal I kept during those travels.

### POSITANO [December, 1973—February, 1974]

Two letters and a postcard from Andrea. Andrea is the Italian boy I met on my last night in Florence. I'd seen him across the street. "Now that one's gay," I said to myself, and one can so seldom say that with certainty in Italy. He came over to me and started talking to me in French. I think he thought I was American, but since he doesn't speak English, he thought he'd have a better chance in French than in Italian. We walked along chatting, reluctantly I went to his apartment. He did not turn me on, no butch pretenses about him. He is a twenty-one year old student at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Florence—some of his drawings decorated his room. He grew up near Bologna, has lived in Florence two or three years. "Florence is a dead city," he kept saying, "and I am dying too." He said he was alone and needed a friend. He had already decided that I should be that friend, that I should stay with him in Florence or take him to San Francisco with me. So romantic, so naive, as if love were born that way. In the morning he clung to me, pulled me back, hoping I would stay.

With his expressive eyes, mobile face, pixie-like movements and his agile body, he is really an actor. He loves the drama of being alone, the mellow, cool, late winter afternoon feeling of carefully nurtured isolation and self-pity. I know it all too well. And I know his situation is difficult, but not so suicidally impossible as he wants to believe. The exaggerated masculine-feminine dichotomy in Italy is an inappropriate setting for so androgynous a being.

We spent only eight hours together and I was glad to get away. "I'm not possessive," he said, yet I feared he'd never let go. We are grotesquely unsuited for each other, considering how much space I need around me. It was a real "European" experience, to be cherished as a memory, but not to be taken seriously. And now, a month later he wants to come to Positano to stay with me...I've come to Positano for repose. To invite Andrea would be, I'm afraid, to invite a storm.

Is there in the trashy stuff of my fantasy life the basis for some good writing? Why not interview my sexual soul, transcribe and edit the results and see what it is? What I am interested in is the spiritual equivalent of the physical lust, the poetic electricity which is the other side of sexual electricity. And male-to-male sexual lust is the first step in an awareness of the world as a world different from the one I was shown as a child. Once one makes

that break, one sees all of life from a different point of view. But first one must identify, make positive the homosexual inclination which frees one to live a different life, to dare to see.

I want to write about the slavery, glamor, ill-lusiveness, idiocy of sexual polarity—the mythology of opposites. All of us cherish and live by weird conceptions of male and female. These illusions govern much of our lives, what we wear, whom we choose as friends, wives, lovers. So much of art is glorification of this polarity. Popular art and advertising is scarcely anything else. The male-female dichotomy seems to be the most fundamental human difference. I want to find out what it is I love and hate in male and female mythology. Like yin and yang each exists only in relation to the other, and this eternal *pas de deux* is endlessly fascinating. What is the epitomy of maleness now may fifty years from now be hopelessly female—yet do some fundamental expressions of this polarity ever change? Some male (and certain female) images arouse longings in me—not only lust, but memories or previews of verbally unknown times and places. I want to recreate those images and go to the places they suggest. I do not want to live in a romantic hallucination, but our "real" life is so much governed by that "unreal" life and I want in a tiny way to recreate that "unreal" life.

I'm feeling more and more the need for sex. Not masturbation, but the warmth and challenge of another body. I am almost 30 years old and not at home with my needs. Masturbation is, as always, pleasant, but insufficient. I sometimes want to reach out to S., to hug him, to tell him, "Come sleep with me." It's not so much sex as tenderness I want...I feel myself no longer young nor innocent drying up from lack of emotional expression. My aloofness is a necessary self-defense, but also a trap. A trap for another deeply buried me. My knowledge of life narrow, as narrow as the boundaries within which I give and receive love.

I need a few nights a month of abandon. Someone to hold, someone with whom to create once-in-a-lifetime moments. Holding hands in the picture show. Men do not do that. I have and I love it. Fear keeps me where I am. Fear of hurt and hurting. Fear of being out of control, of going beyond my experience. My world is still flat because I fear to examine my depths.

Mostly these days I am feeling uncommonly contented and for the first time, grateful. I feel blessed to have been given so much. Here in Positano I am living an easy life...a privileged life, and one I scarcely deserve. To whatever being it is I believe in I've been saying: "You have created a beautiful world, you have given me a glorious life within it and I am happy..." Perhaps it is because I am accepting more of life that I am now able to enjoy it.

The rebel in me lives, but I want to focus the rebellion into some concrete and polished form—a form I hope will be almost, if *not quite*, acceptable to the world as it is.

I must write about Positano. It is a romantic and mystic place. For a typically alienated American like myself, it is a revelation. Such continuity. Life is strong, you can see and feel its century-by-century progression. From where I'm sitting I look upon a shimmering sea, in the distance are the islands reputed to be the dwelling place of the sirens in the *Odyssey*. If one can be so close to powerful mythic sources thousands of years old, can one really fear the small obstacles and dangers of life?

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The work "virility" occupies me. I came upon it in *The Bell Jar*; my eyes stopped. I realized it was a word which has power over me. My cock stiffened in instantaneous response.

Virility is an illusive, much prized quality, something which only a man may have, that with which he dominates. It and the ethereal qualities thought to be its opposite are the point of "Streetcar Named Desire," and the reason Marlon Brando was so exquisite in it.

In the faggot world's pantheon, the god virility ranks higher than Yahweh himself. Every true faggot worships and wants what he is so sure he himself is not (I include myself in the dangerously inclusive statement). Although virility includes thoughts of a lovely cock, a nicely but moderately muscled and slightly hairy body, a "strong" face with piercing eyes, it is more than physical. It is male pride in the glory of being male. And when done innocently and with great style, nothing is so entrancing, nothing so beautiful. When meant to intimidate, to dominate, it can be equally ugly.

I'm feeling now acutely the parts of me hidden, censored by life in Italy. Here men are allowed pride in appearance, indeed a narcissism which would be suspect in the States. Men walk arm in arm. To move in an almost all-male society is normal. It is assumed when the time comes they will do their duty. The roles assigned to male and female, those ancient roles, remain not much changed. In southern Italy they know nothing of the liberated faggot. Here they only recognize as homosexual the precious queen, the near transvestite. That's weird for me. Possibly because I'm an American and strange anyway, they don't seem to recognize me as a homosexual. I am just a male, if a bit unconventional. In a way it's a relief not to be recognized as queer; on the other hand, it suppresses an enjoyable side of my personality, one I've cultivated and found useful for years. What goes on in my mind has no relation to what can be lived here. The outrageous but ordinary things we do in Provincetown, San Francisco, New York are so out of context they can't be imagined here.

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I sometimes fear that my youth is over and that I've forgotten all I vowed I'd never forget. As a child one has powerful insights. One sees with cruel clarity the vanity, the pretense of adults. One vows not to lose one's purity, not to become one of those disgusting adults. Now I wonder if I haven't indeed become one of those ugly adults. Have I unwittingly lost the passion, the clarity of childhood? What have I gained? Freedom?

\*\*\*\*\*

### HOUMT SOUK, DJERBA, TUNISIA [February, 1974]:

I'm sitting in the Ben Yedda square, S. has just had his shoes shined by "his" shoeshine boy, a bright, charming boy of 12 or 13 who now is lounging in the sun, enjoying a cigarette.

Last night I talked in my broken French with a Tunisian guy of perhaps 24-25. I was wandering about town at twilight, absorbing the view by the crafts center. He came up to me, said "Don't you recognize me?" In truth, I did not. It turns out he had been sitting next to me in the taxi I took back from the beach a few days ago. He is Europeanized, hopes to go to Europe or America to work. His goal is to meet a man who will befriend him, including sex—which he seemed not only ready but eager for. He hopes this man will take him to live in Europe. He seems ready to work and support himself, he just wants an opportunity. He's had "*pas de chance*." Everything was set up with a Dutch man who eight days after returning to Holland was killed in an auto crash. I don't disbelieve this story, yet I don't exactly believe it. Was his friendliness all *bon camaraderie*? Perhaps he hoped I'd be the man to take him out of Tunisia.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am trying to find a way of writing about the sexuality here. Superficially this is a dream country

continued on next page

## EUROPEAN DIARY, continued

for the homosexual misogynist. Men control this society; they do everything that has to be done in public, including shopping. And outside of Tunis that traditional separation remains strong. Women are not touched sexually until marriage. And having no choice, the males seek each others' company. Or is that how they really want it?

I sense that homosexuality is not exactly encouraged, but neither is it much repressed. It just *is*, but it's probably one of those cultural facts few Tunisians would brag about. The official ideology is much the same as elsewhere: before all, man desires woman, woman is man's proof of manhood.

There may be men who have sex mostly or entirely with other men, but they are scarcely different from other men, so there really are no homosexuals. It is not so much a question of taste as of frequency. Also where women are hidden, the queen does not exist. In a country where the female sexpot does not exist, who would the queen model himself after? Tunisia is a poor country and sex obviously is available for money, but there are not so many obvious hustlers— it's more subtle than that. And there are plenty of handsome young Tunisian men just looking for a good fuck. If you're reasonably attractive, you might be it; not necessarily any money involved. A man does have his needs, after all.

\*\*\*\*\*

LONDON [March, 1974]:

Last night D. and I went to the A&B, a gay, pub-club, near Leicester Square...an unmarked doorway, up two flights of stairs, you wouldn't find it in a million years if you didn't know what you were looking for. Supposedly one of the oldest places in London, been there twenty years or more. A friendly, late twenties-thirtish, bougie, hip-artsy

crowd. I've seen it all a million times before and wasn't thrilled to see it now. We met there two Canadian boys wearing nearly identical leather or leather-look jackets (not the real butch kind, but the cute style— still any leather has a bit of a butch connotation.) Thane was the older, the personality. I didn't get the other's name, but he was cute, had really short brushed back hair, carefully studied but charming male mannerisms— his way of smoking, for example— a facile, paper-thin butchness, touching and appealing in spite of its self-consciousness. Also there was Robert, dressed all in black, hat and tight fitting gangster-style 1930's jacket, smoking cigarettes through a long and flashy holder, a study in style and such a queen, Scotch. There are no queens in Scotland they said, they've all come to London.

\*\*\*\*\*

BOSTON [April, 1974]:

My thirtieth birthday and I'm supposed to have some profound and sobering thoughts. I have not. I remember a friend who cried on her twentieth birthday because she was no longer a teenager. Perhaps the passage from 29 to 30 is not so traumatic. I've been anticipating this day for two years or more. My notion of youth and age has changed enough to vanquish most of the anguish. Youth no longer seems the only worthwhile time of life. I'm determined to make the whole thing worthwhile. Forty perhaps will not be as exciting as twenty-five, but I think it may be more satisfying. I'm bored with youth.

I'm feeling the need to create a butch self, would like to get some tight levis, so tight you can feel your cock packed in them...autostimulation as you walk along. The coy masculinity of the boy in the bar won me over. Why can't I be more like that? Would it be as boring as I imagine?

SAN FRANCISCO [May-June 1974]:

I'm sighing a lot, frustration. After these months of laziness, the effort of organizing my life seems too much to face. The agony of looking for a job, the bother of getting a place to live, Situating myself among people— so many I know, so few do I feel close to. And the necessity of keeping alive the dream. From afar the dream seems full of promise. The excitement made me nervous. Up close the dream recedes and the obstacles magnify themselves.

I'm determined not to lose the energy I was full of when I returned. I vow not to let my middle class desire for a safe and predictable life overcome my perverse need of danger. I promise to sometimes walk along the edge, if only to cultivate my skill in doing so. In an enclosed life one can't take in the world, can't appreciate the mysteries, can't imagine the awe-fullness of the universe. When I was a child fear enclosed me, but embarrassing passions leaked through. If my life is valuable it is these uncontrollable passions I must thank. Even in the pressured moments, something touches me, needles me. A voice reaches me: "Don't be bitter, don't fear, keep moving..."

The lesson I am learning is not to become too attached to San Francisco, to the myth of "the beauty of life here," a myth so easy to cling to even when living in an uncreative low.

The expansive world I'd begun to know seems to be fading fast. I'm sinking into the abyss California style. Why do I find it so difficult, such a letdown to fit myself into the routine of life in one place. Why do I so much need a transcendent fantasy about myself? I cannot accept that *this* life, this everyday struggle *is* my life.

— GARY ALINDER

This article is excerpted from an essay to be published in a 1975 anthology edited by Allen Young & Karla Jay. copyright 1974 Gary Alinder

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## GARCIA LORCA: New Translation

## FABLE AND RACK OF THE THREE FRIENDS

Enrique,  
Emilio,  
Lorenzo,

All three frozen:  
Enrique by the world of beds;  
Emilio by the world of the eyes and the wounds of hands,  
Lorenzo by the world of universities without rooftiles.

Lorenzo,  
Emilio,  
Enrique,

All three burned:  
Lorenzo by the world of the leaves and the billiard balls;  
Emilio by the world of blood and white pins,  
Enrique by the world of the dead and the discarded newspapers.

Lorenzo,

Emilio,  
Enrique,  
All three buried:  
Lorenzo in the bosom of Flora;  
Emilio in the motionless gin forgotten in the glass,  
Enrique in the ant, in the sea and in the vacant eyes of birds

Lorenzo,

Emilio,  
Enrique.  
All three were in my hands  
three Chinese mountains,  
three horse-shadows,  
three snowy landscapes and a cabin of white lilies  
by the pigeon huts where the moon sets flat beneath the cock.

One

and one  
and one.  
All three mummified,  
with the flies of winter,  
with the inkwells the dog pisses and the thistledown scorns,  
with the breeze that freezes the hearts of all the mothers,  
by the white ruins of Jupiter where the drunks lunch on death.

Three

and two  
and one.  
I saw them lost, crying and singing  
for a hen's egg,  
for the night that pointed out its skeleton of tobacco,  
for my sorrow full of faces and sharp splinters of moon,  
for my ecstasy of cogs and whips,  
for my chest alarmed by the doves,  
for my wasted death with a single mistaken passerby.

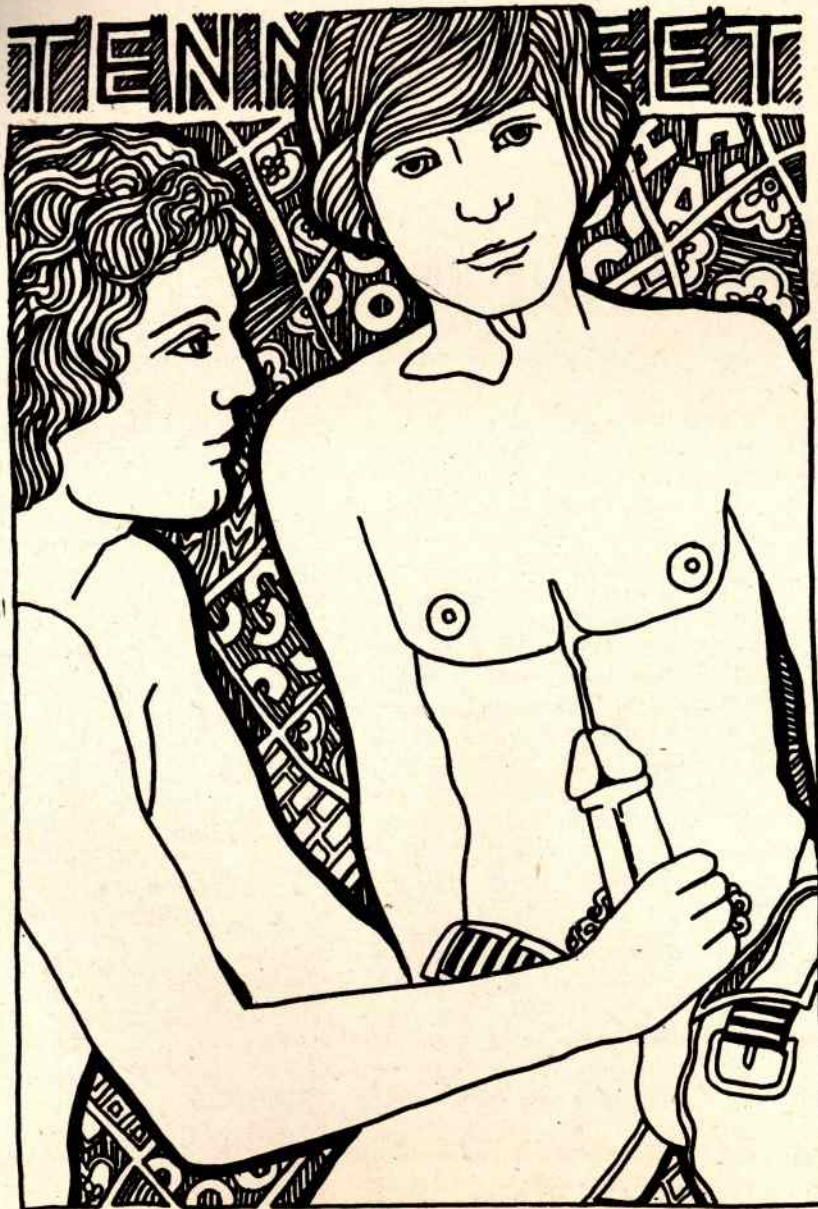
I had killed the fifth moon  
and the fans and applause drank water from the fountains.  
Tepid milk buried in mothers who've lately borne  
irritated the roses with a long white pain,  
Enrique  
Emilio,  
Lorenzo.  
Diana is hard,  
but at times she has nebulous breasts.  
The white stone can throb in the blood of the stag  
and the stag can dream thru the eyes of a stallion.

When the pure forms crumbled  
under the *cri cri* of the pearls,  
I realized they had assassinated me.  
They examined the cafes and the cemeteries and the churches,  
they opened the barrels and the cupboards,  
they mangled three skeletons tearing out their gold teeth.  
Still they never found me?  
No. They never found me.  
But it was known the sixth moon fled a torrent above,  
and the sea remembered (suddenly!)  
the names of all its drowned.

Federico Garcia Lorca  
(translated by Stephen Fredman)

Loving one man fully is sometimes not enough  
even when his love is boundless  
It is then I look to the world as my lover  
and all I live is courtship —  
A warm smile from a passing stranger  
is as pleasing as my lover's mouth  
and an ocean breeze on my back  
as gentle as his beard grazing my thigh  
It is times like this  
that loving one man  
is loving all.

—Michael Shernoff



phantasies & facts  
—for Gary

phantasy: that people are isolated  
pumas, roaming unexplored mountains  
alone, each cat staking out its territory.  
or mourning doves or swans  
coupling in a canal, paired together,  
content in that pairing.

fact: the sun is only one  
configuration of a star. Orion  
is another pattern, unexplored.

fact: my anxieties don't matter  
this time. yesterday you worked  
at the nursing home & went to school.  
tomorrow you'll sleep with your friends.  
& here you are.

pumas eat birds.  
in winter their territories expand  
& sometimes shrink. cubs commonly starve.

phantasy: that we can sleep with our friends,  
our cats, our toucans.

fact: we can.

—Ron Schreiber

## OWLS

Bus depots, promenades in parks,  
Dimly-lit bars that serve watered-down drinks:  
These are not the only places we meet.

A game of chance it's sometimes called  
And looks are everything: good bones,  
Thick hair, pristine skin.  
Without them you perish.

The heart can win and more than once.  
The heart, though desperately wicked,  
Is invisibly huge, a house  
Where body becomes less body.

Love has always been for the fat among us,  
For those of us whose hair is falling,  
Whose skin is sagging.

We are not on the streets or lost  
In a descending darkness.  
We are at peace somewhere, asleep,  
Our intangible fingers entwined in air.

Like the others, we wake  
To seasons of sun and mist  
And begin the day.

—Ronald Stewart

## MAN

A rose on  
his toes

he's taking me  
to his tattoos

let me show  
you, he says

my blue world  
He smokes a lot

and is really  
serious. The

pain, he says  
is not the first

thing. He drinks  
a lot, more than

is good for him.  
A poet must know

the pen, he says  
how it stings

Where do you  
want me to

stand? He says  
the light is best

He strips off  
His blue tattoos

I touch them all  
soon lost in

the jungle of  
his prick

has FUCK written  
all over it

my cheeks puffed  
with history. He

looks down. If we  
never meet

again, he says  
I think you

must  
remember me.

William Kushner  
Jan. 73

for Candy Darling  
dead of Cancer (of the  
WAR HOLE someone  
said)

Rare as those hippopotamuses  
which live on the algae  
growing on the feet of  
pearl divers  
or the head of a fly fixed  
w/20 kilos of toxicity  
(cocaine &  
Sigmund Freud)

It was the last track  
on the tape baby,  
the last take  
of the first flake  
your unreconstructed shadow  
in the velvet blue light  
on the brink of an  
untitled dream  
yellow hair & red lips  
sailing before a fan of  
black air.  
wearing the wings of  
an imperfect angel  
you take your place  
among the 49 lesser Rays  
where chrome finials  
will always be in style  
sheathed in light of  
wheat & roses  
It's called sporting w/  
the WIND  
O Star! These blondes  
w/ death in their faces  
all w/ scornful traces  
around the mouth —  
bruised arches offering  
pilgrimage to the short-  
lived flash  
between entrances.  
It is the song  
on a Midnight baffle  
of trampolines by halfmoon  
You are lost in the  
soft folds of the curtain,  
the way it softly folds —  
Your mind hung with curtains  
Let the white finger  
keep on writing —  
Good night.

Ira Cohen  
Kathmandu, Nepal

## Chinese boy, 14

an orange  
just  
neatly  
opened.

Taste.  
—Ian Young

## TWO MOTHS FOR RICHARD

## Rick Asleep

your naked chest  
breathing  
nipples  
corks bobbing  
on a hot sweet sea

## Rick-rider

astride your back  
your shoulderblades  
made for wings  
where will you carry me

—Ian Young

In another room it is ending  
bleak as winter.

These are the last tender moments —  
more and more sentences  
ending in open air —  
like soft translations...

In strange isolation  
the lovers improvise  
two different endings  
for the same romance.

One lover is thinking of years.  
The other is thinking of moments.

Adrian Brooks  
Jan. 4, 1974/Boston  
May 8, 1974/San Francisco

# FILMS

## A Very Natural Thing

Although it bears the flaws and uncertainties of a low-budget feature debut, Christopher Larkin's *A Very Natural Thing* is noteworthy for its autobiographical perspective which offers us, for the first time, a relatively serious look at the problems and rewards of male love relationships. Its author-director comes to the world of filmmaking after a long period of gestation as a monk, a lay theologian, and then as an architectural renovator in New York City. I have not seen his thesis film, undertaken at the New York Institute of Photography—a 20 minute version of Tennessee Williams' "Desire and the Black Masseur," but the story's inherent homoerotic tension suggests that Larkin, then in his late thirties, was prepared to acknowledge personal feelings in his work. *A Very Natural Thing*, now being nationally distributed and promoted by New Line Cinema, confirms his position as an emerging talent in a yet small gallery of openly gay filmmakers.

The overture-title sequence opens with a solemn benediction bestowed on David—the film's surrogate figure for Larkin—as he makes a final break from monastic life. Rather gracelessly intercut with this event are a series of candid responses by gay people at the '73 Christopher Street Rally in New York's Washington Square; the culminating remark by a young lesbian is "To me, being gay is a very natural thing." The irony of this proud affirmation in the context of the film is that it does not become a reality to the central character until he has experienced sexual love and gradually acquires a degree of self-knowledge.

David (Robert Joel) subsequently takes up a conventional, closeted, single existence in Manhattan, where he teaches English literature to high school students. At 26, he resembles an un-pretentious, good-natured Tony Perkins, without any of that actor's neurotic tics. He has just begun to enjoy the pleasures of casual sex without any ties or commitments, but, like many of us hopes for something more. One evening amid the crowded, hyped-up atmosphere of a Village dance bar, he is drawn to Mark (Curt Gareth) an equally square, but conventionally handsome, clean-cut blond, still in business attire. Our hero is swept off his feet and before long he is seeing Mark regularly. Soon after the marriage of David's straight roommate—which has a serious effect on David—the two begin living together.

From the beginning it is clear that the relationship will be a difficult one. Early scenes of courtship, love-making, walking in the park, grocery shopping, have a conventionally lyrical, happy, often amusing tone. But the idyll is soon dissipated by petty arguments and long periods of unexplained absence on Mark's part. David remains sincerely intent on maintaining an exclusive, traditional styled "marriage," in which he submits to a sexually passive, housewife role, placating and accommodating differences between the two. Mark, on the other hand, obsessed with sustaining his hard-nosed, flippant masculine self-image, remains the flirtatious stud, cruising streets constantly in search of pickups who are similar

in appearance to himself. David has to force him to say "I love you," and it becomes increasingly clear that he is erecting barriers to an exclusive intimacy which David wants so much.

In what must be one of the film's most embarrassing and ineptly conceived sequences—a dinner party hosted by Alan, David's best friend, we are once again back into the fey atmosphere of *Boys in the Band*. Mark pointedly refrains from conversing with this collection of artificially campy types and later tells David, that even though they may be his friends, he doesn't want to spend the evening with a "bunch of faggots."

As this masochistic exercise reaches a point where a breakup is imminent, Mark, who declares himself more "liberated" than David, suggests that they engage in some experimentation which amounts to a weekend at Fire Island cruising sep-

natural thing." Then, like many closeted gays, David finds himself a curious spectator at the Christopher Street Gay Pride Parade in June '73. The narrative is interrupted for a spirited succession of candid comments from gay liberationists during and following the parade at the park rally. Although we do not see David at the rally, it is presumably there that he meets Jason (Bo White), a young brother whose charm and arresting features do not prevent him from relating to everyone in an open, friendly way, suggesting a radiant, loving approach to living.

David is not the sort of person one would expect Jason to be attracted to; yet, the character of Jason, as conceived and projected by Bo White, is not as fully developed as I felt it should have been. Unlike any of the previous characters in the film, Jason is bisexual, not clearly identified with the gay subculture, and seems confident and comfortable about his sexuality. He is—apart from the other marchers—the film's spokesman for openness and liberation. David confesses to him that he has never participated in a march and is unable to be openly gay because of his profession. Jason concedes this, but insists that demonstrating is a necessity and that those who can be open will do so for the benefit of those who feel otherwise. His argument is succinctly and eloquently stated, and at the same time, very natural.

Jason is a professional photograph-



Left to right: Bo White & Robert Joel in "A Very Natural Thing"

arately and engaging in a bit of group sex. David is unable to handle this and moves in with his friend Alan who consoles him during this period of separation from Mark. Alan, through many unhappy experiences, has become thoroughly cynical about love relationships and encourages David to indulge in baths for diversion. David finally relents, and, in one of the film's most gripping and mesmeric scenes he tours a bath, ending in an orgasmic encounter in the steam room.

A momentary rapprochement takes place when David and Mark meet for a day at Coney Island. If the dialog and direction seems cramped, overly articulated and forced in previous scenes, here it has an improvisational ring of truth and the actors seem to have an intuitive, natural grasp of the moment. When Mark suggests that they spend the evening together, David becomes confused and uncertain as to the best course of action. But when Mark's motive is blatantly expressed in sexual terms ("I want to suck your cock"), David scaldingly reproaches him for his casual insensitivity. Mark, reacting defensively to this attack on his self-esteem, convinces David that no permanent reconciliation will be possible.

Although many women and some gay men will sympathize with the painful contradictions and conflicts inherent in this mis-match, Larkin's film, up to this point, reflects little of the notion that being gay is "a very

er who has apparently come out after a marriage. His ex-wife and young son, from whom he has been separated for some time, are seen briefly in a memorable scene in which he talks of his new affair freely and openly, while the child plays in the background. The scars of this former love now healed, Jason feels ready to pursue a relationship with David. However, like most gay men on the rebound from a painful separation, David is not prepared at all to become involved with anyone, though his feelings for Jason are warm and honest. When Jason forces his hand, snapping some candid poses of David in a playful moment, and suggests they move in together, David declines to make any commitment. Though disappointed, Jason, the stronger of the two, accepts his position and the film ends on a lyrical note celebrating their togetherness and hopefulness for the future.

Even though the closing moments of Chris Larkin's work left me elated, it did not erase the impression that *A Very Natural Thing* is not a very successful film. \$100,000 is a very small budget for a full-length, color, dialog movie, and considering this, the result as a whole is a creditable effort. Part of the problem lies in the director's lack of experience and skill (or perhaps inventiveness) in shaping his material, in writing and pacing dialog. It is not so much that the actors are that bad but that they too often seem forced into speeches that lack a

natural flow and direction. For many gay people it will be edifying to simply hear gay people saying things about their lives in a movie that reflect their own experience. The pity is that they are not more well written.

Visually, the theatrical blowup from its 16 mm original is exceptional and Larkin and his cameraman do give the work a certain image consistency that is pleasing, if not always on a professional level. Visual transitions are generally rough, but we never have the feeling of watching a Wakefield Poole movie or an amateurish porno. In order to avoid an "X" rating, the film's sexual episodes have been trimmed to eliminate genitals (except for a few quick glimpses of Curt Gareth) and actual penetration. But Larkin is not prudish about the importance placed on sex in the gay community and we are always well aware of what is happening just below or above the frame. At times, however, Larkin is a master of mis-judgment. The opening part of Joel and Gareth's second love scene, in which they undress before a fireplace to the strains of Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings," is too precious and strained to be taken seriously, as it should be, for the succeeding erotic images to be effective. Larkin is better with the group sex scenes than with couples, as a rule where the emphasis is on kissing and caressing, but without much erotic atmosphere. Much could be learned here from observing Artie Bressan's *Passing Strangers*. I must give him credit, however, for one funny, telling line of dialog which occurs in the first bedroom scene. Mark complains (playfully) of David's kissing his chest. "I'm just being affectionate," he replies. And Mark saucily retorts, "Aw, that went out in the fifties!"

In his press release, Chris Larkin states that the "whole matter of the 'image' of the gay person in our society is probably the top priority issue right now for the gay liberation movement. It is the false images which form the basis for the widespread misunderstanding, prejudice and discrimination against gay people." He talks about "stereotypes left over from the *Boys in the Band* era," without realizing that he is himself reflecting this backward glance in his dinner party sequence which audiences find hilarious and at the same time, pathetic. If we compare these people with Jason—who we unfortunately see too little of—we find them rigid, weak, jaded, and unresponsive to their own predicament as well as the needs of their brothers.

On the other hand, Larkin is careful to add that he wants "to say something about the direction in which I think we have to go to discover the fully self-accepting and responsible life-style of the liberated gay person..." And in the character of Jason he seems to find that hope, a hope that is sadly lacking in the irreconcilable values constantly at odds in the marriage the film depicts. Larkin does not want to say that meaningful relationships are impossible but that they are extremely difficult given the values that men are expected to live by in our society.

I hope that Larkin's next film will proceed from the point where he leaves us here, for the concluding sequence is an inspired anthology piece, and the film's most cinematically affecting movement. David and Jason move—in slow motion—across an expanse of beach into the surf, accompanied by a soaring, powerful orchestral passage, and finally touch in a tender embrace. Larkin himself describes it best as "expansive with pure joy, playful, free, intimate, passionate...symbolizing the effort of every person who seeks a life informed by beauty, intelligence and love."

— Lee Atwell

# Gay Male Frigidity

'Why can't you fuck me?'

This oft-repeated lament, in quite another context, has long been given in myriad heterosexual equations, sublimated into soap operas, films (*Bonnie and Clyde* did not say it all, but said enough) and what frequently is called real life by those who participate in "real life". I have heard myself saying it enough times to ponder, and to here elaborate, if not a theory, then a general description (mostly topological) of homosexual frigidity.

I shall begin with the curious case of Michael X., 22, a former student of RISD whose current preoccupations include the design of a living room (and, presumably, matching dinette) for an intimate friend. In his working hours Michael X. drives a van for a local hospital. He claims to have, at one time, been manager of an all-night drugstore on the fringes of Wilshire Boulevard. My documentation thusfar reveals a cursory involvement with the mechanical arts and a total ignorance of fine arts, beyond knowledge of period furniture. Michael X. is frigid, and seeks to explain his frigidity with the rhetoric of Masters and Johnson, Freud and Jess Stern: "I'm not even sure I'm gay. I don't know if I should be with a man or a woman." Michael X. confided this one evening after imbibing a pint of Tequila and enough valium to sedate the Laotian Army. One of the several persons present later assured me, with the homely wisdom often gleaned from former residents of Ansonia, Connecticut, "A drunken man's words are a sober man's thoughts."

In the context of the above it is important to note that the evening was supposed to have been a *deux*, and that to avoid sexual confrontation with myself Michael X. had invited, without my knowledge, no less than three persons whose part-time job is to make excuses for Michael's sexual inadequacy in terms that obscure the rather central and, to me, simple issue of frigidity. Michael is "upset right now," "going through heavy changes," "too drunk to get it up"—the standard repertoire of inanities which, repeated often enough, begin to sound like facts.

Michael X. is not unique. I am willing to allow that persons habitually using drugs or alcohol often experience distortions of the libido—Shakespeare mentions this briefly in *Macbeth*, and, in more specifically homosexual terrain, there are hundreds of stories concerning passionate evenings ruined by sudden or gradual detumescence. Nonetheless, and despite the paucity of reliable research in this area, there is a phenomenon of chronic male homosexual frigidity which does not necessarily interfere with the automatic response of erectile-tissue stimulation (though frigid males often are impotent, as well).

Michael X., and others I have observed, experience the need, and seek the gratification of homosexual socialization—incorporation in a clan, connection and identification with the wider kinship system of homosexuality. This extends to the frequenting of bars, cafes, and entertainments catering to the extended homosexual family; and what is known about the intellectual and cultural life of such persons participates in group-shared obsessions and pre-occupations: music, certain limited forms of literature, periodicals, colognes, perfumes, facial cleansers, clothing. In short, the frigid male homosexual resembles other homosexuals and does, indeed, have a homosexual orientation, despite his frequent claim of bisexual conflicts. (In fact, actively bisexual people seldom experience bisexuality as a conflict when engaged in sexual acts.)

In the case of Michael X., he is able to use his latent capacity for heterosexual expression as both defense mechanism and as alluring quality for homosexuals who like straight or semi-straight men: defense mechanism during frigidity, allure during periods of recrudescence libido. He is, in fact, a queen, or was at one time; and he is referred to by a feminine nickname. As stated before, he participates in the public manifestation homosexual sensibility while incapable of adapting sensibility to sensuality. Like most homosexuals, Michael X. has straight female friends, whom he enlists as allies or reinforcement of an alleged bisexual ambience. Paradoxically, he does not see himself as bisexual; instead, he oscillates between the polarized stereotyped sexual identities of Straight Male and Fag-got.

During the period when I knew Michael X., our relationship was one of guarded friendship. That's to say, our getting along was contingent on a few implicit conditions. One of the conditions was that we were not to embrace or touch one another unless this happened by accident. This was an especially difficult condition for me, though I was given to believe the same condition was implicit in all Mi-

chael's relationships except the most superficial ones. During the same period Michael X. confided to me that, if he were to make love again, he would make love with me. (I think I have made clear that I was in love with him throughout this time.) He said further that he expected to be able to do this when he was thoroughly recovered from an affair that had, a month or so before, met an ugly halt.

From that time on, the frequency of our encounters abated and the quality of communication between us became even more fragmentary and, at the very end of the relationship, consisted wholly in lies and evasions. Because I was more often than not required to speak to Michael X. through an intermediary (whose accuracy in conveying messages varied from the standard 1 to 9 word sampling/editing to undeliberate but nevertheless total distortion), I was frequently told things which, despite my own efforts to treat them as edited messages, finally destroyed the thin thread still connecting us.

The frigid homosexual male sometimes adopts the body posture we associate with film actresses who have portrayed frigid women: Katherine Hepburn, Bette Davis, Tippi Hedrin. In some recent film studies I made of Michael X., his posture is extremely rigid, but affectedly so. His movements when walking, cooking, seating himself (and, most tellingly, dancing) are both twitchy or sporadic, but at all times mechanical, stiff, and confined. All his spatial perceptions are self-referential: his arms at all times move toward his own body; his legs invariably close tightly together when he is sitting opposite someone to whom they are visible. When his forearms extend outward, his hands are turned toward his own face or chest. His elbows, when dancing, move in a precise pattern— inward toward himself when facing someone, outward to the bare walls when he has his back turned.

I'll discuss my own episodes of frigidity. In this instance I have only still photographs, journals and the accounts of others to go by; in the case of the other researchers, all but a few are incapable of objective analysis and have confined their remarks to epithets and occasional tirades. Okay, I, too, have gone limp as a used Handi-Wipe at times, and at other times been quite tumescent while unwilling to have anyone touch me. In some cases one chalks this up to repulsion, an aspect of melancholy that sets, for me, after the sixth valium or the third beer. In other cases I've been blitzed by the prospect of having to perform the sexual act in company with several persons, or while being observed by a non-participant, and, though this has not interfered with the mechanical performance (and orgasm, unless one is truly a romantic, is quite as mechanically arranged as the hydraulics of getting it in, moving it around, etc., etc.), I felt nothing at those times. I mean nothing, except excruciating mental and physical discomfort, as if an alien species of vegetation were commanding 99/100% of my life space and the iota remaining to me were steadily filling with noxious vapor. A baroque attitude, perhaps, but real at the time.

My earliest episode of conscious frigidity—that is, of frigidity after the fact of accepting my homosexuality and after spells of being comfortable with it—occurred in a bathtub on 17th and Market Streets in San Francisco, in an old house I happened to be living in. I was engaged in "69" (as a Cancerian this is supposedly my preferred sexual act #1) with a cinematographer who, despite a mild addiction to morphine, felt that he could, with some considerable tittivation, come. Steve was in what I suppose one would call the dominant position, that is, on top of me; the shower was on, at a comfortable temperature, and between periodic licking of his testicles I suggested he imagine us both in a rain forest in the lower Amazon basin to enhance the already tropical flavor of the *mise-en-scène* (the bathtub and shower curtain were both verdant green). I really liked this fellow, though I suppose by conventional standards of beauty he is quite repulsive even to this day. But while my own feverish endeavors to make him come were beginning to harvest some hard results, I suddenly found my own, normally rabid desire for the big O departing like a Batista cadre. By the time the turgid splat of what is referred to in French postal cards as "his love juice" hit the roof of my mouth, I was in Interzone.

This was not a temporary kind of Interzone, either: for about four weeks I was, literally, without libido. Certain types of food—vermicelli, to name one—became so repugnant I actually threw up upon seeing it served at a neighboring table in a Chinese restaurant on Castro Street. This sounds frivolous, but on the day following the onset of frigidity I was raped by a black cello player in the front seat of his car (he'd picked me up hitching), and

threw up. Vomited. He didn't seem to mind, but the rape and my reaction to it was the kind of astral combination frigidity, in my episodes of it, appears to conspire with.

In Chicago, world traveller that I then was, I experienced, a year later, another hiatus in the libidinal choo-choo train. I think it coincidental that I was at the time incarcerated in a mental hospital. Mental patients, by and large, have, if anything, a larger than life sexual appetite and frigidity is hardly the kind of behavior sufficiently discouraged by society to warrant confinement. In other words, there was as much sucking of dick as gnashing of teeth and smearing of feces going on, the nurses were banging the doctors and each other and the patients, the attendants were blowing the patients, the patients were going down on their therapists, on each other, and on the arts and crafts and volleyball instructors. Obladi obladi. I was as much a part of the fun as anyone until one evening when my evening nurse, a male, invited me to walk the length of the ward, which was built around a courtyard, as he locked up the conference rooms and dining hall for the evening. The nurse claimed that he had to replace the linen in one of the bathrooms, and ushered me into same. Once inside, he locked the door a bit less quietly than he intended, and I perceived that he was going to rape me, which he did. Once again, I became frigid, though I stress that orgasm followed the forced fellation of my penis as night follows day. But, as before, I felt absolutely nothing. (This was also my first experience of having someone spread a towel out under me.) And, as before, several weeks passed before I could allow anyone to lay a finger on me. The arching of the back, the automatic tensing of the muscles, the tics and spasms I have described as observed in Michael X. were present in my case as well, though the first instance of frigidity was followed by a period of a kind of pansexual longing for non-human objects—rocks at the beach, the sea, quartz, mica, amethyst. The glass house in Golden Gate Park became an object of sexual desire for a while.

In tying some of the loose ends of this argument together, it is illuminating to hear from other quarters that research is being done in the area of what I would call the "familiarity-breeds-indifference" phenomenon, where sexual attraction slackens as one grows to know and like (or, perhaps, know and dislike) someone: this has happened to me frequently. However, it is less like frigidity in that case than is, say, getting to know someone to whom one has been sexually indifferent for a period of time, becoming sexually drawn to them, and having them freeze up after an initial overture. I'm speaking entirely of homosexual encounters, and am not concerned with straight male reaction to homosexual advance. I believe that impotence in the straight male (in a heterosexual relationship) sometimes indicates a homosexual component gone haywire, too stringently repressed, or whatever, and frigidity in the straight male would in my view be a definite barometric indication of this. But within the gay world, a male-identified-male who is emotionally unable to enjoy sex is likely to use the obverse of the latent homosexual formula as a defense mechanism, since, despite the various inroads Gay Liberation may or may not have made thusfar on reshaping public attitude, heterosexuality is still the "official", or academic sexuality to which all else, for the majority of people, is anathema.

The landscape or mental space of male homosexual frigidity is not coincidentally similar to schizophrenia, because it is part of that particular sharpening of associative processes (at the expense of logical and more conventionally analogical mental processes that normally coexist with it) which we associate with schizophrenics. Michaelangelo Antonioni has described this psychological space in his great film *Il Desserto Rosso*: in the film, Monica Vitti portrays a woman who has just "recovered" from a mental breakdown. She finds herself living in a world so devoid of humanity that she remains trapped in the atmosphere of the breakdown; there is, simply, nothing else to relate to. The character Vitti portrays is frigid in the sense that sexual intercourse simply heightens her sense of isolation and fear. In the bizarre lovemaking episode of *Il Desserto Rosso*, the walls of the room were repainted several times for various shots; the colors of the walls, as well as of the bed, are subtly altered from one shot to the next. Antonioni has worked out a comprehensive formula in his color films for the direct effect of color on the central nervous system. (While shooting this particular film it was necessary for him to have a factory painted red in various places. After the completion of the film the factory owners left the walls red; a week later, riots broke out and fights between the workers became frequent. The walls were repainted a soft green and the tension died completely.)

Gary Jane Hoisington

# BOOKS

## Oscar Didn't Do It!

*Different: An Anthology of Homosexual Short Stories.* Edited by Stephen Wright. Bantam Books, N.Y., 1974. 394 pp. \$1.95 paperback.

Reviewed by Steven Brown

"An Out of the Closet Classic...a magnificent anthology of provocative fiction," proclaims the publisher's blurb. While all the stories in *Different* are not necessarily that magnificent, the most powerful aspect of the book is the fact that it exists. I found *Different* while searching through a downtown Springfield, Illinois bookstore for some gay fiction to read. As usual I found myself scanning the same books on the same shelves by the Grove Press section. I was about to leave when the color design and title of this book caught my eye. The list of authors was provocative: Oscar Wilde, Paul Goodman, D.H. Lawrence.

Generally, the book proved a good companion. The diversity of writing styles, themes and, of course, the unique common bond provided even the weakest tales with some redeeming insight. The stories all deal with some kind of gay theme (some quite subtle). The authors themselves are not necessarily gay. All except two of the twenty-four stories are by men.

One of the most lyrical and erotic pieces in the book, *The Prussian Officer*, is by D.H. Lawrence. The story tells of a relationship between a Prussian army captain and his personal orderly, a relationship of almost master-slave proportions. Showing whatever inner emotions he has in a brutal way, the captain expresses what must be an affection for his servant with beatings and cursings. The captain himself is a very masculine handsome, but cold and aloof figure. The orderly is not devoid of feelings in this tyrannical yet almost paternal relationship: "The orderly felt he was connected with that figure moving so suddenly on horseback, he followed it like a shadow mute and inevitable and damned by it." The damnation comes in the inevitable union of the two men which becomes a death embrace.

An incredible emotional electricity is generated between the two men in the repressive setting of the military in wartime. For me the real beauty of the story came out of the juxtaposition of this story and the Prussian countryside: "The soldiers marched flanked on either side by the valley wide and shallow glittered with heat: dark green patches of rye, pale young corn, fallow and meadow and black pine woods spread in a dull hot diagram under a glistening sky...the burnished dark green rye threw off a suffocating heat, the mountain drew gradually nearer and more distinct."

Either out of error or a conscious attempt at greater sales potential, editor Stephen Wright has wrongly attributed two works in this anthology to Oscar Wilde: *The Priest and the Acolyte* and an excerpt from *Teleny*. *The Priest and the Acolyte* is attributed by Wilde scholars to John Francis Bloxam. He wrote it while he was an undergraduate at Exeter College and published it anonymously in 1894 in the college literary publication *Chameleon* of which he was editor. Wilde's opinion on the story is given in the transcripts of his trial. When asked by the prosecuting attorney for Lord Queensberry, Sir Edward Carson, whether he felt this story was immoral, Wilde replied, "It was worse, it was badly written." And in a letter to his friend Ada Leverson, (the Sphinx), Wilde wrote, "The story is to my ears too direct, there is no nuance; it profanes a little

by revelation; God and other artists are always a little obscure. Still it has interesting qualities, and is at moments poisonous which is something."

*Teleny* is believed to have been written in 1890 by several writers and stands out mainly for being the first English novel to deal exclusively with a homosexual theme. In his *Unrecorded Life of Oscar Wilde* (1973) Rupert Croft-Cooke writes, "The style of *Teleny* is totally foreign to Wilde's way of thinking and writing. Nothing in the whole novel has the slightest suggestion of Wilde's talent in it. Surely Wilde gave offense enough to puritan conscience without saddling his reputation with this silly piece of filth." While very graphic in its depiction of the sexual relationship of *Teleny* and his lover, *Teleny*, in my opinion, is hardly filth. I rather enjoyed the erotic mysticism pervading this tale of *Teleny*, a pianist involved in Victorian England's theater scene.

Included in the anthology are four stories by Phil Andros taken from his book, *Stud*. All deal with different experiences taken from his life as a hustler. These stories did not appeal to me personally. However, they did provide a personal insight into the world of hustling. One work that was equally impressive for the personal realism it conveyed was *Cruising* by Francis March. This piece amounts almost to a documentary "day in the life" of a typical gay man. March provides insight into the bar and bath scenes and manages to smoothly articulate the inane but so real aspects of everyday thought-actions: "Cruising, cruising always looking for someone new, that was what gay life was all about...A million new partners? There were never enough there always had to be more; the ideal love, the Prince Charming, romance, sex without end."

*Paul's Mistress* by Guy de Maupassant, written in 1881, stands out from the rest of the stories in the book for its delicate and beautifully subtle treatment of a Lesbian theme. The only work in the book dealing primarily with the emotions of a woman, it is set in the context of a heterosexual relationship between Madeleine and her lover Paul. Madeleine is very up front about her attraction to the town lesbian Pauline. Paul can accept neither the idea of Lesbians (whom he calls "terrible creatures") nor the idea of his lover having any feelings for anyone but him, least of all another woman. The believable characterization of this straight man accentuates the wonderfully liberated nature of Madeleine. The ending is beautifully unexpected.

The idea of an anthology of gay fiction with a short biographical note on each of the authors is a good one. In spite of his perpetuating the misinformation on Oscar Wilde, the editor has presented some beautiful works of prose in an accessible paperback format. Gay works of art sitting quietly next to this month's best sellers in bookshops and drugstores across the country is an appreciated phenomenon.

## Dotson Rader's Closet...

*Blood Dues* by Dotson Rader. Knopf, 211 pp., \$6.95 hardcover.

Reviewed by Allen Young

Dotson Rader is a successful freelance writer who implies he is straight, yet seems obsessed with the subject of homosexuality, and often prefers the personal friendship of gay men. His first two books, *I Ain't Marchin' Anymore!* and *Government Inspected Meat*, deal with gay

themes directly or indirectly, as does *Blood Dues*, his latest book.

Rader wrote one of the first feature articles on gay liberation to appear in a major national magazine, the *Evergreen Review*, of which he is an editor. The piece was curiously ambivalent and bore the title, "All the Sad Young Men."

When the *New York Times* decided (belatedly) to review the very first books to emerge from the gay liberation movement, they chose Rader to write the review. His review was favorable, but he used the pronoun "they" to describe gay people and the pronoun "we" to mean everybody else, including, presumably, himself. I remember reading this review, and remarking to myself that this was strange—I have been convinced from Rader's earlier writings that he was, in fact, homosexual himself. He was so incredibly familiar with the gay male world and this familiarity permeates his literary sensibility.

There is something intriguing and mysterious about this Rader, something a little suspicious, almost.

In 1972, when I was corresponding with Eddie Rastellini, the gay prisoner who was stabbed to death last November in Bridgewater, Mass., I got a letter from Eddie telling me that Dotson Rader had written to him and expressed interest in his case. I never did find out how come Eddie had gotten in touch with Rader in the first place. But in any case, I knew that Rader (whom I never met) was a successful writer with lots of good contacts and perhaps some spare money. So I took it upon myself to write a brief letter to Rader encouraging his interest in Eddie's case. I urged him to visit Eddie and also to send him cigarette and postage money. He wrote me back and said he'd try to see Eddie "in six or eight weeks" (he never showed up and he never wrote again, and he never sent a dime.) At the bottom of this letter, he added this paragraph:

"By the way, I am in no way involved in gay lib. I have written extensively, perhaps too extensively, about it but I have to admit my understanding of it is very limited."

In this short note, the expression "I am in no way involved" seemed like Rader was hung up that I should mistake him for a faggot. And if he felt that his understanding of gay liberation was limited, why did he accept a *New York Times* assignment to review the gay liberation books?

*Blood Dues* is not a book about homosexuality, but rather it is a book about the anti-war movement and Rader's involvement in it. Although I would argue that he was never more than tangentially involved, Rader considers himself to have been an integral part of the New Left.

He admits that his attraction to politics is essentially sexual.

"Revolutionaries and bikeboys and other tough outsiders were rebel figures to me; the butch stance, the ruthlessness, the overstated masculinity, the power of their bodies and their machines, the independence and mobility evidenced by their lives, their position as outlaw, all constituted their appeal," Rader writes.

Interestingly enough, one of the few personal acquaintances of mine who appear in this book is Eric Mann, a former member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Weatherman—it would probably be fair to say that Mann was one of the most handsome and most masculine personalities around SDS circles, and I find it entirely appropriate that he should be Rader's buddy.

Rader goes on to explain his belief that "acts of violence by young men against women (were) political acts in the specific sense that they were long delayed reactions against authority presented to males in boyhood in the person of a dominant woman, the matriarch and the teacher."

Rader says that violence in America results from the "sexual disfigurement of young males," and he places the blame on women. Rader repeated this theme recently in an article on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times*, and in that case he made it ex-

plicitly clear that homosexuality is a case in point of such "sexual disfigurement."

In *Blood Dues*, Rader takes several pages to explain his view of homosexuality, and I wish I could quote the whole thing here. Not surprisingly, his anti-homosexual views seem to dovetail with his anti-woman views. The context of his comments on homosexuality is Rader's observation of a gay liberation demonstration in Greenwich Village in the summer of 1970 at which police brutally attacked the demonstrators. I was there, and I remember well the blood on the faces of several friends, so I was especially disgusted by Rader's reaction:

"And what was startling to me was that while I politically supported the homosexual activists, I found myself emotionally siding with the police. I shared their contempt for the homosexual. I did not know how to explain that, whether it was because these homosexuals being up front, out in the streets, in some way were threatening to my sexuality, more threatening than the police, or because I held some secret bias against homosexuals arising from my early days in New York when I was broke and often resorted to them as sources of money and in the payment received humiliation and abuse as gratuity. Perhaps it was deeper than that, a resentment coming from my belief that they cheapened life because they were antipathetic to creation. In fellatio and pederasty I saw not only self-indulgence, the avoidance of responsibility..., but also the murder of seed. Homosexuality was not an act of life. It was death in sexuality. It was murder of potential life in the name of pleasure."

Well, honey, that is quite a mouthful for someone who, in the rest of this book, talks about his warm friendships with Tennessee Williams and Paul Goodman, and who is constantly waxing poetic over the beauty of his male friends. Maybe Rader is just putting us on! "Murder of seed" indeed! I suppose he is against masturbation and condoms, too!

Aside from this mention of his hustling days, the only other clues Rader gives us as to his actual sexual behavior is a reference to three heterosexual encounters—one with a 14-year-old girl, one with a prostitute, and one with a girl who tried to blow him but he couldn't get hard.

The romantic hero of *Blood Dues*, as I read it, is a young draft resister named Jann Eller:

"He was handsome, and he was given to smiling easily and to gentleness and he had a soft voice and a quiet modest demeanor that conflicted with the hard edge of his political statements. He interested me for many reasons, none of them sexual."

Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

*Blood Dues* focuses on a benefit for a large anti-war group. Rader organized the benefit, but the extravaganza (featuring Tennessee Williams and Norman Mailer) was a flop, and shortly thereafter, Rader became disillusioned with politics and perhaps with life itself. This book is really the story of that disillusionment. Rader ominously recalls his wrist-slashing suicide attempt at age 19 (he has just turned 30 at the writing of this book), and he describes his drift into drugs and purposelessness.

Dotson Rader, for all his weirdness and butch pose, often seems candid and even frail, and he is therefore not the kind of person you want to condemn. His homophobia is qualitatively different from that of an anti-gay shrink or an up-tight clergyman. In a chapter in this book about the visit to the U.S. of the Russian poet Yevtushenko, Rader reads his beads so well and this chapter is a beautiful tribute to the poets and others languishing in Soviet jails. There is, therefore, a humanism in Rader that largely negates his anti-gay ravings, and he says he thinks his own sexuality is messed up anyway. He obviously enjoys the company of gay people and he has many gay (male) friends.

The tragedy of Dotson Rader is

that he has written and thought about homosexuality and gay liberation always in terms of the other. For this reason, all of this thought about sexual politics—and *Blood Dues* is largely a book about sexual politics—is confused and misdirected. So caught up in his own masculine image (he's into cowboy fantasies especially and even tried to get a small role in a Grade B cowboy flick), Rader refuses to see the homosexual experience as his own. He can identify with rough trade, yes, but never with the faggot. And so he ends up in absurdity, lambasting "matriarchs" in a society run by male politicians and generals and businessmen, and accusing homosexuals of "murder of seed."

In the end, it is women and homosexuals who have to pay the price for Rader's peculiar brand of closetry.

## Alexander's Boy

*The Persian Boy* by Mary Renault. Bantam Books, 1974. \$1.95 paper. Pantheon Books, 1972. \$7.95 hardcover. 469 pages.

Reviewed by Andy Dvosin

To be normal, to do like the birds and the bees, to be integral with nature and with every natural thing, is surely one of the most powerful human desires. And achieving that feeling, that is, the esteeming of oneself as so entwined with things, is likewise one of the great pleasures available to us in life.

What gives Mary Renault's novels their beauty and tension is the struggle to reconcile two genuine but opposite feelings: love, true love—with the consciousness that *this* kind of love is somehow outside of nature, and therefore must be inferior to the rest of it. The question Renault's characters ask themselves is: "How can I be a faggot and a man, too?"

I offer a paradox: it is precisely because she can take the terms of such a question seriously, with all the millennia-old assumptions about normal and natural it contains, that Renault has been able to write consistently and successfully of homosexual love, and has indeed been the only important contemporary novelist to do so.

*The Persian Boy* and *The Charioteer* are the "gayest" of Renault's books. But neither conforms to even half the tenets of gay liberation; they reflect instead, like all significant art, what is, not what should be. And it is on its own term in the main that I'd like to talk about *The Persian Boy*.

Here is an earlier treatment of the same subject that Renault takes on in *The Persian Boy*:

*If the World be worth thy Winning  
Think, O think it worth Enjoying.  
Lovely Thais sits beside thee  
Take the Good the Gods provide  
thee.*

That is from John Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*, which celebrates Alexander the Great's victory feast on his conquest of Persia (Thais is the female courtesan who is the chief human trophy among the spoils of war presented to Alexander).

I mention the Dryden poem, written almost three hundred years before *The Persian Boy*, to show how little things have changed since then. Renault's novel too is about Alexander the Great's conquest of the world, and is full of the same glamorous macho stuff that has made historical best-sellers since Dryden's time and before: love and war, the exhilaration of military conquest and the lust to dominate, combined with high romance and sexual intrigue amidst the palace corridors of power. The catch of course is that instead of a female consort for Alexander, a Thais, Renault substitutes a male lover, the beautiful Persian youth Bagoas,

through whose eyes we see the novel unfold.

Bagoas was a eunuch. This is a clever piece of historical luck for Renault, for it permits her to preserve intact the sexual role polarization that characterizes each of the male couples in all her novels. In effect, Bagoas is the woman and Alexander the inwardly sensitive but outwardly prepotent man. Renault must herself be an old woman by now, but faint tremors of the sexual revolution seem to have reached her, and she may be finding it harder to preserve in conscience these role dichotomies among her gay fictional couples. Bagoas' eunuchry is thus a heaven-sent gift, for without his balls he is exempted from the traditional requirements of manhood and masculinity, and may abdicate to just his sweet and innately graceful self. Meet Mr. and Mrs. Alexander the Great. In fact, history tells us (and Renault capitalizes on it fictionally that Alexander's soldier legions on the whole welcomed Bagoas as the royal consort, much in the same way that such figures as Christine Jorgensen and Candy Darling are accorded a kind of raucous public toleration by straight society today.

*The Persian Boy* is really two books in one, and I suspect each is for a different audience. I wish I could say that I preferred the gay part to the military part, and let it go at that, but in truth I liked best the moments where these two intersect. When Bagoas is first introduced to Alexander, there is an excitement in awaiting his appointment with love in the throne room. Let's admit that there is a certain pungency to lovemaking when it is set off by visible grandeur, when the relaxation and physical intimacy are tempered by all the power politics raging outside the royal bedroom. But interest in the book palls as the descriptions of Alexander's battles, marches and conquests accumulate, and I suspect it will be so with most gay readers of the book.

If Alexander the Great is Renault's triumphant answer to the question, "How can I be a faggot and a man, too?" what, in the end, has been proved by this? That we can be just as nasty, just as dominating and competitive as any straight man? Cold comfort that is, even if it is true.



The Persian Boy  
Drawing by Michelangelo

If there is a lesson to be drawn from the Renault books it is this. *The Persian Boy* was on the bestseller lists for many weeks and was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Renault's books are said to have been Robert Kennedy's favorite fiction. The said truth of the matter seems to be that if a gay book is acceptable to the straight world (and Renault's on the evidence are), then and only then is it acceptable to the mass of gay readers. On the fifth anniversary of the activist phase of our movement, these books are a reminder of the sluggish and sometimes necessarily retrograde pace at which a social revolution proceeds.

# POETRY

## Our Words

*Mouth of the Dragon* Nos. 1 and 2, A Poetry Journal of Male Love. Edited by Andrew Bifrost, 1974.

Reviewed by Andy Dvosin

With poetry we deal with ultimate experience; available also from music, sex and drugs, but in such short supply elsewhere in life. The first issue of *Mouth of the Dragon*, a new gay male journal of verse, attempts to fill what until recently had been a vacuum (which nature supposedly so abhors), the dearth of really outstandingly good contemporary gay male poetry.

The title of *Mouth of the Dragon* is one of the best things about it. We, faggots, are the dragon—to the straight world, that is. But also a little to ourselves. The aim is for all of us gay people, but especially our poets, to dive into the treasure it guards; love, fine poetry, life itself in all its holiness.

The first poem printed in Issue 1 continues this theme. Richard Bogaert Smith's untitled "poetry/ like my sex" tries for magnificence, and almost achieves it. It is what you might call a haiku poem of ideas. Its conclusion trumpets the inauguration of a personal (and by inference, therefore a general) renaissance of male poetry:

*my words  
and my men  
promenade  
and disclosed [naked] be.*

Right now, this poetry is "hidden":

*i keep it  
beneath  
oil rags that fall  
down from bone ...*

which recalls Yeats' famous line about "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" being the source of all poetry. But here there is a recognition that for gay feelings, gay ideas, the treasure still largely lies waiting to be unearthed from the hearts and bodies of gay artists. If only the poem didn't creak a little in the joints—its transitions aren't as sure as its statements—what an outasight poem this would've been.

Emilio Cubeiro's "This Is Called a Whole Lot of Shit's Been Said About Those Faggot Not Really Blue Blues Again" is a long, talking-blues number which is rock to most other poems' classical music, which is a quick, primal energy absent from poems of more formal accomplishment, those that are more minutely attentive to the sound and weight of words. Coarse, driving, reckless, so nakedly artless that it becomes art, Cubeiro's is a poem no one will be bored by.

It's also a more honest poem than most: down on its knees is where it opens, with its faggot-narrator blowing the "straight trade" he's so wretchedly attracted to. Such scenes enact in a terrible way—not knowing whether you'll be killed or not—romanticism's twin themes of Love and Death. (I know, having picked up hustlers on Times Square myself.)

A fierce dialogue ensues once the sex gets under way in the poem, moving from complete humiliation to a "speak bitterness" outpouring by the faggot and arriving at a final mutual understanding and accommodation. This last rings least true to me. All duality is falsely imagined, the mystics tell us. I know that, but cannot believe, perhaps because I can't accept, this reconciliation between faggot and butch Man here.

The poem is not all grimness: throughout it are woven bits of high-hat nonsense like:

*We call some vegetarians  
some fruitarians  
some humanitarians*

*some are librarians  
some are bavarians  
some are acquarians...*

"This Is Called, Etc." exemplifies in language and thought some of the hard, male attitude it consciously decries, but ultimately that contradiction is the subject of the poem: the anger and attraction masculine homosexuals feel for "straight cats" who fearfully/contemptuously reject them.

Jonathan Williams has perhaps the most perfect poem in the issue. Here it is, all of it, including the title:

*Actually, I Didn't Come Out of  
the Closet Until 1971*

*8-foot  
buck-toothed  
southern  
gurl*

I love this poem, which describes a basically "male-identified" gay man, exploring his non-male self, both for ideological reasons and because he needs to, all the while feeling strange self-conscious and unattractive in so doing. The sentence I've just written paraphrases with one-tenth the force what Williams has compressed, with the fire of true feeling accurately captured, into the six words of his poem. That's why we need good gay poetry. This is a poem about being gay, male and American, and small as it is, will last.

Ian Young's poetry is getting to be a known quantity, from its frequent appearance in broadsides, gay lib journals, and in the pioneering anthology he edited called *The Male Muse*. He writes gay city pastoral:

*Edges, edges  
of quiet moments  
for you,  
a still lightness,  
perhaps tinged with blood  
for being not quite worthy.*

The word "quiet" or its equivalent in mood occurs in nearly every Young poem (another poem printed here has the click of the camera as its only sound). It is when the Anglican minister surfaces in Young, attracted to clean-limbed young boys with uncomplicated minds, that I become uncomfortable. When this happens, the poetry turns slightly bathetic and cloying ("all/for tangled hair and sleepy arms"). One criticizes out of respect and love; he remains one of the best poets of the New Gay Poetry.

There are other fine poems in this issue of *Mouth of the Dragon*: Joseph Canarelli's "Fragment of a Poem," Joe Rubin's "Dilemma" and Marc Rubin's "The Compleat Angler." So often, liking a poem means liking what is said, not just the how of it. Illustrations of this confusion doubtless occur in the poems I've singled out for praise; others will find poems unmentioned here which engage their lives more directly than they did mine.

The editor and the poets of *Mouth of the Dragon* have engaged in a brave enterprise: the turning around of our vision of ourselves. In a less suspicious age for gay people, Hart Crane wrote about his own poetry:

*let thy waves rear  
More savage than the death of kings,  
Some splintered garland for the seer.*

Fifty years later, Emilio Cubeiro is saying the same thing here, but minus the torture and grandiloquence ("I can almost hear/another one of those faggots/posing as a seer"). The wry self-deprecation is actually a mark of self-confidence; in its small way it is a measure of how far we've come.

The second issue of *Mouth of the Dragon* has poems by Kirby Congdon that celebrate maleness and mutilation, and send the closet door swingingly wildly on our darkest masochistic fantasies. Also Michael O'Connor's surprising and delicate epiphanies of gay life (street cruising, refreshingly told for once from the viewpoint of the cruised, and a fine political poem on the New Orleans fire).

(*Mouth of the Dragon* is available from Gay Liberation Book Service; listing elsewhere in this issue.)

*Sodom, or the Quintessence of Debauchery*, attributed to that rakish libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and published in Antwerp in 1684, has the distinction of being the first literary work to be censored in England on the grounds of obscenity and pornography. It is indeed appropriate that English-American anti-smut laws chose as their first victim a fine example of homosexual Restoration erotica, for homosexual literature has almost always been the single literary tradition to suffer the most at the repressive hands of censors and the no less repressive hands of scholars, critics, editors of so-called definitive anthologies and authors of so-called standard biographies, and of course teachers who would not touch such a tradition—if they even knew it existed.

Although the constitutionality of censorship laws is a never-ending debate, militant and aggressive sweeps under the rug are no longer serious overt threats to the realistic expression of the homosexual experience. *Sodom*, for example, was finally re-published in 1966—albeit as a purple paper-back. The censorship of the recent past, however, has already accomplished much of its goal, for homosexual literature written before 1900 is still generally unavailable. Several collections such as *Eros: An Anthology of Male Friendship* (ed. Patrick Anderson and Alistair Sutherland, New York, 1963) and the less timorous *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* (ed. Brian Reade, New York, 1970) can introduce serious students to the historically important literary tradition that lies hidden in unexpurgated Latin editions and limited private printings. But for the most part the homosexual literary tradition has been entered into the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* and then shelved in the cherry cabinet because of its ten-letter word.

The most serious threat to the liberation of homosexual literary history is the censorship of the outstanding scholars, editors, and critics of the past who sometimes acknowledged their meddling with the unsavory theme of a certain work, but who usually omitted in silence the offensive passages and facts. John Quincy Adams in his definitive edition of *Chief Shakespearean Drama* politely indicated, by a series of startling asterisks, that he did not care to print the obscene jokes that appear in *The Killing of Abel*, the first vernacular mystery play in medieval English literature. But he failed to mention that most of these jokes are homosexual puns upon Cain's oral-genital and oral-anal intercourse with his "boye" Garcio, with the Devil, and even with his brother Abel. Hyder E. Rollins, in his standard anthology of *The Renaissance in England*, candidly refuses to print much of the finer poetry of Shakespeare's contemporary Richard Barnfield, not because *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594) or *Cynthia, With Certain Sonnets* (1595) contain obscene passages, but because Rollins finds their overtly homosexual themes "unsavory," "cloying and offensive." For an enlightened mind, Barnfield's poetry is no more cloying than many another Elizabethan courtier's pastoral complaint for the unrequited love of his cruel fair, and from a gay point of view the fact that his beloved is a "a lovely Ladde" rather than a disdainful maiden—a Gany-mede rather than an Amaryllis—is a positive joy and a fountain of friendship upon the monotonous field of heterosexual corn.

Rollins' editorial heavy-handedness is fairly typical of the more responsible scholars, and although the modern reader may smirk at such a priggish attitude, at least Rollins had the decency to own up to his deletions. But such is not the case of numerous other scholars and translators, reputed to be even greater than Rollins. The modern student, as unable to read Greek or Latin as are most of his professors, is repeatedly confronted by mystifying asterisks, iniquitously ponderous Latin substitutions for the merely coarse jests of Catullus, mistranslations such as "friend" for "pederast" (*paidikos*), and reams of pages that are silently ellided. Scholarly research in this field consists of a liturgy of excommunication. If we wish to offer serious criticism of the homosexual passages in the *Idylls* of Theocritus, we must be prepared to juggle with the Latin passages in the *English* translation from the *Greek* by A. S. F. Gow—whose translation is a must for scholarly footnotes. The same obstacle will be found in W. R. Paton's definitive-but-dull translation of the twelve volumes of the *Greek Anthology*. As for the so-called complete works of Lucian, the scholarly translators eschew even asterisks and Latinizations, and bury in a footnote the fact that several entire dialogues and numerous passages have been omitted—*passim*. The classic Standard Edition, Benjamin Jowett's Plato, translates "beautiful boy" (*kalos*) as a milder "fair youth," and "the love of boys" (*pederastia*—"pederasty" or "paederasty" depending upon one's typographical sensibilities) as "friendship"—thus effectively obscuring the intergenerational aspects of Platonic paedogogy. In fact the translations of and commentaries upon Plato's *Symposium* have been so refined since Marsilio Ficino's neoplatonic bowdlerization of 1473 that we quite nonchalantly use

the ubiquitous catch-all "Platonic love" to describe John Donne's blatantly heterosexual love-lyrics—without realizing that Platonic love is not possible until a lovely lad's chin is covered by soft down. Plato's *Phaedrus* has suffered an even worse reversal, for Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*, sanctioned by the Renaissance insensibility to plagiarism, paraphrased the passage about an army of homosexual lovers, inserting female pronouns for male pronouns in the right places, to envision an unconquerable army of courtiers whose courage was sustained by their watchful mistresses—perched atop the battlements miles away from the melee of battle! Scholars haven't noticed this disparity of distance, but neither are they well versed in the fact that in the *Phaedrus* Socrates quite explicitly condones sexual intercourse between friends, "friends who may not yet have their full spiritual wings, but who have nevertheless sprouted their feathers and will mount together the ladder of perfection for their love's sake." This passage has been ignored to such an extent that few readers understand the relevance of the quotations from the *Phaedrus* that appear in Mary Renault's *The Charioteer* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Readers of modern homosexual literature have been denied a sense of the continuity of this tradition. Scholars busy themselves so much with suppressing the facts that hardly anyone is aware that way back in 1925 it was discovered that some of Whitman's finest erotic poetry was originally written to "he" and "him" and then heterosexualized for publication—yet critics still talk about "latency" etc. as if this documentation doesn't exist.

The typical manner in which homosexual literature is mistreated is historically illustrated by the way in which Shakespeare's *Sonnets*—and their notorious "problem"—have been handled. These sonnets are of course guilty of pathology by pronouns, so the first important editor, John Benson, in 1640 remedied the situation by replacing each "he" or "him" by "she" or "her", thus evading the irregularity of one Renaissance gentleman addressing another as his sweet wag and master-mistress without being kicked in the cod-piece for his impropriety. Benson's blatant editorial dishonesty has since been corrected, but the more ambiguous sonnets are still deliberately omitted from lower-level anthologies apparently compiled for courteous gentleman readers. The substantial scholars Edmund Malone and Edward Dyce contended (in 1790 and 1832 respectively) that Shakespeare's intimacy of address was merely a Renaissance convention, a view that is still fashionable today. In 1890 Angelo Olivieri documented this view by citing the use of similar terms of endearment by Poliziano, Martelli, Bembo, and Michelangelo—apparently unaware of the fact that Poliziano and Bembo were publicly well-known overt homosexuals and Martelli and Michelangelo at least came under the suspicion. By the time this controversy over Shakespeare's love-diction would wear itself out, critics had erected several monuments to their own euphemistic imaginations. As for the literary, rather than the linguistic, convention, the only other sonnet sequence addressed by one man to a fair youth in English Renaissance literature was Barnfield's *certain sonnets*, containing lines as overtly homosexual as "Sometimes I wish that I his pillow were, / So I might steale a kisse." Claes Schaar in *Elizabethan Sonnet Themes* suggests that Barnfield's sonnets directly influenced Shakespeare's, including the "treasure/pleasure" rhyme, but the common teacher in today's classroom has never heard of Richard Barnfield, and would be shocked to learn of the Theocritean-Virgilian homoerotic tradition that lay behind the "mere Renaissance convention."

The major obstacle for a critic-gay-liberator to overcome is the very curious assumption that homosexual writers express a merely homosexual truth arising from the ghetto of their experience, while heterosexual writers are somehow capable of expressing universal truth—which apparently is relevant even to homosexual readers. We could similarly hold that blacks write only for blacks, Jews only for Jews, and Whigs only for Whigs. Though even an eighteenth-century decorous gentleman would concede that the majority of those who possessed refined taste could not always and

invariably perceive, much less define, universal truth. One of the poems in the Collected Edition of Stephen Spender's work now ends with the universal (albeit sad and cynical) truth: "Whatever happens, I shall never be alone. I shall always have an affair, a railway fare, or a revolution"—this apparently is more universal than the original line in the First Edition: "I shall always have a boy, a railway fare, or a revolution," though the original is more metrically congruent while avoiding the jolting repetition of "affair" and "fare." The Collected Edition version is not more universal; it is simply more vague. A universality gained, as in Michelangelo's *Sonnets*, by a typographical shift from *signor* to *signora*, graphically undermines such a dubious metaphysic, and the experience of gay, black, and women readers seriously discredits "universality" as a viable critical concept, hopefully assigning it to the same antiquarian's niche now occupied by scholarly objectivity and the pathetic fallacy. This is not to debunk the notion that a significant and relevant work of art should have a reasonably generous breadth and some degree of sentimental humanism, but surely Mark Andre Raffalovich's "Our lives are wired like our gardenias" strikes an affinite chord in heterosexuals who have never camped it up to relieve the anxiety of social ridicule. If "universality" is everywhere and consistently defined strictly in terms of either the biases of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant heterosexual males or in terms of neutrality/non-sexuality/impersonality—as in the heterosexual over-praise of Auden's "Lay your sleeping head"—then we have a clear indication of the failure of humanism in the western world.

Most of those critics and educators who take the historical approach because of their partially correct view that knowledge of historical milieu and biography can deepen our understanding of an author's work, strangely abandon this approach when they examine a homosexual writer's work or a (possibly) homosexual theme in a specific work. By ignoring such circumstances, they would have us believe that every homosexual theme in literature is an anomaly, in accordance with the prejudice that homosexual behavior is itself "queer". The classic argument is that the love of Achilles and Patroclus not only is a "spiritual comradeship" in itself, but proof positive that "in the beginning" masculine love was "pure," and "degenerated" into "perversion" during Roman times—quite ignoring Homer's own acknowledgment that hustling was already a thriving business, that Achilles "longed for Patroclus" strength and his manhood, "and that, in the opinions of Lucian, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Plutarch—relying upon their knowledge of works now lost or destroyed—Achilles was Patroclus' wife. Although the critics romantically pursue any suggestion that a poet may have had a secret mistress, when it comes to the biographies of possibly homosexual authors who did not suffer the public humiliation of Oscar Wilde, the standard cliché is "But there's no real evidence." Thus, though John Aubrey said that Sir Francis Bacon was a "paiderastos" and "had gany-medes and favorites," Aubrey cannot be trusted because he was a sensationalistic gossip-monger; although Sir Simonds D'Ewes knew of a "very effeminate-faced youth" who was Bacon's "catamite and bedfellow," D'Ewes cannot be trusted because he was a Puritan extremist; and although even Lady Ann Bacon complained of "that Bloody Percy" whom Francis kept "yea as a coach companion and bed companion" (incidentally, Bacon's will leaves a sum of money to his servant Henry Percy), her testimony is untrustworthy because she had a mental condition in later life. We learn a great deal more about the nature of "trustworthy evidence" when we realize that James Orchard Halliwell in his 1845 edition of D'Ewes' *Autobiography*—the only available edition—quite simply *deletes* the passage in which D'Ewes talks about Bacon's homosexuality (vol. 1, ch. 10, p. 192; the passage is printed separately in a collection of miscellaneous tracts in the British Museum, bound under the title *Historia Vitae et Regni Richardi II*, 1729). By such means as this deliberate suppression the Father of Modern Science, regarded as the veritable incarnation of the ideal "universal" western man, remains untainted by the narrowness of his love.

# Ganymede Raped: Gay Literature-- Critic as Censor

Even if an author is accused and convicted of homosexual acts, critics go to outrageous lengths to protect his purity: Nicholas Udall, author of *Roister Doister*, the first regular English comedy divided into five acts, was sent to the Marshalsea for committing "buggery" with a certain Thomas Cheney, but the scholars concur that the secretary of the Privy Council carelessly misspelled "buggery" for "burglary." It is better—according to heterosexual critics—for an English worthy to be a thief than a homosexual.

If a critic recognizes that an author is "almost certainly latent" if not overt, he seldom proceeds with an analysis of the possible influence of his or her love upon his or her literary works. The biographical head-notes in every sophomore anthology suggest the importance of Petrarch's love for Laura, of Dante's love for Beatrice, of Wordsworth's love for Annette, but never are we told that Oscar's love for Bosie informs nearly all of his poetry, or that the homosexual's need for a public mask is a factor contributing to the satire on social disguise in *The Importance of Being Earnest*; that Whitman's love for Peter Doyle influenced his prophetic theory of comradeship; that A.E. Housman's unrequited love for Myron H. Jackson contributed to the bitter but restrained sorrow of much of his poetry (or that his probably requited love for others contributed to the numerous homoerotic-athletic puns in his verse, or that Wilde's trial is behind the refrain "They're taking him to prison for the nameless and abominable colour of his hair"); or that Edna St. Vincent Millay's frequent references to Sappho or Lesbos are not prompted by her love for Charles, or that Tennyson's love for Arthur Hugh Hallam prompted him to write that most "universal" of sentiments: "'Tis better to have loved and lost/ Than never to have loved at all."

In some ways this lack of awareness is all to the good, for when a critic, whose knowledge of homosexual love is gathered from psychoanalytical primers rather than experience in the gay subculture, decides to correlate an author's love-life and

of the typical homosexual personality. Critics and teachers who never even mention the Oedipus Complex while discussing heterosexual literature are suddenly glib with theories about castration anxiety, pregenital fixations, and nipple substitutes in homosexual literature—as though homosexual literature is somehow "more Freudian" than heterosexual literature. They are immune to the necessity of establishing a table of statistically significant data to support their theories, and will readily construct, as some have done, a comprehensive theory of "homosexual aesthetics" based solely upon the work of Aubrey Beardsley. Thus "scenes du toilette" can be found to be characteristic of homosexual literature in general, though the nearest correlative in Pindar's *Odes* is a wrestler applying oil in preparation for an Olympic contest. Or they will construct, as does Sartre, a metaphysics of masturbation based upon the early work of Jean Genet, quite disregarding the total lack of a profound erotic ontology in the equally homosexual theme of Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (once we realize that its "heroine" is the author's boyfriend).

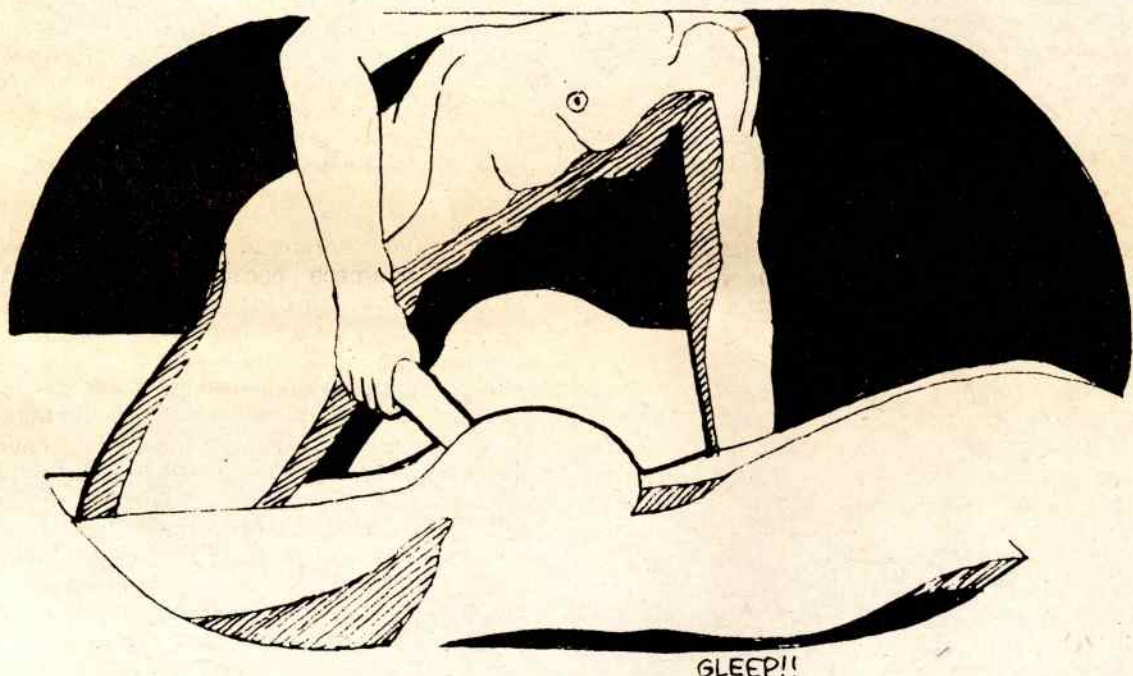
No critic seems to have grappled with the immense difficulty of defining "homosexual literature" in terms wide enough to support an all-inclusive theory about the nature of such literature. "Homosexual literature," as a monolith, would have to be represented not only by literature with a dominant and overt homosexual theme written by an overt homosexual, but all the seemingly disparate categories of literature with a dominant and overt homosexual theme written by a latent homosexual; literature with an overt heterosexual theme written by an overt homosexual; literature with a bisexual theme written by a latent homosexual; literature with a latent lesbian theme written by a latent or overt bisexual and vice versa; literature with an overt homosexual theme written by an overt heterosexual; and a truly vast number of mathematical possibilities of literature with positive or negative, dominant or subordinate, overt or

cussing solely upon the exclusively sexual penetration (or desire to penetrate) of one male by another, or one female by another—concomitant with a fear of penetrating the other sex. Thus while the critic of heterosexual literature can use all the terms and ideas listed under LOVE in the *Syntopicon* to the *Great Books of the Western World* (of which, incidentally, nearly one-third of the authors represented were homosexual), the critic of homosexual literature is reduced to ferreting out obscene puns. If the work in question is an innocuous love-lyric addressed by one male to another, usually devoid of pointers to the author's preference for fellatio, buggery, or frottage, the critic will go on to discuss the poem in the entirely irrelevant terms of the author's supposed fear of or dislike for women. John says "I love you, Henry," and the critic tells us "John hates Mary," though Mary hasn't been mentioned in the poem. Now this is radically unfair: a literary work must be judged, appreciated, and understood by what it expresses, not by what it does not express. It has been said of Jean Genet that "in spite of his total inability to imagine men who are not homosexuals, he does offer variety within his own particular range" (Philip Thody, *Jean Genet*, 1968), and the critics have solemnly concurred in recognizing this "dubiously limited" achievement. Yet a critic who similarly pointed out that, "in spite of his total inability to imagine men who are not heterosexuals, Henry Fielding does offer variety within his own particular range" would be laughed to scorn. However: after our derision has subsided, we might be struck by the revelation that the range of heterosexual literature may well be more limited than the range of homosexual literature, for the former does indeed tend to present a dull vista of heterosexuality while the latter more often than not runs the gamut of hetero, homo, and bisexual experiences, as in James Purdy's *Eustace Chisholm and the Works*.

But the critics seemingly will continue to naively discuss homosexual literature in terms of the general opposite of what is specifically expressed. A homosexual love lyric to a single person is construed as evidence of the author's masochism (all homosexuals are self-destructive), his compulsive promiscuity (all homosexuals are compulsively promiscuous), his fear of women (all homosexuals fear women), and, if there are mythological allusions, his pederastic fixation—for there are mythological allusions, his pederastic fixation—for is not such a poem by the very nature of its pronouns already a pathological document? Such criticism is not only textually irrelevant, but operates from the dangerous sociological principle that human emotions can be lock-stepped into mutually exclusive sexual dichotomies. If I love Goodness it may be philosophically tenable to assume that I therefore hate Evil, but it is certainly not very perceptive to suggest that my love for Gerald cannot coexist with my love, or at least my respect and admiration and affection, for Mary. Homosexual literature is analysed in terms of theories about exclusive homosexuality, when in fact the bulk of homosexual literature is written by bisexual males, often married, who send off love lyrics indiscriminately to both mistresses and boyfriends. In the eighteenth century any educated gentleman referred to "the other sex" when he meant the other sex: our penchant for speaking of "The opposite sex" is a dehumanizing mathematical proposition.

By far the most iniquitous application of this type of non-sequitur reasoning is the assumption that homosexual experience necessarily impairs an author's imaginative abilities. The view that Verlaine corrupted Rimbaud's art as well as his morality is a commonplace in even the most liberal of current biographies, and the less-than-great stature of Tennessee Williams, W. H. Auden, and a host of other writers have been attributed to their homosexual loves. Such causal reasoning rises stinking from the sulphurous depths of the hell over which the medieval demon Backbiter sits in his bigoted pride, spewing venom round about him. It is absurd to suggest that Sophocles, for example, is less great because he loved a wine-waiter, or that the breadth of vision of Goethe, for example, was impaired by his pederastic flirtations with Ferdinand, among others. Let us candidly admit that most homosexual literature is quite mediocre—but let us no less candidly acknowledge that the plethora of decidedly minor heterosexual authors discovered by the horrified student of graduate seminars are equally second- and third-rate. As a statistical fact, there happen to be far more minor heterosexual authors than minor homosexual authors...

Of far more interest than a general theory about the type of literature arising from a homosexual author's relation to his or her homosexual loves or repressions—and of far more fruitful discovery—are a number of specific theories about the literature arising from a homosexual author's relation to a potentially hostile audience: To what extent is the



GLEEP!!

his literary life the analytical composite can be quite grotesque if not monstrous. Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has been reduced to a pathological document of pregenital perversity, particularly oral aggression and anal voyeurism (sic). Yes, Albee has publicly acknowledged that he's homosexual, and, yes, perhaps Martha is a bitch-queen in drag, but surely we can also see the play as a thoroughgoing critique of the social masquerade played by heterosexuals. And "analogy," wrongly presumed to be the major fixation of male homosexual love, is surely less present in Albee's drama than in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. Contemporary critics frequently deprive homosexual literature is narrow, thus betraying the implicit assumption that heterosexual readers have not the imaginative wherewithall to critically apply a homosexual situation to their own. So a little change of emphasis, as for example the heterosexual love triangle in the movie version of the homosexual love triangle in Tennessee Williams' *Night of the Iguana*, or the elimination of the homosexual character Perry from the movie version of *Midnight Cowboy*, are the necessary distortion by which homosexual themes are made comprehensible for heterosexual minds limited by their "universality."

As the taboo against homosexual love gradually lessens—at least in "learned" journals, though most still refuse to publish positive homosexual interpretations—critics will discover, and exploit, a fertile field for research and criticism. They will venture forth into this largely virgin territory woeefully inequipped for their investigation. Most will use the shortcut of a ready-made critical tool in Freudian psychoanalytical theory, as unaware that this monolithic canon of homosexual literature is as mythical a phenomenon as the hypothetical model

latent, male or female homosexual or bisexual or heterosexual themes written by guilty or proud overt or latent homosexual or bisexual or heterosexual male or female authors. Before one knows what's happening, the entire western literary tradition will be subsumed by the homosexual literary tradition. A final correlation of a significant number of these works will succeed at best in offering merely suggestive support for detecting several "major" themes in several "major" categories, though it will certainly undermine our confident definition of "heterosexual literature" and seriously blur most of our prejudicial distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual love. Our new-found sophistication resulting from such an attempt at being definitive will make us more than chuckle at Eric Partridge's assertion, in *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, that Shakespeare could not possibly have been homosexual because none of his bawdy jests is from the woman's point of view...

The survey will, more hopefully, undercut or dependence upon the Freudian hierarchy of erotic phases, for we shall find no devouring mother in the myth of Ganymede, no anal fixation in Andrew Marvell's "Definition of love," no castration anxiety in Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, no gender confusion in Whitman's *Calamus Leaves*, no close-binding-intimate mother in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, etc.

But let us examine in somewhat more detail the non-sequiturs and semantic obscurantism that impregnate most Freudian analyses of homosexual literature. The substantive issue in such literature is homosexual love, or the ambiguously intermingled erotic, emotional, and spiritual relationship between members of the same sex. The critics not only evade this fully human emotion, but degrade it by stripping it of all its nuances and by fo-

BRANARD-74



WAY II  
I WANT TO LIVE  
IN VIEW  
OF THOSE MOMENTS THAT BE LIFE JOINING  
THE HEART WITH MIND  
TO REMAIN  
THE CHILD IN VIEW  
OF THE SUN THE SEA THE MOON  
TO TALK  
WITH THE BREEZE  
TO GO  
ON & IN  
INSIDE  
THE CRAWLING WINGING  
ONE WITH ONE WITH ALL.

I WANT TO MOVE  
CHANGE CONTINUE  
REMAIN AT ONCE  
THE SONG OF THE SINGER  
THE EAR OF MY NEIGHBOR  
THE BITE THE BUG  
THE SORE OF HIM WHO'S ME  
THE SOAKY LAUGHING LAUGH OF HIM WHO'S ME FLYING  
LAGOONS THE PLACES NAMED  
FOR US BY US OUR  
CLOCK TONGUES WE  
NEED & WISH  
THE TOUCH UPON COMMINGLING  
IN THE HARDWOOD  
NETTLED OUR  
LOSS  
BETWEEN THE YELLOW HEAT  
THE WHITE COLD  
HABITAT OF LOVE-FUCK HAD  
IN THIRTEEN RIVERS OF MOUTH  
MINE THAT IS YOURS ONE  
SPECK BREATHING  
THE PROTH SEA FORTH  
AH! STREAMING THIGHS NECK  
NIPPLE CHEEK  
GLINT-LIT FUCK!

I WANT TO SEE TO FEEL  
THE LIMIT OF DAY  
THE INDISCERNIBLE BLUE  
GREEN  
THE PINK  
LIMIT OF ROD  
LIGHTNING NIGHT  
TO DASH  
INTO THE BEAM  
LISTEN  
ONE WARM EAR  
CURLED UPON  
ERUPTION MOUNTAIN OF YOU  
WHO'S BODY  
THE GROWING PEAKS  
SING SILENCE NO-SONG OF ALL SONGS SONG  
INSIDE  
THE SILKEN AMPLE HAIR OF YOU  
TOUCHING TOUCHING TEACHING  
ALMOST TOO PERFECT  
CRYSTALLITES SCREAMING  
BAWL-LIFE  
BALLING ON...

come  
come to be  
WHO DOUSES WITH CHERRY LIFE  
RED-HOT WHIMPERING IN GOLDEN ARMS!  
+  
BUT IF I CAN'T BE  
WHAT I WANT TO BE  
WITH YOU  
OR ANY UNEARTHLY'S FAULT  
SOME SWEETER SOME LESS  
PERMEATE THIS AIR  
& AFTER-SCENT  
BE & BE WITH ME EVEN WITHOUT ME  
IS ALL  
I ASK IS ALL  
I KNOW IS WHAT FORMS THE WHOLE  
THE NOTES THE MOMENT RESTS  
CLEFS  
OF WINGING ONES & SLURS  
CRESCENDOS  
UNIMAGINABLE EVERYWHERE.

come  
come to be go  
on...

—Richard Taggart

Wednesday  
on crowded  
Chittaranjan Avenue  
just  
behind  
the Calcutta  
Medical College  
Hospital  
just behind  
the Calcutta Medical College Hospital,  
a human  
body  
a human body  
was lying  
was lying  
in a highly  
decomposed  
state  
was lying in a highly decomposed state  
in a highly decomposed state

The two  
of us  
The two of us  
grasped  
grasped  
each  
other's  
body  
grasped each other's body  
feeling  
every inch  
of flesh  
feeling  
every inch of flesh  
as we ground  
our hips  
as we ground  
our hips  
in rotating  
movements  
in rotating  
movements  
around and around  
around and around  
back  
then moving  
back  
then moving  
back  
our bodies  
forward  
ramming  
our bodies forward  
ramming  
our bodies forward

the mirrored  
walls  
the mirrored walls here  
here  
will slide  
away  
the mirrored walls here  
will slide away  
and in a moment  
of holy  
rapture  
and in a moment of holy rapture,  
Rodney's  
will transform  
itself  
Rodney's will transform itself  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
Free Clinic  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
the demons  
who appear  
the demons who appear  
externally  
externally  
are the result  
of our own  
inner  
poisons  
are the result of our own  
inner poisons  
of our own inner poisons  
Tell  
me  
what  
to do  
Tell me  
what to do  
Tell me  
what to do  
Tell me what to do

the mirrored  
walls  
the mirrored walls here  
here  
will slide  
away  
the mirrored walls here  
will slide away  
and in a moment  
of holy  
rapture  
and in a moment of holy rapture,  
Rodney's  
will transform  
itself  
Rodney's will transform itself  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
Free Clinic  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
into the Los Angeles  
Free Clinic  
the demons  
who appear  
the demons who appear  
externally  
externally  
are the result  
of our own  
inner  
poisons  
are the result of our own  
inner poisons  
of our own inner poisons  
Tell  
me  
what  
to do  
Tell me  
what to do  
Tell me  
what to do  
Tell me what to do

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HARRISON, Lou (b. Portland, Oregon 14 May 1917), American composer. "He was brought up on the West Coast, facing east", writes Wilfred Mellers. Yes, most of Lou Harrison's life and education has occurred in California, while his central interest lies in the sonorities of Asia. He was, in 1934-35, a pupil of Henry Cowell in San Francisco, and later of Schoenberg in Los Angeles. During these years he organized recitals of percussion music with John Cage while "moonlighting" as a florist, a record clerk, a poet, a dancer and dance critic, a music copyist (his handwriting is famous for its beauty), playwright, and builder of instruments using found objects: the tack piano, automobile brake drums, graduated coffee cans and flower pots, clock coils, gongs submerged in washtubs, plumber's pipes.

In 1943 he emigrated to New York where Virgil Thomson became an intellectual (though not a musical) influence, and a champion of his works. Here too he commented professionally in such lamented periodicals as *View*, *Modern Music*, and the *Herald Tribune*. He also briefly acted as editor for the trailblazing *New Music Edition*, wrote a pamphlet *About Carl Ruggles*, and conducted the first performance of any Charles Ives symphony, the 3rd complete. In 1947 a breakdown provoked an extended retirement into the N.Y. Psychiatric Institute, although the same year brought a sizable grant from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Soon after, he quit New York for good, teaching first in Portland, then at Black Mountain College, finally returning to California and into his present home in Aptos.

He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952, and again in 1954. During the latter year he also won the Twentieth Century Masterpiece Award, and attended the International Conference in Rome where Leotyne Price premiered his first opera, a monodrama titled *Rapunzel*. The following year he received a Fromm Foundation Award, and a commission from the Louisville Orchestra to write the *Four Strict Songs* (eight baritones and stylized orch.) on his own text, in Esperanto, about certain of his constant concerns—love, plant growth, peace, and mutual enjoyment on our travels to death.

From 1957 to 1960, in preference to a lucrative job at Buffalo University, he worked full time in an animal hospital, composing at night with the aid of Benzedrene. He then "withdrew" again for a year. The early 1960s took him to the Far East. A Rockefeller Grant provided study first in Tokyo and Taiwan, then in Korea with Dr. Lee Hye Ku and Liang Tsai Ping who, in teaching him the principles of Korean court music and Chinese classical music, made of him America's first true orientological composer since the late Colin McPhee.

In 1963 he became a Senior Scholar at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. He also intensified his schedule of building new instruments (now incorporating such exotica as choirs of jade flutes) conforming to his lifelong obsession with pitch relations and a need for what he calls "just", rather than "tempered", intonation. From 1965 until the present he has been variously occupied as ballet accompanist, researcher in Oaxaca, beneficiary of the Thorne Foundation, composer of his first film score, teacher at San Jose State College, and, with a nucleus of friends, as touring concertizer and lecturer on his own and oriental music. He is devoutly involved with pacifism and with Esperanto as a means to world peace, with hiking and poetry, and with civil rights for homosexuals. Indeed, these involvements are conjoined in his art, the most recent example being an opera for puppets called *Young Caesar* based on an early (male) love affair of the emperor.

Lou Harrison's music is not easily pigeon-holed. Although most of his hundred some works are first rate, they are of a wild and wilful variety of genres. Especially during the 1940s they were 'occasional', speaking a language, as required by the commissioner (usually a choreographer), ranging from the strict Schoenbergian 12-note formula, through the Coplandesque diatonic and the Ivesian total sound fields, to studies for groups of non-pitched percussion. In general, however, Harrison is a melodist. Rhythm is pronounced in his work too, though rather more four-square than eccentric. Counterpoint is not essential to his typical scores today, harmony even less. His *Koncherto* (sic, an Esperanto spelling) for Violin and Percussion Orchestra is virtually all in line, while other of his pieces from every period are solely melisma with ostinato or drone background. The effect is exceedingly Romantic, but, curiously, neither Chinese nor Western—removed in time and space.

Harrison has never had a mass following, for he has lived secluded, flirting with neither the New York market or the college circuits which in America remain the chief outlets for contemporary music. He nonetheless is protected by a circle of friends (notably Peter Yates, the 20th-century specialist, Leopold Stokowski, the conductor, and Oliver Daniel, the publisher) who are focal in keeping his production before a discriminating public.

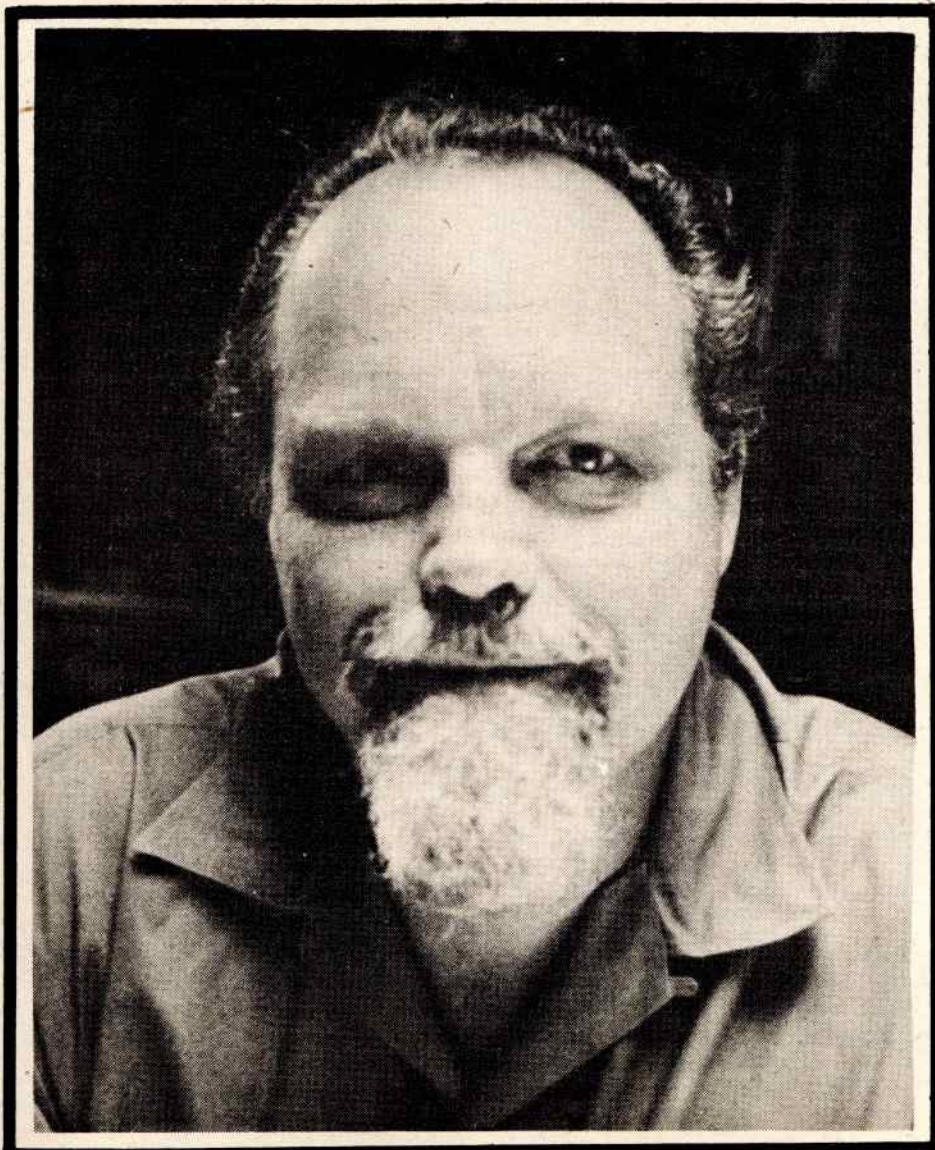
Ned Rorem  
[from *Groves's Dictionary of Music*]

The following interview with composer Lou Harrison was taped by Winston Leyland, editor of *Gay Sunshine*, at the composer's Aptos, California home in Summer, 1973. Musician Bill Colvig also participated in the interview. It was revised and edited in October, 1974. A photo of the interviewer appears on page 29 of the joint *Fag Rag Gay Sunshine* issue (Summer 1974).

In the interview, W.L. = Winston Leyland; L.H. = Lou Harrison; B.C. = Bill Colvig.

Winston Leyland: Why don't we start our by talking about your earlier life, your background in general?

Lou Harrison: I was born in Portland, Oregon in 1917. I came to California at an early age, and so I really regard myself as a Californian, more specifically as a San Franciscan, though I've had my troubles of late with that city. Nonetheless, it's there I grew up and came-out. When I was growing up there, it had lots of concertizing. John Cage was in and out; he had been introduced to me by Henry Cowell. We began giving concerts and we did percussion concerts. That was the golden age of percussion. Things that now are recorded and have become part of the repertoire are things we were doing then.



Lou Harrison, 1972

# LOU HARRISON: AN INTERVIEW

At that time, San Francisco was really fairly relaxed already about being gay. I never had any trouble with it at all. None of friends did either. The first time I encountered that feeling of tightness and constraint, or up-tightness, was in New York. When I went to New York for the first time I did see that there was a certain difficulty, but it never really occurred to me in San Francisco, particularly when young. Of course, when you're young, you're immortal; the world is marvelous, and it's springtime. Just before I left San Francisco, I lived for three years with a man who is now dead. He was older than I. I generally like people older than myself. That's been a pattern all my life, though I've had little affairs with younger people.

We were very active at that time in giving concerts on our own. We established the basis of a free-lance musical activity which was experimental and exciting just by doing it ourselves. John Cage and I, for example, would go out and rent a hall like the California Club where we gave a now famous concert. Later, I did something at the *Fairmont Hotel* where they had a little theater downstairs. We had a few friends who were able, really very skillful musicians. Then we would either compose or ask our friends to compose pieces for the concert. John Cage used to do this before we were together in San Francisco at the Cornish School in Seattle. Henry Cowell had stimulated both of us to all of this. At that time John Cage was married to Xenia Cage, and he and Xenia were very dear friends with Sherman and myself. Sherman and I had rented a big studio where we all rehearsed; it was a dance studio.

During this time, I was working at Mills College with dancers, and I taught musical form to dancers and composed for dancers a great deal. The main thing I remember of that period is living with Sherman for about three years. Then we separated. At that time my emotional life was very intense as you know it is for some young people. It was a real upset in my life. Then I took up for a couple of years with a young man who became a dancer. We lived together while I was working as a florist. This was in the very early forties. Then we moved together to Los Angeles where I also worked at UCLA and where I studied with Schoenberg at the same time, and accompanied and composed in the dance department. Also, I worked with Lester Horton who was a marvelous man, just lovely, and had a studio there.

He was a very great choreographer. It is now being realized slowly that he corresponded to and had all of the same genius and excitement that in New York was given to Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and all this school. Lester had his own group; and his principal dancers are still dancing.

Then we went to New York around 1942. Shortly after

that, I found myself alone; my other friend vanished. That was the war period and New York was wide open. Friends helped me. For example, John Cage introduced me to Virgil Thomson. Virgil or John Cage introduced me to Minna Lederman, editor of *Modern Music Quarterly*, and she gave me reviewing for the summer. So I covered band concerts and new pieces that were being played around during the summer. But right away Henry Cowell also gave me some work from Charles Ives, and I worked for Ives. I was in the big city and alone except for these personal friends. My private life began to take the form of the random cruising that New York made madly available at that time. During the war, New York was host to all the armies and navies of the world and everybody else. It was quite a free and open sort of life, which, incidentally, no longer exists. I took up while I was there with a minister. That was a sort of extraordinary period in my life. He had a Black congregation in the Bronx. At that time I was a little bit militant on the Black situation, and helped him a bit like that. Every so often he'd get a blockage and come over Saturday night, and we'd do the sermon for Sunday, which was fun. He was a very nice man, rather melancholy, from the South, and needed cheering up every so often. He now is very happily married and has a congregation in Brooklyn, I think.

W.L.: At the time you lived in New York were you also friendly with literary people?

L.H.: No, I wasn't, because they were very much older and established people. I knew Robert Duncan. He was very young at that time. He taught us poetry one night which was grand fun. He gave us some words and we made poems up. I used to, in fact, see him quite frequently. I also knew John Henry Meyer, who had a gallery and did puppetry. Paul Bowles wrote him a little puppet opera. As a matter of fact, Jane Bowles wrote him something which is still in the repertoire too.

W.L.: You knew Paul and Jane both?

L.H.: Yes. As a matter of fact, it was Paul who, in a sense, gave me his job on the *Herald Tribune* when he went to Morocco for the first time and stayed. He came down to my house and offered me the post. So I went up and started to work. I knew Paul quite well, as a matter of fact. A very mysterious person, and utterly charming. Still what a marvelously skillful writer. Last time I saw him he brought one of his Arab friends in New York to a party at Leopold Stokowski's. I think Peggy Glanville-Hicks had set some of his letters for voice and orchestra. Oh by the way, Peggy was always part of our scene in New York. She's a charming woman. We're all very dear friends. Paul was composing at that time you know. He was a composer for the most part.

Once he took up writing, he simply abandoned composing which was too bad because he was a very good composer.

**W.L.:** I have a recording of his *Scenes d'Anabase* and *Music for a Farce*.

**L.H.:** Well you know then that he's a good composer. He had also an absolutely fascinating way of working. He showed me how he did it once. He would write down a measure or some ideas just a few bars long or something like that on a scrap of paper. Then he'd dump it in a waste basket. When the waste basket got  $\frac{3}{4}$  full, or something like that, of just these little fragmentary ideas, he'd take them out and start putting them together in different ways, like a mosaic. Some of them would work, some wouldn't. He'd wait until he'd find something else. Occasionally he'd copy out more of one because that would come back a couple of times. He'd piece together his whole pieces this way. It was a marvelous mosaic way of working, sort of a way of sneaking up on the subconscious too because you could emit these little sparks and then finally the whole work would appear as you contemplated the entire board or field as it were. I thought that was fascinating. I've never really tried it; I should sometime to see what that would work like for me. It worked for Paul, I thought very well. I think he did the *Sonata for Two Pianos* that way, a beautiful work. Fizzle and Gold have been playing it for years.

**W.L.:** The relationships you had in New York were not satisfactory?

**L.H.:** Because of so much else they tended to be not. I took up with a young artist, and that was catalytic because he helped me with calligraphy. I learned a lot from him. We still are good friends. But that one was the only catalytic and interesting relationship. As a matter of fact, it was somewhere around then that I decided that the next person that I had to do with would either be a musician or a functioning artist of some sort. New York was most valuable in acquisition of knowledge. I really gained an awful lot in the experience of reviewing, having to think about music, the presence of an incredible number of museums which I haunted. I had lots of artist friends, painter friends especially. The painter world I've always liked too because they have a certain easy camaraderie that is great pleasure. It was very different from the literary or musical worlds because they are dealing with sub-verbal things too. They relate to music, and they love music most of them. So, New York was a very widening experience in many ways. But it also brought me into conflict in some sense because on the west coast my experience had been that the nearest relation we had as Americans was Asia. You know, San Francisco is close to Asia, whereas in New York, you are just a stone's throw from Europe. It's a completely different civilization. So that took some difficulty, made some difficulty for me. When I got back I immediately refelt the connections with Asia. Then, of course, I plunged into them at once when there was the opportunity of going to Asia actually. Since then, of course, I've been better balanced, back on home ground and also Mexico.

We had a group that was more or less stable in New York, but it was heterogeneous. It was mixed as to sexual orientation. We all believed, though, in advanced technical procedures. The whole circle included the younger ones like myself, John Cage, Ben Weber, Frank Wigglesworth and Alan Hovhaness. Then the older age level with whom we were very close included Henry Cowell, central information as you know for a whole generation or more of musicians, and Virgil Thomson. Edgar Varese was in the periphery and Carl Ruggles and, of course, I did some work for Charles Ives; there also were Wallingford Riegger and Otto Luening. Harry Partch had not come into the picture. He was still working, I believe, out here. He came to New York when I was there. I do remember writing a review, a dreadfully uninformed one, of one of his concerts there.

It was what I call the new music group that most of us were interested in. We were developing advanced procedures, trying to hear the music of the previous generation that had not been done. Neo-classicism was very strong when I arrived there and the Americanistic thing. I and several others drew attention to the work of previous generations that were not being heard. For example, there was no performances, at that time, of Ruggles and Ives, or very few indeed, and Varese and his group. It was that which I wanted to hear. So we stimulated interest in that and did give concerts and succeeded in swerving the course of music a little bit in that way I think. So at that time, it did not basically devolve on sexual orientation, though some of us tended to group together because it was comfortable. Of course it always has. Some of us collected and spent time together simply because we could share common feelings and understandings. That also passed clear over the aesthetic; we had no common aesthetic at all. I don't think anybody does, do they? At that time, of course, nobody had in mind doing a gay movie involving all of the arts, or for that matter, a stage work or anything of that sort. There was no reason for any collective action as specifically being gay. Consequently there were a hundred different aesthetics, ways of doing things, different interests in the arts too because there was no way publicly of doing anything about being gay at that point.

New York for me, Winston, was not a productive period as to composition. In the first place it's too noisy. I don't see how anybody lives in New York. I can't any more. Also there is so much going on, and as a young person you feel like you have to do it all. Besides, there was the question of earning a living which involved a good deal of copying, and then also music reporting. Music reporting I found, at once, good for me because it makes you think about music; but also, it has that awful business of while you're sitting listening to a piece, you are at the same time trying to think of something to say about it. And that's not good. It means you're not really listening to the music. Eventually I had a breakdown. I'm sure New York's noise and the general complexity of everything, all contributed to it. Since then I have not liked to review or write about music except more abstractly. Then I took to country living, and as you can see, I still live in the country. I like the quiet. I came back here around 1953, following a two year interlude at Black Mountain College after the breakdown, and I've been here ever since.

**W.L.:** Maybe you could talk a little about your involvement

in the Black Mountain School in the early '50's.

**L.H.:** That was a strange and difficult period in my life because I had a big breakdown before I went there. I think John Cage suggested me as a possible teacher. I went down and I had a very bad reaction to it at first. Later I began to like it; it was a conversion. At that time, Charles Olson was our faculty head and Mrs. Rice from the earlier institute that Black Mountain broke off from in Florida. Max Dane, whom I used to think of as the great dane, was there. He was a mathematician, a perfectly charming man who played the cello and liked to play a Bach sonata every so often. I had only two or three pupils. One of them was Merrill Gillespie, now in Berkeley. During the summer we had Bob Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly, both of whom I enjoyed very much, and Paul Goodman, such a nice man. John Cage and Merce did one of the first of their "things", you know, with various things happening, timings by the watch and so on. It was like one constant festival, people were arriving all the time. Robert Duncan was there. Bill Masselos came down and played a piano concert. I arranged that. At the same time Franz Kline was there painting. I put one of Kline's paintings over the grand piano. Bill Masselos played one of the Ives sonatas, with the Franz Kline abstraction hanging in the air right above the piano; that was a marvelous thing. I also worked with Catherine Litz, the dancer, who is now in San Francisco working with Sheila Koregos.

Black Mountain was based on a farm, you know, and it was a co-op. The pupil/teacher relationship was fantastic. We had one or two pupils apiece, you know. It was also quite free. I took a class with Johana Yalovetz. Her husband, who was a musician, had died and she stayed on. She taught bookbinding, and I learned to bind books there with her. Our student body ranged from people who have gone on to become quite well known to people who seemed to drop out and have stayed dropped out, as far as we know. We had a good time, and it was an extraordinary experience for me, quite intense at the time. Part of that getting along was in some sense coming to terms with my own homosexuality in terms of a community too. And it wasn't until much later that it dawned on me that my homosexuality was in some sense valuable. And it does stand to reason that if you are going to have young people growing up being homosexual (and nature herself produces this generation after generation) any good school should have at least one model. This seems to have been part of the attitude of some of the other faculty members and students there too. There had been another homosexual faculty member just before I came there. Nothing was made of it, and I think Black Mountain was one of the few institutions in the United States where that was true.

I moved back to the West Coast about '53. Then I went to Rome in 1954 for a conference that Nicholas Nabokov and Virgil Thomson had invited me to. I won an international prize there. Stravinsky gave me the certificate. I had a nice conversation with him and with Malapiero. I cruised the Tiber at late hours with other distinguished people, and had a good time. Also I had an Italian lover while I was there, who was charming. We made love in Michaelangelo's old studio, which was the water works at that time. Then I came back here, and my parents gave me this place so that I could work.

I moved here to Aptos nineteen years ago, in 1954. The last six or seven of those years Bill (Colvig) has been in my life. As I approached 50, I tended toward alcoholism. I was producing alright, but when I came out here I was in a fury against all of New York and all of the difficulties it had meant to me. I have had periods, even here, when I could not even talk about music with anyone except possibly Bob Hughes who has some magic gift with me about this matter. But it has been very productive out here. During my life I've earned my living different ways. When I was living in San Francisco I earned my living at the Palace Hotel as a florist for a while before I went to Mills College. And then here I worked for four or five years as an animal nurse in an animal hospital. Then I got the Phoebe Ketchum Foreign Award for composers. The award ran for three years. It's the biggest award that can be given a composer in this country. I went to Mexico then for a year and came back. At the same time, I was asked to teach at San Jose State, and I've been there ever since, 6 years, 7 years just about.

I met Bill (Colvig) in the first year there, and he moved down here right away. We've been living happily ever after. I've involved Bill, or rather Bill got me involved. When I first met him I was in another period of hating music. Then Bill got me reinvolved because he comes from a long musical family. He seemed to like to give concerts, so I roped him in on the concerts I was asked to do, and gradually I got to do more of them. Now we're madly busy all the time giving concerts. I've written my best music the last few years, too. Also, he has become an instrument builder. In short, he is so much a part of my life, both professionally and personally, and it's an inextricable compound now. We're really one person in some sense.

**W.L.:** Do you think this is the first time in your life that you've had this kind of relationship both in your personal life and in regard to your work?

**L.H.:** Yes. There was only one other and that was with a young New York artist. It was a personal relationship, and he was part of the art world too and had an independent role. He's now quite famous and well known in a special field of art. That was the closest. I never had to do personally with a musician as part of my life. It works very well now because Bill seems to be just part of everything. He's also extremely bright and able to do the special things that I want done. He also is interested in doing them, so it works out beautifully. Obviously, we're living happily ever after. When we met we already knew many people in common and had a background that was curiously intertwined for years and years; it's surprising we didn't meet before. As a matter of fact we first formally met when Ned Rorem and I were reading *Facade* at the old Spaghetti Factory in San Francisco. Ned Rorem came out to do some pieces of Bob Hughes for the Oakland Youth Chamber Orchestra. It was Bob Hughes' suggestion that Ned and I read the verse in a performance of *Facade*. So we did it and Bob Hughes conducted, and a friend introduced me to Bill. I took one look at him and listened to his voice,

and I knew.

I'd had three or four year relationships in my past. But this is the first real permanent relationship that I've ever felt strongly about, that it really was an integrated life. I think that being fifty had something to do with it. By the way, Ned and I have been talking about this subject. Forty hit him pretty hard because he realized he was no longer a youth. Oh, he dreaded that moment. But fifty is when it hit me. When you're forty, after all, you might easily have another half to your life. By the time you're fifty, you are fairly certain you're not going to have another half. Boy it hits you. So there is no more nonsense; you're going to have things the way you want for the rest of it. I think that really helps give a mind set that makes a permanent relationship possible. What do you think about that Bill?

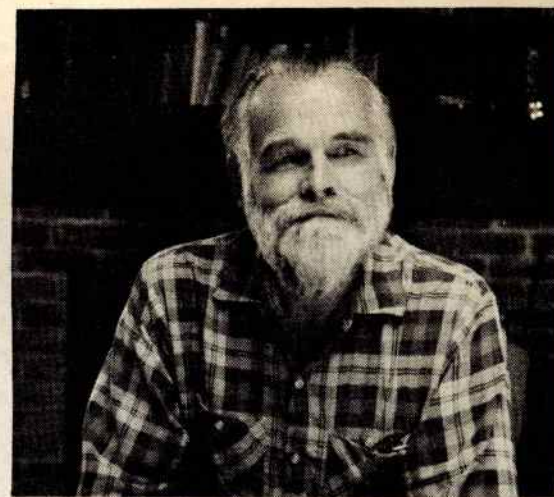
**Bill Colvig:** I think it did in our case. A lot of it is just getting more realistic about everything in general. Younger people are so idealistic, hetero- or homo- sexual. A lot have a hard time making a permanent relationship. They always expect too much, over idealize the whole thing.

**L.H.:** And also they are immortal, so they can afford to hold ideals, more imaginary images. I think that young people now are much more realistic and much more sensible than when Bill and I were young. They know so much more than we did. You've no idea how tiny and protected and tight the whole thing was by comparison. Well there were so fewer people too. Nowadays the kids encounter great masses of people with all sorts of different ideas. They encounter through the media a thousand things that we had no access to either. They are much more informed, much cooler characters that ever in history probably. I'm full of admiration. When you deal with a young person nowadays, by the time they're in their twenties they're already really mature and sensible. But still that sometimes doesn't really alter what goes on in your body. You can't alter those anabolic and catabolic processes; they just happen. We're timed inside the genes. That does make a difference too. So there is at any rate a certain point to that business of mortality hitting you when you're about 50, the knowledge that you are going to have things your own way. That's the way I reacted. I suppose some people give up, or some people get neurotic. I'm stubborn; I'm a Taurus, very much the bull; so that's the way it hit me.

**W.L.:** I think it's very beautiful to see the kind of integrated relationship that you have.

**B.C.:** We're both very accustomed to it and every once in awhile we reflect on what it would be like not to have it, and we don't even want to think about it.

**L.H.:** It's unthinkable for me, really unthinkable. That's why we worry about becoming a "duprass". In Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* a "duprass" is a couple so close together that they really pity the rest of the world and do not have any further social feelings. We're not really a duprass, I'm sure about that. In the first place we give too many concerts.



Bill Colvig, Aptos, Cal. 1972

**W.L.:** Do you feel that if you had this kind of integrated relationship in your twenties, it would have affected your work as a composer?

**L.H.:** Oh, I think it would. But then, of course, it's almost impossible to think back. For example, it might well have released me as a composer. But would I have had the knowledge that would have made such an integration possible for both of us, and would he have had it. I'm just happy that it happened when it did, and that we are living happily ever after.

**B.C.:** Zappily ever after.

**L.H.:** Zappily ever after. Bill has a very good sense of humor. That's also a help. I tend to get very solemn. I've got a drive. I'm not really happy unless I'm finishing things. I'm happy for a while, then I have to start finishing something else. I have to be sobered up by funnies every so often, and he's a great help along that line. One of the nicest things Bill said to me after we met was, "I've always wanted to live in a cabin in the woods with a dirty old man and now my dream is realized." When I took up with Bill, those things I used to do when I was young with my first lover, like climbing mountains and going out back-packing, all came back. It was a great joy because I do need to be out in nature. We are, as a matter of fact, very well integrated in this community. We're always invited together; there's never any problem. Of course, we're also a functioning professional team; that's understood as well. So it works very well. It's a marvelously integrated life for us.

**B.C.:** Should we put in here about my having been invited to the Institute as your spouse?

**L.H.:** This last year I was elected to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters along with Allen Ginsberg, Joe Campbell (an old friend of mine), James Brooks, the painter, Jasper Johns and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Induction ceremonies were held in the hall there, and there was a luncheon beforehand. I told them that Mr. Colvig would be coming too and that he needed tickets. Then it was

stated on one of the letters that they were expecting Mr. Colvig for luncheon too. So we both appeared and sat at the same table.

**B.C.:** That's all that were at the reception, the inductees and their spouses and older members of the Institute. So I was actually invited along just as a spouse as a matter of course.

**L.H.:** Well, Bill, I think it's more than that. You're a colleague too. We're so integrated a functioning team that it would be hard to separate us at this point for any reason. There is that lovely story about Tennessee Williams. When he was making a movie, there was a young man around at a party. One of the directors came up and said, "What do you do?" And he said, "I sleep with Mr. Williams," which is a position in itself. Bill's function is, of course, not like that; neither is mine for him. It's much more elaborate than that. We met through music, and we continue to operate through music, of course. It's our business.

After we met I found out that Bill came from a long family of musicians. Oh, it's a marvelous family, just darlings. They've invited me right in. It's really marvelous to live, as it were, in an extended family. His mother writes both of us with affection. We visit them. All the brothers and sisters are affectionate and warm to us. I've felt very included in a family that is much larger than I had any knowledge of before, and all musical, too.

**B.C.:** He was the only one invited to a family birthday party for my father's eightieth birthday who wasn't a blood relative or actually related by marriage. He sat at the head of the table along with Papa and me. There was about thirty-five or forty people.

**L.H.:** I was astounded at one point to realize that yes, there his eldest son was at his right hand, and I was beside the eldest son. On the other side was the eldest daughter and her husband, and so on right down the line. It took a while for that to dawn on me. But I was thus included; so it was an extraordinary experience for me. We have continuing good relations with the family. My mother balked a little at first, but she finally accepted Bill.

**W.L.:** Both of you have found that your creativity has been stimulated by the deep interpersonal relationship?

**L.H.:** Oh, I'd say yes. Don't you agree with that?

**B.C.:** Oh, yes.

**L.H.:** I am perfectly certain that I wouldn't have composed the things I've composed in the last four or five years without the stimulus from Bill. He's part of the very mechanism by which it's done. I don't mean the spiritual or intellectual or emotional mechanism. I simply mean he builds instruments, he plays. It's all part of doing it. Also, the creativity from our relationship keeps me going. I don't know if you could even call it a stimulus; it's a sort of release he gives me that makes it possible to do these works. I find that for the first time I'm actually doing the larger works of my maturity because I have in some sense a normal life for the first time too. I'm no longer on the road to being an alcoholic. I get more and more stable and can do more things.

**B.C.:** The only trouble is the more things you find you can do the more you try to do. We're forever having this awful struggle trying to do so many things. I think my life changed for the better getting involved with all this personally, helping Lou to get his composing done.

**L.H.:** Well there's more to it than that. When Bill first came down, he didn't perform in public. Now, he's a professional musician performing in public quite constantly, and he has his own acclaim as such. He gets reviews and comments and he is known as a professional musician on a national scale. Now he has gone on to become an instrument builder. A long time ago I used to ask people to build things for me, and I'd make designs and take them down to a carpenter. Now I just give Bill the problem generally, and he comes up with extremely inventive solutions. About a year ago he produced the entire gamelan for the *Heart Sutra* and for *Young Caesar*, which is no small achievement. This last year he's been concentrating on the monochords and the transfer instrument. He comes up with new ideas, very inventive for construction and perfection. So he does all sorts of creative things. The Mode Room is the project now.

Many years ago I thought of the idea that there was nowhere on the planet where you could go to study all the various musical modes that mankind has made in the course of history. It suddenly dawned on me that it would be a marvelous thing to have a Mode Room. I first proposed it in an article at the Tokyo Conference in 1962. Then the idea lapsed, because, after all, it would require a room somewhere, probably a host university and then a fund to keep it going. What I had in mind was a set of drawers. For example, you could pull a drawer and there would be Ptolemy's intense diatonic. Then you would have bars, or tuning forks, for an octave. Somewhere in the room there should be a harp or a large instrument which you could tune up over many octaves to really study its characteristics and be able to compose on it. Then there should be a big book which should tell you when the mode was first written down, or where it was first discovered, or what its history in diffusion among people was. Well this could amount to quite a large library of such material; and it fascinated people. I called it the Mode Room, of course, because that's what it would be. I thought: someday I'm going to do something about it.

About a year ago, for one of my classes, Bill and I whipped up a plain monochord, just a stick. Within a week he had gone and produced a really good professional monochord with a steel tube and exact to within a millimeter in a whole meter's length which is indiscernible to the ear, and almost indiscernible to laboratory instruments. Then he perfected a method of playing the modes on the monochord. Then we decided to go on and make a transfer instrument to transfer the modes. All of a sudden it dawned on us that the Mode Room should be a kit that anybody could have instead of a place where people had to go. It could probably be produced fairly inexpensively. So that's what we are up to. There will be a book that Dr. John Chalmers is writing, *The Divisions of the Tetrachord*, which I regard as probably the most important book on music in many centuries. Then the

production of a monochord, a transfer harp, and a book of history about intonation. Then also the publication of these strips because on the monochord you have to have paper strips which measure off the modes, and so we'll be able to publish those too. The whole thing is going to be the Mode Room. We hope to get it in functioning operation in about a year. I think it's one of the most important things musically that I will ever do. It fills a real need; and it is also endlessly stimulating. Each one of these modes is a world, you know, Winston. It's absolutely fascinating to hear modes and, for example, to cross history like that, to realize that the mode you are listening to, because it was notated in true mathematic ratios, is exactly the way Ptolemy was hearing it in Alexandria in the Second Century B.C. It's like having a phonographic time machine, and it's a very exciting musical experience.

**W.L.:** Is much information about the modes taken from books of research?

**L.H.:** Oh yes, and some of it's quite hard to find. I did discover that there are two great periods in musical intonation. There is the Greek period from Pythagoras through Ptolemy. Then there's a gap of several centuries. When the Arabs took up Greek learning, there is another great flourishing. Avicenna, for example, turns out to have had a very exciting life. So now I'm writing on that as well. It's very exciting, this world of intonation across the planet and through civilizations. It's going to take a long time. We'll gradually just collect modes from all over. There are a lot of ethnic records from various civilizations, and we can transcribe those modes and date them. It's like the early days when they first began to take astronomical observations.

**W.L.:** What about the earlier relationships that you've had? You mentioned that you lived with a few people for periods of two or three years. Were those catalytic in any sense?

**L.H.:** They may have been in terms of my inner growth and understanding, but I'm not sure of that, Winston, because really for a great deal of my life I was an awful prig. I suppose I still look back on things that simply shock me that I said and did, the way I behaved. But I suppose we all shock ourselves occasionally. Cocteau had a wonderful phrase for that, he said, "I have an angel in me whom I am constantly shocking." I was much too preoccupied with my work, with my art, with my music, and a sort of interior selfishness.

**B.C.:** I don't think I would have been able to stand him. I'm not sure he would have been able to stand me either.

**L.H.:** Again, we arrived at just the right time. The gods have been plotting this for a really long time.

**B.C.:** I was fairly neurotic when I was younger. I was sort of up-tight. We never would have got along at all. Another thing, he was a heavy smoker, and I couldn't stand people who smoked a lot. I wouldn't have had anything to do with him on that score. Luckily he quit a couple of years before he met me.

**L.H.:** So everything conspired to make that work. It turns out that Bill and I had mutual friends, even one of his brothers and I knew one another many years ago. We played recorder together in San Francisco State. We had a lot of mutual friends as composers. Bill collected composers; he likes them. I take it that comes from being in a musical family; sooner or later you get to the source.

**B.C.:** I only had two before him.

**L.H.:** Yes, I felt as though I had joined a "barem" at first. I wrote to one of the other members to that effect. They've all dropped out of his life.

**B.C.:** Unluckily, the one who meant most, a great deal to me was dying when I was making the gamelan. I was so busy with the gamelan I did not have time to write him and I knew he was getting worse all the time. But I sort of ignored him and the news of his death came as a great shock. It was just one of those coincidences that happened.

**L.H.:** Well, I think that's forgivable. Now he's got an angel that's being shocked.

**W.L.:** I saw on the shelf your big book on angels, *Dictionary of the Angels*. I'm an angelophile, too.

**L.H.:** That's wonderful. Do you know that's the only source book in English on angels. When you consider that it is a dogma for three separate religions, it's about time somebody wrote a book on the subject. It turns out, too, in my recent studies on Avicenna [Arab philosopher, died A.D. 1037—ed.] that he was a great angelologist. Apparently it was Avicenna's work that prompted the wonderful chapters on angels in St. Thomas Aquinas. I want to do something eventually in honor of the angel Israfil who is the angel of music and who sort of softened up Mohammed for Gabriel's take over.

**W.L.:** Carl Ruggles has a piece called *Angels*.

**L.H.:** That was a work I conducted in New York once. People kept shouting *Bis! Bis!* from the auditorium and I didn't know what it was. Edgar Varese came and said, "Go on, do it again; it means repeat."

**B.C.:** You thought they were calling you a beast?

**L.H.:** Yes. I didn't know what they were saying. So I went out and conducted it again. *Angels* is a beautiful piece [Available on Turnabout record TVS 34398—ed.] I think angels are a nice idea.

**W.L.:** And very influential with Cocteau, too.

**L.H.:** Yes, he had his own angel, Heurtebise. I love Cocteau. I was going to send him a record of my music but he died. He had such a marvelous mind, and he's such a wonderful artist. At the same time he produced a lot of trash too. It's like finding opals amid autumn leaves. At his best he was marvelous, particularly, I think, in the theater. His movies, of course, are wonderful. I thought every city should have a play house that was exclusively devoted to showing *Beauty and the Beast* just over and over and over again. It's sort of all you need to know, it's so beautiful, absolutely enchanting. Everybody falls in love with the beast, of course. Cocteau realized that. I have an edition of the fairy tale, *Beauty and the Beast*, which he wrote a little afterward. He said that he realized that people in fact fall in love with the beast. There's a bit of a shock when the beast turns into

a handsome prince. In the movie when Beauty looks upon the prince, who is the beautiful Jean Marais, he says, "You will get used to it," because he's been transformed from the beast she loved into this handsome young man. So Cocteau realized that impulse too. It's extraordinary, one of the most beautiful movies ever made. It had lovely music by Auric

**W.L.:** Do you want to talk about how you started composing. Were you into music from your childhood?

**L.H.:** Yes really. From the very early times I had the usual piano lessons, along with dancing lessons. I remember learning the *schottisch* [popular dance] when I could barely toddle and the polka and things like that in a dancing class. I played in recitals and played the piano all through childhood. When I was about ten I started to compose. I have, of course a few fragments from that period. They were all piano pieces. Then I assayed grand things very shortly afterwards, sonatas and things like that which were perfectly awful, but they were some indication of ambition along the line. I started studying composition when I was an adolescent. I never went through any courses in school; it was all private. I won a little scholarship and studied with Howard Cooper in San Francisco for two or three years. He was a pupil of Domenico Brescia. I studied variation and fugue and these classical compositional studies. It's like learning to do sonnets and odes. Then I studied with Henry Cowell. I wrote a letter I think, and then met him out at Olive Cowell's house, in the old days. That was the first modern house in San Francisco. It was done by Irving Marrow, who did the Golden Gate Bridge.

When I went to Los Angeles, I studied with Schoenberg. Then when I went to New York, I got acquainted with everybody, Virgil Thomson, Henry Cowell, (who was there then), Wallingford Riegger, Otto Luening. I knew Aaron Copland by that time too. And I was part of the New York scene for about ten years. It was there that I conducted the Ives 3rd Symphony complete, and Ruggles. I gave some concerts. I helped edit the *New Music Edition*. It would be hard to enumerate the things I was into, but then all of us were busy all the time doing everything.

So I began composing early. I just haven't stopped, and I don't suppose I ever will. Sometime I regret being a musician because it's so complicated. I'm not awfully skillful at patience, let's put it that way. Music really requires a lot of patience. That's why I have to have back-up arts like painting and writing because there's so much just plain chore about the art of music. Nowadays the kids often don't bother to write anything down; they just improvise it and put it on a tape. But I am of the classical persuasion; I like precision; I like to decide as many things as I can, coordinate them. It makes a difference for me. So I just have to pay the price which means an awful lot of patient work. Just before I met Bill, I was teaching Esperanto, a language I dearly love in San Francisco. I spent a little time here in my lonely days in the country working with animals and forestry for awhile. I spent most of my time with calligraphy and Esperanto. I did some pieces, of course, but those were the things that after work every night I was doing here.

**W.L.:** Could you talk about your opera *Young Caesar* and how your relationship with Bill was catalytic in its composition?

**L.H.:** Bill got me used to the idea of being a musician again in the first place, and not hating everything about it. I was asked by the Encounters Group, in Pasadena, a modern composer presentation group, to do a concert. They pay a certain amount of money and were willing to commission a work from me for first presentation on their series, which often happens. I didn't know what to do for them, but I had wanted for a long long time to write a second opera. My first one, *Rapunzel*, is on a text by William Morris. I wanted to write a puppet opera; I love puppetry. I kept thinking in terms of a Southwestern Indian thing. All I could see was a white, sort of adobe stage with *katchinas*, and beautiful color in the puppets. But the music idea was a little restricting. I could only hear drums and maybe a flute or something. This wasn't quite what I was up to, because in the meantime I had had this long Oriental period, the beginning of the writing of a book on Korean music, and the exploration of Chinese music. All of this was very strong in me, a surge of this interest and knowledge. So, Bill suggested, why don't you do a gay subject, which had somehow never occurred to me. Within fifteen minutes I had remembered the episode in Caesar's life, his affair with the king of Bithynia. Immediately I decided that's what I would do. I began getting lots of ideas for it right away, both for the production, and for the music.

The gist of the story is that Caesar, who comes from a republican atmosphere in Rome, finds himself in an Oriental court with an Oriental king. He actually has an affair with the king; and I'm sure he was absolutely dazzled there because this king was apparently a very intelligent and brilliant man who had already ceded his kingdom to Rome. As a matter of fact, Caesar liked Bithynia so well that he went back to do legal defense of friends he had made at the court, and there are other evidences that he really liked it. It was the only time in his life, outside of with Cleopatra (when they went up the Nile) when he took some time off. To me what this meant was the young Roman, in a brilliant Oriental court. It meant, also, the combination of Western music with Asian music. It was, as you can see, a focal point, and it was exactly what was in my spirit at the same time. I wanted to do something which had this combination of world music. I had trouble finding librettists and finding a puppeteer to do it. It was terrible; I went through three puppeteers and two authors. Finally, Robert Gordon made me a very good libretto, his first. I set every word of it conscientiously. Eventually, I want to take time out and concentrate it. But basically it's a good opera. It's in 14 scenes. We just finished recording excerpts from it, instrumental excerpts because there are a lot of tunes everybody likes.

My idea was, Winston, that it should be a chamber opera in every sense. There is a precedent in modern writing, and that's Manuel De Falla's lovely opera for puppets, *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*. That has only 21 instruments, 3 voices, something like that. I wanted to go a little further and have only 5 players but lots of instruments because I don't write for a clarinetist, a flutist, a violinist. What I write for is a musician who can play four or five instruments, at



Lou Harrison at 2nd model of cheng [psaltery], ca. 1963

least, I expect them to play four or five. So if I had five players, I would expect at least 25 or 30 instruments to be available to me in various combinations. Usually, you can get it; so that's the way I compose. I do more and more of that. Then I wanted 5 puppeteers, five players, and five singers, because it's a big cast, but I thought 5 singers could change their voices enough to do it. They would all be back stage, and all you would see would be puppets. That's the way it turned out except that it required another few puppeteers, so there turned out to be 7 or 8 puppeteers. All that got out of hand was the puppetry. Finally I did find a professional puppeteer, Bill Jones, art director of KQED, and he did finally produce the whole set.

*Young Caesar* had a number of performances. We tried two or three preview performances which were almost complete. Then we did the first full premiere at Pasadena. That was quite successful. It roused the oddest press I've ever had. Some people enjoyed it, and some people were absolutely flabbergasted and insulted.

**W.L.:** Why do you think they felt insulted?

**L.H.:** They couldn't believe that I would do such a thing seriously, present this episode from Caesar's life as a puppet opera. One reviewer couldn't imagine that there could be such a thing as a serious puppet opera.

**B.C.:** I think also that a lot of people thought Caesar couldn't possibly be that silly. The image they had of Caesar was as the great leader, and they couldn't believe he could have gone through such a period. It rubbed them the wrong way.

**L.H.:** Some of them didn't know the old saying about Caesar: every man's woman and every woman's man. There is a story in the books that when the Senate was mad at him in later years, they used to hail him as he came in, "Hail, Queen of Bithynia!"

**W.L.:** In what way did you treat the relationship between Caesar and Nicomedes, king of Bithynia?

**L.H.:** Caesar was sent to Bithynia in Asia Minor to collect boats for a campaign against Mithridates. He went to the client king, Nicomedes, to demand boats and had a love affair with the king. He got the boats, too. At the end of the opera there's a great sailing of boats for which I wrote a barcarole which, of course, means boat. I'd like to do more, too, on such themes. They're grand fun. I would like to do some of Alexander the Great's life which is a marvelous subject.

**W.L.:** Have you read Mary Renault's novel, *The Persian Boy*, a very sensitive treatment of Alexander's later life?

**L.H.:** Oh, isn't it marvelous? Bill read it to me. And I'd like to do a number of other operas or works. I really did fall in love with puppetry. I can do so much, you know; it can be so fluid and so full. For example, if you want to show a big banquet, you can. If you want to have a fleet of boats leaving, a fleet can leave. It's one of the virtues of puppetry that you can be lavish, and I like my theater lavish.

Gilgamesh is a big favorite of mine, too. I was going to do Gilgamesh for the York Festival when I realized I couldn't leave my mother because of her illness. But I will do it anyway sometime. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the affair between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. It's heartrending, the original poetic epic, and also it cannot really be construed in any other way than a romance, a very powerful and deep love between Gilgamesh, the hero, and a sort of wild man who must have represented all sorts of things. When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh really goes wild, mourning. Then, of course, the mortality idea hits him and he spends the rest of the epic looking for some sort of immortality. In the end everything fails and all he can take is pride in his work which is building the great wall at Uruk. Incidentally, I have a piece of the wall at Uruk right here. It's a loan from the Oriental

Institute in Chicago and comes from the 18th century B.C. But it is astonishing that our first literary epic should have this subject, the relation between two men, as a very important thing. I am happy to see that Benjamin Britten has done a more overtly homosexual theme [Britten's opera *Death in Venice*—ed.] I'm very happy about that, and I eagerly look forward to it.

**W.L.:** Don't you think the climate is right now and has been for the past few years. Would such works have been performable and acceptable twenty years ago?

**L.H.:** No. I think that all the freedom we feel to do subjects of this kind now is due to the intervening strength of the gay movement. For myself, half of it was the McCarthy period. Senator Joe McCarthy was the one who resolved me never to hide in any closet about anything ever again in my life. When you get to the point that you don't know what's in your mail box, the only counter power you have is to live an absolutely open life, and I think that's really important. Some of the same feeling I had is back of the gay movement: the opening up and fighting for civil rights. You never get a thing by not fighting for it. Minorities do have to continuously keep the majority aware they exist. It seems to me that homosexuality is a cautionary minority for the rest of the world. It is the only minority which is produced spontaneously by nature herself generation after generation. And you'd think that would be a caution to the straight world that they don't have everything exactly their way all the time.

**W.L.:** I think the artist has a very catalytic role in this area.

**L.H.:** Yes, I think so too, and I think that the public who accepts a work of art should sometimes think of its origins. I think that's only fair; they cannot expect that the origin is going to be the same for every work of art. In a way we really do have a privileged position as artists in this society. It's extraordinary. I've been to other societies, and I can tell you we do. But I do want to re-emphasize that we are a minority that is produced by nature. Other minorities dissolve. For example, if you have color minorities, they can just get dissolved into the blood stream of the whole group. Religious minorities may disappear or get absorbed again. I can't think of another major minority that is produced directly by nature over and over again.

**W.L.:** And it's interesting too, that through recorded history so many major artists and writers have been gay. Their gayness has been a stimulus in their work, an important part of creativity.

**L.H.:** Yes, whether known or not, I'm sure that's true. We know a little bit from Tchaikovsky's diary, though how directly it relates to his work we don't know. It must have been, after all, the Sixth Symphony is dedicated to the nephew with whom he was having an affair at the end. A recent psychological study of Beethoven shows that he was probably a repressed homosexual. It's funny how these traditional rumors have been going around for years. The gay world has always known about Tchaikovsky, of course, and there have been rumors about Schubert, for example, and his friend. They combined names at one point you know, and came out with a name that was sort of halfway between both of their names.

**B.C.:** When are we going to do that?

**L.H.:** Well, I don't know, we've tried all sorts of things. We used to cut out the C&H sugar cartons, Colvig-Harrison, very sweet. But the sense of community I think that we have had. How many years has it been really?

**W.L.:** Mattachine started in 1950 as an activist group, the first of the homophile organizations.

**L.H.:** I joined Mattachine many years ago. What happens, of course, is that every generation re-invents the whole

thing, at a time. But every time there's a little more progress I think.

**W.L.:** The tempo has been accelerated within the last three or four years.

**L.H.:** Yes, I agree with that. We can even have feature length movies about us too. Television now accepts the subject. That's a fair indication, I think, that the general community is beginning to accept the facts of life. It seems me that *Gay Sunshine* has turned in some sense, into our major cultural journal which is an interesting transition.

**W.L.:** It's not a change so much as an evolution. The political and cultural have been integrated. For instance in the Ginsberg interview [*Gay Sunshine* #16], much of what Ginsberg said was both political and literary at the same time. Not political in the polemical sense. But I think we're coming to a new understanding of what we mean by political, too. A work of art, a piece of music can raise consciousness. A work like *Young Caesar* is a beautiful work of music, and at the same time it also raises consciousness in the sense of treating a gay subject in an open way, honest way, without being defensive about it. But if you had written *Young Caesar* fifty years ago, it probably would not have been performable.

**L.H.:** Oh yes, I think so, and not that far back even, just very recently. I think that change is clearly the result of emboldened honesty. I wonder about the absolute political connections, of course, of the revolutionary movement. I have the feeling that revolutions are much too busy to worry about our problems generally. The Castro pronouncement about gays, for example, has proved very disagreeable to numbers of us, and of course we read of distressing things in Maoist China, too, which is an exaggerated example of a certain kind of revolution. It's apparently very hard to make a successful humanistic revolution that includes everybody. It doesn't seem to have happened in our time, at any rate in this century. Segments of a full revolution occur here, there and yon, but it doesn't all coalesce. As a matter of fact in the United States we are really freer now, and we're having a more thorough-going revolution in many ways than other parts of the world that are professing revolution.

**W.L.:** Don't you think there is a kind of dichotomy here? In one sense there is a great deal of artistic freedom in the U.S. Yet at the same time—in the Sixties, for example—there was a massive bombing of Vietnam, torture, and the My Lai massacre. It's a schizophrenia. Artists are free in our society—up to a point; as long as their art doesn't shake up capitalist structures too much.

**L.H.:** Of course, all of us were fighting on both fronts then; we were fighting both for minority rights and against the war. I devoted a fair amount of time to writing *Peace Pieces* which were literally political activist music. Some of them were good music, some weren't probably, but I had to do something. Vietnam was a dreadful disaster. Yes, you're right, a very mixed bag, wasn't it; and it's still a mixed bag as we see, at the present time, the government having such an imbalance. If the present situation holds with an obviously weak president, then maybe Congress will take back powers that it relinquished slowly, and we might get a better balance again.

**W.L.:** I think one of the roles of the artist is to be prophetic and to speak out against injustices. You have done this with your *Peace Pieces*, just as Picasso did it with his painting, *Guernica*. And I hope that *Gay Sunshine* can do likewise.

**L.H.:** One of the great protests was Robert Duncan's *Passages* 22, that one enormous single sentence against the Vietnamese War and Johnson at that time, which I set as one of my *Peace Pieces*. We got our only "boo" at the Cabrillo Festival from that. Some little lady said "boo". After that, there was silence in the hall and some lady said "boo" and one of the double-bass players looked around and said "shame!" So mild a riot.

**B.C.:** And of course, Associated Press quoted, "Amid cries of 'boo' and 'shame'." It was marvelous music.

**L.H.:** I've done four *Peace Pieces*. The *Heart Sutra* is the fourth.

**W.L.:** Could you talk a little more about the *Heart Sutra* and about Esperanto, the language in which it is written and in which you're an accomplished linguist. I heard it at the Cabrillo Music Festival and was immensely moved by it.

**L.H.:** Esperanto is an international language. It really works. I found myself in Italy not being able to speak the language. I'm very sensitive about being articulate. So when I came back here I thought surely somebody has done something about this. And I remembered that when I was a very early adolescent, the daughter of a professor at Stanford had introduced me to the language of Esperanto through a book. So I immediately went up to San Francisco to the international bookstore. From that time on I made use of Esperanto.

I am currently a member of the Esperanto International Musicians League. I was for a while a member of the Buddhist Esperantist group with headquarters in Belgium. The musicians group headquarters is in Turin, Italy. Within the last year I've written a large work in Esperanto. It's the *Heart Sutra*, *La Koro Sutro* in Esperanto, which was performed here at the Cabrillo Festival (Summer 1973), with Carlos Chavez conducting. Bill's instruments were used. The whole gamelan that he made was used along with a chorus. So the work is for chorus and gamelan. It's the text of the *Heart Sutra* translated from Sanskrit into Esperanto by a friend of mine in San Francisco, Bruce Kenedy, a superb linguist. I commissioned the translation several years before I actually composed the piece. It's about half an hour long. Every year the Cabrillo Music Festival does one large work by me. Last year we did a Chinese concert, and the year before that we did almost the complete *Young Caesar* which is an opera that comes from the relation with Bill, just as the *Heart Sutra* does.

The *Heart Sutra* is one of the great documents of humanity in the area of what the West knows as Hagia Sophia, Holy Wisdom. The Mahayana Buddhist version of that started fairly soon after the Buddha died. By the Second Century A.D. a huge literature had developed. For example, I think the major book of that is the *Perfect Wisdom* in a hundred thousand lines; each of those lines is thirty-two

# Four Reflections on a Number

For Winston Leyland



syllables. You can imagine the size of the book. Then it's had condensations clear down to a single letter, the letter "a" in Sanskrit. But the most successful, and the most noble, and the enduring one is the *Heart Sutra*. It's called that because it's the heart of the matter. It's seven paragraphs with an introduction, and the mantram at the end. It concentrates all of the paradoxical beauty of this whole area of philosophy into a very brief, sharp space. I had wanted to set it ever since I was in Asia in the early sixties, and it just brewed for ages. It's psychological insight on the question of Nirvana which is the Buddhist problem.

Buddhism, as you probably already know, is a self-evaporating religion. The minute you're talking about it it's no longer Buddhism; it's a practice. The *Heart Sutra*, which is about the practice and its evaporation, is just full of paradoxes. It comes out to a mantram. Also there is a question about one phrase in the translation I find absolutely fascinating. The Sanskrit phrase at one point can be construed in two ways with the fullness of the practice of perfect wisdom the Bodhisatva, who is the person doing all this, finally attains Nirvana or finally is sustained by Nirvana. When you're completely with it, of course you're in Nirvana. The doctrine can be construed as meaning that that's the fixing point, the non-back-sliding point, and that you are then sustained; no matter what comes up you can't be shook-up. It's the same thing in Epicurus' philosophy. The word "atarax" in Greek means the same thing fundamentally as Nirvana, the state in which you can no longer get shook-up, or shaken-up. Nothing will budge you; you're in the unshakable pivot in the confusion sense too. So it's the same thing. In fact, Epicureanism is very close to some parts of Mahayana Buddhism. Epicurus lived just after Alexander's conquests, and he very carefully questioned all those who knew of things from India. So it is a kind of refined Buddhism in the Epicurean doctrine; it relates to it at any rate. That's the question in the *Heart Sutra*, the question of translation as to whether all this practice leads to Nirvana, or whether Nirvana happens on the way and then sustains you when you get shook-up. It's a question of being with it all the time and not getting swerved. So I vote for the sustaining point of view; it seems to me the more sensible. I retranslated that one word in the Esperanto text to conform with that notion, but it can be read either way as a matter of fact. It's a marvelous text. There is, I think, almost no moment on the planet when the *Heart Sutra* is not being intoned somewhere. It's the favorite text, you know, for all walks of Buddhism. Every Mahayana sect uses it. I think it's been translated even into Pali. It's probably used in the Theravadan area too now. So fundamentally, it's really the quintessential text of this kind of philosophy.

I had wanted to set it for a long time, and all of a sudden it started to roll because there was a congress of Esperantists in Portland last year. A lot of them came down afterwards to San Francisco for what they call a post-Kongress trip. We entertained them as Bay Region Esperantists. Bill and I organized and presented a concert at San Francisco State on August 19th, 1972. That's when we presented the first performance of the *Heart Sutra*. So it was written specifically for an Esperantist conference. They loved it. In fact, the San Francisco papers did announce it at my request, that it was going to be happening, but they didn't bother to review it. But we didn't mind that because, of course, reviews started coming in. Two from Holland, at any rate, and we got one from London too. Well this is the advantage of having an international audience that is literate and has access to the press.

W.L.: So the crucial element is one's being sustained by Nirvana in this life and beyond, as opposed to obtaining Nirvana.

L.H.: You're right about sustaining Nirvana in this life. As I understand it, proto-Buddhism involves being totally with it all the time, not having any objections, not being shook-up, perfect equanimity about everything at all times. Fundamentally, it's a formula for being happy, if you want to be happy. Now it's surprising the number of people who don't

want to be happy; so it doesn't help them. But if you do want to be happy, there is a formula, and if you'll just follow it and get with it all the time, then that's Nirvana. If you get to the sticking point about that, you are in Nirvana all the time, which is the idea. It's the Epicurean "atarax", complete equanimity and not being shook-up. As in Epicurus, you have to control your environment a little bit to do this, because otherwise you are at the mercy of the elements, so to speak. Buddhism makes no point about the question of life after death at all. As the Buddha pointed out, if you want life after death, and you don't get it, then you'll be disappointed. If you don't want life, or if you don't care, and there is, you'll be surprised. In any event there is no way it can help you at all while you're here to be happy. So the question is completely irrelevant, and he wouldn't discuss it. He said it simply doesn't matter. Reincarnation, I suspect, in the original prototypic Buddhism simply meant from minute to minute. What we have done in the past does determine our reincarnation minute to minute, you know. The real point is not to want anything to be other than it is, in any way than it is; that is, not any more or less than it will be, nor your attainments either.

W.L.: So it's more a sense of equilibrium and not an insatiable ambition kind of thing; a gradual developing evolution of one's being, one's talents.

L.H.: Yes, you're right, that's it. For example, if you want to be happy, you can't just all of a sudden say, "Oh, yes, now I want not to want anything to be more," because automatically you're off the beam. It's very poised and almost inexpressible. As a matter of fact, when it's happening, Buddhism evaporates. The desire, the Way, the path, everything's gone because there, whatever is is. I think that's the basic idea of the *Heart Sutra* too. Through a list of marvelous paradoxes, you know, form is the same as not-form. The four-fold business is very frequent.

Here's one of the four-fold things he says, "Here, Shariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form. Emptiness does not differ from form, nor does form differ from emptiness. Whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form." The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness. You just are intended to apply the four opposites all the way down the line. It's a kind of wiping out of intellect by the use of extreme intellection. It's self-evaporating. "...Here, Shariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness. They are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither deficient nor complete..." James Broughton gives it more clearly in his Zen Poetry:

This is It  
and I am It  
and You are It  
and so is That  
and He is It  
and She is It  
and It is It  
and That is That

O It is This  
and It is Thus  
and It is Them  
and It is Us  
and It is Now  
and here It is  
and here We are  
so This is It.

W.L.: There is a clarity, a la Gertrude Stein, here.

L.H.: Yes, well, it does come down to that. To quote another of his poems, "Round Table":

It's all in your head,  
the first man said.  
It's all in your heart,  
said another.  
It's all in your stars,  
said the man with scars.  
It's all in your guts,  
said his brother.

It's all in your soul,  
said the man who was slow.  
It's all in your balls,  
said the fast one.  
It's all in your things,  
said the fellow with rings.  
It's in no thing at all,  
said the last one.

L.H.: That's what the Wisdom literature is all about. Incidentally, the Christian literature developed about the same time as the developed form of Mahayana Buddhism. Do you know that marvelous intersection, intellectually, in Syria?

W.L.: Do you mean Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite of the fifth century A.D.?

L.H.: Yes. His work is related to the Perfect Wisdom literature of the Mahayana Buddhists. It was in Syria that that exquisite confusion between Christian and Buddhist saints came about: the Balavariani, Saints Barlaam and Josaphat; a real divine comedy. The Christians in Syria had an extremely rich intellectual life. They apparently knew of the life of the Buddha, and the Mahayana business of the Bodhisatva; they simply adopted lives of such conspicuous sanctity into Christianity.

W.L.: This was connected with the Nestorian schism of the fifth century and its subsequent history, as I recall.

L.H.: Right. It was the Nestorian Christians who spread into Asia as far as China, and this information probably came into the Christian Church through them also. It is only recently that the church de-canonized, unsanctified Barlaam and Josaphat. Otherwise, you could walk into a Catholic church and light a candle for the Buddha and the Bodhisatva. But to return to the gay subject—though there is no fundamental problem about gaiety in Buddhism, the way of the elders, all of the up-tight groups still make prohibitions or did at least scripturally. Nobody pays any attention, the same thing as the advanced Catholic situation.

W.L.: That quotation in the Ginsberg interview was interesting. Ginsberg asked his Tibetan Buddhist guru what he thought about homosexuality. The response was that the important thing is communication. And surely that is one of the basic approaches of gay liberation.

L.H.: Right. That was a very stimulating reading. I really just loved that. Allen is stimulating. He's a marvelous guy.

W.L.: Was the *Heart Sutra* your first work utilizing Buddhist texts?

L.H.: No, I set the *Invocation for the Health of All Beings* from the Metta Sutta which is a beautiful text. It's part of a large Sutta in Pali and is a very well known Buddhist text: "May all beings be happy and at their ease, may they be joyous and live in safety, all beings whether great or small, born or unborn, visible or invisible... May all beings be happy and at their ease, may all beings be joyous and live in safety..." Another part of it is that you are instructed to think of every living thing, every being in the world as though you were a mother and had an only child, to extend good will and love to the whole of the animate conscious universe. It's part of the good will feeling of Mahayana Buddhism. It's a beautiful sutta.

That was my first *Peace Piece*. It's dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King. That's for unison chorus with a small orchestra including percussion, two harps, some strings, a trombone, very small. All these *Peace Pieces*, by the way, were done at the Cabrillo Festival in Aptos with Gerhard Samuel conducting. They took a whole half program because I collected them. My very first *Peace Piece*, or my first protest piece, because I didn't label it a *Peace Piece* back in those days, was done in 1935, '36; it was a protest against the Spanish War. It had a quotation from Milton. It was for a percussion and string quartet. Then I did to my own text a little song which was another *Peace Piece*. It was about the atom bomb. It has a lot of things, but it wasn't a Buddhist text, it was my own. So I think fairly surely, Winston, that the Metta Sutta, the *Invocation for the Health of All Beings* was the first Buddhist text I set.

Another one I want to set is the ten Ox Herding pictures of Zen. They're just beautiful. There's a whole series of different sets of them, so I could choose from a lot of texts. Fundamentally there are ten pictures. They represent the psychological journey of finding one's rather violent libido in the shape of an ox. First you get a glimpse of the landscape, then you find the ox, then you grab the ox, then you tame the ox. The ox finally gives up and listens to you play the flute. Then finally you release the ox, and it's all blanked out, endless white moon. Some groups add a further one where the fat, jovial old man goes back to society as a sort of buffoon. He's the enlightened one, of course, who has tamed the ox. The ox herding pictures have all sorts of charming things in them. It took me nearly ten years to brew up the *Heart Sutra*. Eventually the Ox Herding pictures will brew up too. I want to set them probably for soloist and chorus and a small ensemble of some sort. Then I want to project those woodcuts on a screen or even make a puppet show of the ten scenes. I'm not sure quite, but some ritual presentation of the material because it exists graphically in so many versions. It would be beautiful to project all those along with the music. Many commentators have commented on the pictures and the meaning of them; so it gives a lot of different texts.

W.L.: You mentioned last night about some Medieval Arab musicians being transvestites. Maybe you could talk a little about that and homosexuality in the East.

L.H.: In the earliest histories of Arab music, the first important musicians were apparently transvestites, apparently also homosexuals. That's not always true you know. Much ill will attached, as a matter of fact, to them. Drinking wine and listening to music and like that are not orthodox in Islamic practices. That didn't stop them because there were periods, of course, when Islam resounded with song and instruments and much consumption of wine. The tradition of the minstrel in Europe in the middle ages apparently derived from the habits of the musicians of Islam, that is to say, the costumes, the wearing of certain hair-dos and/or long hair, henna hands, use of make-up, and so on. In fact the word mascara is an Arabic word. Homosexuality has, of course, been a frank part of the Islamic tradition for a very long time. One reads of Turkish sultans, for example, even in the last century or before in history, and the advice given

them in growing was not to scorn either sex. So certainly a bisexual habit was a part of their tradition and background.

In the Far East homosexual practices have been largely associated with the literati and are much more closely connected with writing than they are with other arts. This is largely because the musical foundations, the big foundations of the court and the church are largely hereditary. In Japan even the clergy marries. The court orchestras continue to practice generation after generation, from father to son, so that the habit of musicians being homosexual does not hold in Far East Asia—China, Japan and Korea. There used to be a tradition in Korea and Japan of Buddhist monks who would go about with young men to raise money for their monastery. There is a good deal of homosexuality in the history of Japan among Samurai and so on. There was in fact one monarch who offered rewards for any of the Samurai who would marry and have children.

The Wharang tradition in Korea seems to have had homosexual overtones. It was during the Silla dynasty, roughly contemporaneous with Tang in China, and was a courtly institution involving young men. It's very romantic, at any rate. It was involved also with the shamanistic practices. As we know, shamanism includes homosexuality very often as a part of its structure. So that the Wharang institution, very poetic, seems to have been part shamanism, part court, part poetry and music, the singing of songs, and part Buddhism. It was an institution all of its own.

W.L.: I had wanted to talk a little about the relationship between your gayness and the creative process. This perhaps is more pronounced in writers, as you said before, than in composers.

L.H.: Yes, I think so, and for the very simple reason that to say, "I am gay" is done with words. That as a public matter is entirely verbal. I think that a musician, composer at any rate, deals with generalized terms. That is to say, for example, depicting making love in music works no matter what sexual combination you have because it's a matter really of the fundamental expression of sensuality and it simply doesn't matter what form it is. You rightly point out, Winston, that there are fewer musicians who have declared themselves homosexual for the simple reason that there is no real public need for it, or there is no problem in that sense because there is no verbal problem except as you pointed out too. If a composer is writing a great number of songs and they all have gay texts, then some one might inquire at some time. Of course, I have written an opera on a gay subject and

one song which I myself construe as being a gay love song, as it were.

Has Ned Rorem set any gay texts? I don't specifically remember any gay texts from him. Texts by gay authors, yes, but I don't remember any involving actual gay material.

W.L.: He did set work of Frank O'Hara, Paul Goodman and Walt Whitman.

L.H.: He's a very skillful composer and I'm always looking forward to things. I think he feels, because of the *Time* article, perhaps that he's less important as an instrumental composer. It think that's nonsense; he's a very good instrumental composer. *Time*, you see, said that he's the best song writer that we have. So now he feels that he has to be the best song writer, has to turn them out by the millions. Overlooked, for example, are the beautiful pieces he did for Louisville, his orchestra pieces. He's an all-around composer. I think he has had an unfair press in that sense. He's an all-around composer, and a very sensible one I think too. Is Ned the only declared gay composer?

W.L.: Well, Virgil Thomson hasn't openly declared himself, although his gayness is an open secret. I suppose Ned Rorem is declared more or less because of his writing in the *New York* and *Paris Diaries*.

L.H.: Yes, they're very specific on the subject. That just goes to show you how far we've come. I remember being quite surprised that a fellow musician, a fellow composer had written such a diary, and delighted, as a matter of fact. I wrote a review of both of them right from the start. I hope that more gay material will be used more naturally in the arts; and I think it will be.

W.L.: Don't you think that in the past many artists felt compelled to make a dichotomy between their personal lives as gay people and their art, whether it be writing or music; and that there's been a break-through within the last decade or so?

L.H.: Yes, I think so. Also rousing, out of gratitude and natural group feeling, a kind of loyalty to a group which was not there before. I used to envy minority composers who had behind them a whole minority group. For example, the Armenian bishops used to fight to sponsor concerts by Alan Hovhanness. I used to think, how marvelous to have a minority that supports you, that you could write for, and that you had a real response to. I shouldn't be a bit surprised that that brewing underneath also helped lead to my opera, *Young Caesar*, because of that feeling of support from a

minority group. I like that.

W.L.: How has your relationship with Bill affected your own creativity?

L.H.: There is one thing that I have observed over the years. I do not go along with the pseudo-Freudian notion that sexual frustration, or sublimation as they call it, is a help to creative processes. I think, in fact, exactly the reverse. Unless you have plenty of love, plenty of sex, plenty of affection, it just gets in your way if you're trying to do creative work. When that's expressed in fully living, then I think you can live the life of a creative person. But I think that you're just gummed-up otherwise. If you are all frustrated, what can you do? The proof of the pudding is that I have been very happy with Bill, increasingly happy; and I am increasingly composing and doing big works, the natural thing you know. So, in my own case, that's the plain proof of it. I think a lot of people are rethinking that notion these days too, don't you? This is another reason, too, for outright living, all the way down the line I think.

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LOU HARRISON DISCOGRAPHY (record labels in parentheses). Consult *Schwann Catalog* for details. Those asterisked are now unavailable.

Canticle No. 1 for Percussion (Time), (Mainstream)

\*Canticle No. 3 for Percussion (Urania)

\*Mass (Epic)

\*The Only Jealousy of Emer (ballet for small orch.) (Esoteric)

Song of Queztecotl \*(Period) (Orion)

Four Strict Songs (Louisville)

Suite for Cello and Harp (Columbia)

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Suite for Percussion (CRI)

# Male Homosexuality and Machismo

The following article was written by members of the F.L.H. [Homosexual Liberation Front of Argentina]. Translated into English by Tanye Vitasche

We live in a sexual culture rooted in a civilization whose values give support to the figure of the man. Penis worship and prohibition are the two axis of our official sexual ethic. Historically, agrarian societies have been predominantly patriarchal. Those of a pastoral, craft making or industrial nature, like ours, are predominantly patriarchal, which demands a macho sexual ideology to overwhelmingly value the masculine.

For the macho ideology the point of reference is the male organism; accordingly, male is that which has a penis, and female not that which has a vagina, but that which lacks a penis. Woman is defined by her lack, which devalues her: she is less.

In the sexual relationship there is a subject (the man) and an instrumental object (the woman) glossed over respectively as, 'active' and 'passive'. Therefore, the woman is exploited, be it for the reproduction of the species (long range goal) or for the prevailing satisfaction of the man (short range goal).

Transposed to the plane of homosexuality, machismo limits itself to projecting its ideological charges on a conventional and schematic image of the homosexual: a man who has the state of being of a woman, the "nelly", the "dizzy queen" etc. The homosexual, seen through machismo, is the man who acts like a woman, who renounces his phallic superiority and passes from subject to mere object. The typical macho sexual fantasy is sanctioned aggression against the "faggot". The fantasy is to hurt him like a contemptible object, to make him suffer while calming his anal anxiety.\* To be a "faggot" is more contemptible than to be a woman: it is to have the elements of supremacy and to destroy them, humiliating oneself and one's status.

When a worker alludes to the fact that his boss "broke his ass", he implies no longer a sexual behavior but a violation of a right of his at work.

The violation of his chances for success crops up in all the institutions in which the worker finds himself enrolled, since it is the system that determines who has power and, in accordance with it, distributes the chances.

At work, the homosexual is treated with the same restrictions as are women: he is kept away from supervisory and representational duties. He cannot be the image of a director of a society based on the positive value of masculinity; he is restricted to accessory and decorative tasks. He can be a dancer and a *manosearse* in a stage-setting; he can be a hair-dresser, a beautician, a fashion designer, an interior decorator, an actor. This limitation of work causes mental alienation: he feels like an object, an instrument, a decorative thing. Thus we have the exhibitionistic and masochistic image of defiant "faggots," martyr and star, who "walks up to the scaffold of mockery with his diamond fan in hand." Machismo pretends to corroborate its hypothesis: "faggots" flaunt themselves and bring on their own punishment because they recognize that they are guilty of their abominable peculiarity.

How does one get rid of these ideological standards which we have briefly summarized — the manifold alienating myths which our society sustains in the face of the sexual problem? They are closely interrelated and have a common object: that man be a stranger to man, that he be alienated from himself, that interpersonal relationships pass for aggression and destruction, that there be no true mutual understanding nor true contact among individuals. Instead a mythical aloofness is disguised and labeled morality. The myth of the "faggot" exists because *macho* society needs for it to exist. *Macho* society perverts woman and accuses her of being an object, and then perverts the homosexual and accuses him of being degenerate. It is not natural that man be the owner of woman, nor the complement, that woman be the property of man. It is not natural that men should copy women's state-of-

being, but neither is this state-of-being of the "fair sex" natural; all these perversions are the responsibility of an alienating society, which turns around and invents convenient bursts of indignation to satisfy its guilty conscience. The existence of the "faggot" serves to confirm the *macho* status quo.

Official psychology, as accomplice of the system, has decreed homosexuality to be pathological, despicable. In this way social repression is granted a natural function: the guardianship of the healthy instincts and the correction of perversions, in the name of nature. Homosexuals, then, are naturally inferior to heterosexuals.

## Sexual roles

The notions of sexual activity and passivity hold sway within a *macho* sexual ideology so that only sexual relationships in which one of the parties plays the conventional role of the female and the other that of the male is comprehensible. This ideology responds to the official sexual mores in our societies, and is the result of the tradition of Judeo-Christian paternal authoritarianism, whereby homosexuals are educated, subconsciously, to assume the sexual role of the woman and to live like conventional woman (decorative objects, domestic lives, dependent on men, restricted from work, etc.). The judgment of social reproach (guilt) has been internalized and a situation of anguish is generated: not to be such a man as society proposes, and to be, at the same time, homosexual. That homosexual who rejects this role will have to live a double life, outwardly conventional "*macho*," affecting relations with women, including getting married, and heed his preferences in secret and in strict intimacy, with all the anguished consequences which this double life brings about.

On another level, *machismo* finds itself unarmed and lacking in explanations to resolve the case of homosexual relations among males in which the sexual roles are interchangeable. Here there is no way to assimilate one into the "man" model and the other into the "woman" model. One habitually resorts to the easy explanation of refinement, vice affectation, or sexual satiety which lead to "waywardness." *The truth is that there is a real need for sexual contacts with persons of one's own*

sex, even if one practices heterosexuality too and the homosexual has none of the characteristics conventionally attributed to his peers. Neither are the erogenous zones which homosexuals use to satisfy themselves, nor the concrete practices of which they make use (anal sex, mutual masturbation, fellatio) different from those which heterosexuals use, nor do they possess organs with special characteristics, nor suspicious hormonal imbalances. We are talking about individuals who, biologically and in state-of-being, are men like any others. How to explain this under the conventional scheme, according to which, even when both are males, is it a question of a masculine person and a feminine one?

One could argue that there are homosexuals who have obeyed the *macho* system, like those described above. Among those who correspond to the stereotype of the "faggot," are counted those who exaggerate their effeminacy in order to excite more easily the potential partners that interest them, for whom they act out the role of woman. But this aberration has nothing to do with the authentic homosexual relationship, which is the relationship between two people of the same sex who identify with the biological sex which their bodies possess. The individuals who are the easiest prey of sanctions and are the most obvious targets of ridicule (very effeminate men, "dizzy queens" literally, "lost crazy women") are those who have best internalized the role imposed by our repressive society; that is, to be both woman who were born men and also to serve as scapegoats for the aggressions of the oppressed masses, among whom the anti-homosexual taboos tend to be strongest.

These cases of unhealthy acceptance of repression do not confirm the goodness of *macho* ideology, but instead underline its lack of principles. *Machismo* is the sexual ideology of the unlikelihood of impulses, the philosophy of bodily sadness, the misery of a culture based on dissatisfaction and prohibitions. *Machismo* not only reduces the possibilities of sexual realization because it forbids all practices except one, but it also ruins the main one of the possibilities of the sexual act: creative communication between two subjects on equal footing, who complement each other

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# GAY SOCIALIST CONFERENCE

In early October my lover and I together with other friends drove down to Los Angeles to attend the Lavender and Red Union conference, which was organized by a group of gay Marxists. Gay women and gay men were both present at the conference in roughly equal numbers. I was happy about this since it seemed to indicate that socialism was going to serve as a point of solidarity between the gay sexes in a way that gay liberation could not.

The opening workshop in the conference, "Class Consciousness", began with a presentation by the male members of the Union, who gave a concise introduction to Marxist class analysis. They asserted the following things: 70% of the wealth in America is controlled by 3% of the population. This 3% represents the ruling class or bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie maintains its large wealth through the exploitation of the working class or proletariat. The position of any individual in the society is determined by that individual's relationship to the means of production. The ruling class owns the means of production, but does none of the work. The working class does all of the work, but owns none of the means of production. In addition to the two principally opposed classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, there exists a class called the petit bourgeoisie, which helps to mediate the exploitation of the workers by the ruling class. This class consists of small businessmen, tradesmen, and professionals, who do not own the means of production, but rather, own the means of distribution of products and services (gas station owners, grocery owners, doctors, my father).

The Lavender and Red Union members asserted that gay liberationists must realize that the primary division in society is not between gay and non-gay people, but rather, that all societal divisions spring from the maintenance of class oppression. Under capitalism racism and sexism are necessary to maintain the power of

the ruling class. Sexism serves to perpetuate the nuclear family, which is the basic unit of consumption in capitalist society, and the framework designed to reinforce the producer/servicer division of labor. The male worker gives his labor to his producer job. In order to help him bear the oppressiveness of his job, the male worker is provided with a servicer wife, who gives her labor to the male and to the family. Since there is no similar arrangement for servicing the wife, the powerful institution of sexism is necessary to maintain the inequity. It is because of a need to perpetuate the nuclear family that gay oppression arises. Since gay sex is non-procreative it is a threat in that it does not provide the ruling class with a supply of new workers. But more significantly, gay sexuality will not conform to the producer/servicer structure of the nuclear family, and thus threatens the power of sexism to oppress women. Therefore, it is essential to sexism, and thus to capitalism, that all homosexual desires be repressed, that women pervert their sexuality into a service for their husbands, and that men be aggressive and dominant to engender their labor.

This analysis brought the workshop to a point of dealing with several crucial questions. The primary question was: Would socialism provide an end to sexism, and thus to gay oppression? A look at existing socialist societies prompted someone to answer "not necessarily". There were, for example, the infamous gay concentration camps in Cuba. Someone in the group said: "I don't want to celebrate the Revolution one night and find myself in a concentration camp the next." In spite of various kinds of attempts to deal with sexism, male leadership continues to dominate Russia, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Yugoslavia, and even the American Marxist left. Someone pointed out that male supremacist societies, whether capitalist or socialist, thrive

on sexism and the nuclear family. Someone else suggested that in spite of socialism, nationalism will encourage sexism (as in Cuba). In any event we agreed that none of the kinds of socialism which existed in various socialist countries today was the kind we gay people wanted.

In defense of socialism's potential one of the Union members asserted that whereas sexism is necessary to successful capitalism, it is a hindrance to successful socialism. So we then discussed whether or not it was possible to end sexism under capitalism. There was discussion of the sexual revolution — the apparent loosening of taboos against gay sex, premarital sex, and post-family extramarital sex. One woman observed that these taboos had been loosened principally for the upper class. This observation forced us to confront a ticklish question. Were the gay liberation and women's liberation movements essentially bourgeois movements? This question was, of course, difficult because many of the people present had given themselves wholly to these movements in the past. Coming out, someone said, is a class privilege. Gay liberation has been a libertarian, revisionist movement primarily on behalf of white males who wished to retain and enjoy both their class/male privileges and their sexual preference. But this was no surprise to the women, who had left gay liberation long ago precisely for this reason. So it became apparent that some of the gains of the gay liberation movement were indeed bourgeois. Yet, several people felt that broader changes had occurred, perhaps in response to technology. Technology had both reduced the need for procreation and provided birth control to dissociate sex from procreation, and thereby opened the door for both women and gays to exit from society's procreative prison. Certainly it is not coincidental that both the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement both began to stir with the introduction of the pill. Nonetheless, one of the Union members insisted that any advances afforded by technology were superficial, that they represented necessarily a concession rather than genuine advancement, because ultimately capitalism depended upon sexism to function.

Furthermore, someone else noted,

the attitude changes prompted by technology were accompanied by changes in ruling class strategy. Religion, of course, existed as the principal guardian of capitalist morality — the reigning enforcer of normalcy, conformity, self-sacrifice, and subservience. However, because of the irrationality of its demands and precepts, religion is threatened by intellect. So as technology affords a growth in intellect, religion must give way to psychology, a seemingly more rational method of behavior control. The communion wafer becomes a tranquilizer, and the troubled suppliant is ready to submit once again to oppression; thus heaven is encapsulated and transubstantiation made real by the flesh of the pharmacist. At this point I recalled the Marxist assertion earlier in the discussion that capitalism would eventually destroy itself. Perhaps it is capitalist technology which will become the calendar of subversion. In any event the group seemed certain by now that sexism could not be destroyed under capitalism.

Several women suggested that many members of the straight left were erroneously convinced that equal work opportunity and state-provided child care were all that was necessary to end sexism. Well, of course, we all knew that sexism was deeper and far more complicated than that. Yet, this was the attitude of those socialists who planned to seize power. And so the workshop was led to the realization that women and gays would be responsible for preventing post-revolution sexism by playing a pre-revolution role in eliminating sexism in the revolutionary left.

Several women led the discussion into the problem of finding practical methods of achieving a socialist revolution. It was suggested that the bar was among the chief institutions of gay oppression, and that it was a good place to begin. The bar, of course, is frequently the center of communication in the gay community. "We have a strong underground there", one woman said. And so the bar seemed to be a good focal point for organizing gays: a place to leaflet, a place to scheme, a place—ultimately—to take over. Mixed in with this discussion were several criticisms of men's values. Men, of course, do not find themselves forced

## GAY MALE WORKERS

A gathering of about 50 Gay male workers took place on Saturday, October 5, 1974 at Bishop's Coffee House in Oakland, California, sponsored by the Gay Men's Political Action Group. The purpose of the day's activities was to provide an opportunity for gay men to discuss and share their various experiences as gays on the job. Some of the topics discussed were the difficulties in being either in or out of the closet at work; job discrimination; relations among gay men at work; and relations with unions, employers, and other workers. Attempts were made to reach gay men in all areas of employment: in professional, office and factory-type occupations and also in gay-identified jobs, such as hairdressers, and hospital employees.

The discussion among the mixed group of workers revealed that employers in virtually all fields spanning all levels of the economic spectrum manipulate their gay employees into positions of absolute powerlessness. This happens whether the employee is "out" or not, and assigns gay

workers to a vulnerable position while granting employers a convenient excuse to arbitrarily fire gay workers, who have no security and exist under constant fear of being dismissed.

Many employers will allow gays to work for them, even as relatively up-front gay people, while still maintaining anti-gay regulations on the book. This type of policy insures that gay people will have to "stay in their place," not cause any trouble, and accept the most unpleasant assignments. Thus if gay people should become too active in politics or unions, for example, they can be fired, ostensibly for their gayness, and not for their offending activities.

This type of double standard is especially rampant in the Armed Forces, the ranks of which contain many faggots, contrary to public opinion and Pentagon propaganda. One man, who was in the Navy for nine years, revealed that up-front gays can exist comfortably enough in the service if the don't get busted, compromise themselves, or tarnish

the sacred name of their branch of service. A veteran of the Air Force stated that many bases house gay bars. He described Travis AFB as the "gayest place around," far surpassing anything that San Francisco could offer. Travis has both enlisted men's and officer's clubs that function essentially as gay bars.

Nevertheless, all branches of the service maintain anti-gay regulations which grant the military impeccable legal grounds for throwing anyone out who is gay whenever they wish to do so. Thus if any faggot gets too uppity, organizes his fellows on base or national issues, or gets in the news, he is summarily discharged, despite the fact that he may have been openly gay for years beforehand. The reverse of this, however, is not true: you cannot be discharged from the service simply because you are gay. The Navy veteran reported that he tried to get Conscientious Objector status but after nine years in the service, no one would hear of it. He then told his Commanding Officer that he was gay. His Commanding Officer told him that he was not gay, and anyway, who would care? He was finally able to get discharged only after persistently working on it by writing letters, making statements, and crusading on base.

A lot of gay men have to spend forty hours of their week in a straight environment surrounded by straight people talking of straight life and es-

pousing straight values. This reality creates great psychological imbalances between gay and straight co-workers, and is a source of both overt and subtle gay oppression. It was pointed out that sometimes survival necessitates being in the closet at work. Spending forty hours every week pretending to be straight is a difficult job in itself. Increasing numbers of gay men are beginning to realize that "coming out is a choice not to do certain kinds of work." Many faggots' first requirement for a job is that it permits them to be who they are — no more closets. They see survival as more than a paycheck.

Being ignored is a defining characteristic of gay men at work. There was almost universal agreement that gayness is not talked about on the job. Straight workers talk about their lives, loves, fantasies, and families, but there is no space for gay talk. Gay people find themselves giving much emotional support to their straight co-workers, most of whom do not even realize that gayness is something to talk about. These one-way relationships are very common among mixed workers, and represent an enormous rip-off of gay energy. Several men said that they had to start distancing themselves from the people they work with because they were giving so much and receiving so little in return.

Gay workers are expected to be "nice" as part of the price paid for

to suffer the same economic oppression as women. One woman asserted that it was "the butch studs, the male-identified men, who had led gay liberation into its bourgeois libertarian role." There was no disagreement with this. Other women affirmed the need for solidarity. One woman said that lesbians should work with gay men—if only to force the abdication of male privilege. Power, of course, must always be seized.

Now the workshop worked its way into a very central issue: How to reconcile the goals of Marxism with the goals of gay liberation. One person suggested that perhaps the fundamental assumptions of Marxism should be examined. Can all relationships—all power—be defined by economics? Or are there extra-economic forces which conspire to encourage oppression? Is, for example, the biological necessity of heterosexuality to achieve procreation a fact which will invariably encourage a society to favor heterosexuality? Such questions reveal the speculative nature of Marxism. Yet, it seemed, that in practical terms, though there were no assurances, no guarantee for gays, socialism was preferable to capitalism in that it was more just for humanity. But how does Marxism propose to achieve its goals? Through revolution—and revolution, by Marxist definition, means the seizure of power by the proletariat—the workers. The workers, and only the workers had the means to achieve revolution, since it was they who operated the means of production. And so the revolution must be the violent seizure of power by the workers from the ruling class. Marxism, therefore, emphasized the primacy of the worker in achieving revolution.

I found myself filled with reactions to this session. The full force of the idealism of the lavender and red struggle rushed over me, and I was thrilled, suddenly, by a vision of swirling red banners and lavender shirts—loud triumphal music—rows of humanity arm in arm, unafraid of kissing: sensual revolutionaries. Gone were the stiff green starched woolen cold uniforms of regimented militarism, the inflexible heartless dogmas of scientific analysis sternly, even gravely, proclaiming the seriousness of revolution. The male

authoritarianism had been vanquished, passion spirited the ranks of revolt; the soldiers made love together—uniforms gave way to joyous costumes. The ruling class was aghast—unable to comprehend the phenomenon. The commie-pinko-queers were happy. And their happiness was in the seizure of power, the inevitable revolution, the destruction of the church, the obliteration of the nuclear family, the end of poverty, the opening of prisons, the banishment of cadillacs. But then the cloud returned—the Revolution is a serious business: discipline, organization, hard work. And the socialists will allow no compromises in Marxism.

The Lavender and Red Union has its own bookstore with books by Marx and Lenin, a good selection of gay women's books, an assortment of gay men's books and various periodicals. There were also noticeable omissions to the standard repertoire of gay publications. A friend of mine had given several of his books of poetry to the Lavender and Red Union to sell in their bookstore. The poetry was gay liberationist poetry—celebrating gay sexuality: anti-sexist, anti-imperialist, anti-church, and the Lavender and Red Union central committee returned this poetry with a curt letter saying simply: "On the basis of political content we find ourselves unable to sell your poetry in our bookstore." No explanation, no encouragement, no personal touches, no affectionate terms, no "love, the Lavender and Red Union". It was a flat and total rejection—utterly arbitrary and utterly heartless. You see, the poetry did not smack of scientific analysis; it was not a product of endless study groups; it had a picture of a man in glitter and make-up on the cover instead of the biting stare of Marx or Lenin. It was poetry which spoke of an "army of lovers", of "freaking faggot revolutionaries"; poetry which said "revolution must be gay to be total".

And so I trembled a little at the Lavender and Red Union's letter. It came down rather than across. It was a symbol of all that I feared in the manifestations of Marxism: the reduction of existence to a beam of energy focused upon an important but narrow objective—the inability to perceive the grand and horrid dilemma of human existence, except in terms of economics. The rejection of Michaelangelo and Wagner, or even

the beauty of a flower or a drag queen, because art and beauty are not included in the masculine notion of revolutionary violence. To this my artist's spirit replies: Let poetry lead the revolution, let drag queens design the uniforms; let workers smile, laugh, sing and watch the sunset while they strike. I fear the Catholic nature of Marxism—its quantitative anti-sensual nobility. But its nobility—yes, a curious word to attach to Marxism. Justice for all humanity demands humanity's nobility. To achieve justice, humanity must deprive itself for a time. But time is a precious commodity because each life has a limited helping. And so—the paradox of revolutionary self-deprivation.

And so my conclusions are these: I believe life must be enjoyed while the world is changed. Revolution must be fun, as well as deadly. And if pleasure is a privilege, it is, I think, one that humanity deserves. Gay liberation and Marxism have a great deal to offer each other. Gays must learn to understand their oppression in the context of class analysis. Gays must realize that freedom for bourgeois gay males is not real gay freedom. Gays must realize that the repeal of laws, the end of harassment, the end of discrimination, even the sanctioning of homosexuality by

this society—still is not real gay freedom. And Marxists must learn that the supremacy of the worker cannot mean the advocacy of working class values. Beyond the change in the balance of power there must be a change in the substance of human values. Revolution is more than just the seizure of power; it is also the alteration of the hopes and aspirations of those who seize power. The just distribution of power, though an improvement, will not guarantee justice for all human beings. And so it is up to socialists to redistribute power, and up to women, third-world people, and gays to transform the new owners of power. And those who would be both socialists and gay liberationists, let them pursue revolution, class analysis, planning, scheming, overthrow, with imagination. Let gay socialists employ the full power of their talents in poetry, films, cooking, writing, and love-making to revolt the world. When we leave a study group let us dance and subvert, sing and steal, kiss and shock, wear a dress and confront the system we hate. But let us also share the struggle to overthrow the chains of the bosses. It takes a fairy to make a revolution pretty.

—David Greene



Gay participants in Chilean Resistance march, San Francisco, Oct. 1974

Photo: Alejandro Stuart

straight acceptance. Gays are forced to accept heterosexuality as the norm while straights ignore gayness. People may know that certain workers are gay but nothing changes in their relationships. Most often everyone is assumed to be straight to such a degree that it is impossible to even discuss gay related topics. This is true even in situations where there are lots of gays employed and where it is common knowledge that half the men on the ward are screaming fags. You still do not talk about it. Gays are expected to act just like straights. Here again, faggots are leaving jobs where they are totally and consistently ignored.

Participants in the Conference felt that gay workers derive a lot of support from each other on the job, although many said that there is a constant frustration factor in these relationships. One man discussed a two-faceted relationship he had with one of his fellow workers; inside the work situation they were closeted, acting like any two straight workers but outside the job situation they had a gay relationship. Other gay workers mentioned that they can never be demonstrative with other faggots at work, that they have the freedom to be gay only behind closed doors, even when people are upfront about being gay. Despite these handicaps most gays know that their sanity on the job demands close contact with their brothers and sisters.

On the legal front gay workers are in a largely unprotected position. There are no laws barring discrimination against gay people, and few unions will fight for such clauses in their contract. A hospital worker related that he proposed that the union ask the hospital to bar discrimination based on sexual preference in their contract negotiations, and the union did so. When the hospital rejected this idea out of hand, the union made a tactical decision not to fight for this clause, despite large numbers of gays in this particular union. Most unions do not actively support their gay members or fight for their rights. Gay workers often are arbitrarily fired or just as arbitrarily transferred to "non-sensitive" positions, actions which unions will usually oppose. Several gay workers mentioned that they had considered becoming more involved in their union but were intimidated from doing so by the dominant straightness of the organization. However, it was pointed out that the formation of gay caucuses within unions, using gay negotiators, and active gay participation would probably improve the quality of work life for gay people.

There is little more support for gay people keeping their jobs than for getting them. One man reported that his lover had been offered a job at 7:30 in the morning. When he told them he was gay, the personnel director told him that "he would have

to call him back later about this job." At 11:30 the same morning he was told that "they had another candidate for the job." The American Civil Liberties Union and the Whitman-Radcliffe Foundation, are both interested in the legal ramifications of this kind of job denial. One factory worker reported that he was successful in convincing his straight co-workers to go out on strike when he was threatened with dismissal because of his gayness. The management, impressed by this show of solidarity, relented and the worker kept his job.

Gays working for gay employers in gay establishments do not fare so well either, probably because of the exploitative nature of bars and baths. The privilege of working in a gay environment is so sought after that gay employers oppress their employees in much the same manner as straight employers do — low wages, long hours, arbitrary firings. The class nature of the employer-worker relationship takes precedence over the common bond of gayness.

There was agreement that gay workers face many of the same oppressions as third world and women workers. The commonality of these experiences provides a fruitful opportunity for these workers to improve their working and economic situations. However, before this opportunity becomes a reality, the anti-gay patterns which prevail in the working world will have to be over-

come. No small task. Many gay men at the conference stated that they felt most comfortable working independently in situations where they could choose who they would work with or for. Many gay men are striving for economic survival by independent means, whether free-lance professionals, craftsmen, therapists, or teachers. It was recognized that this choice is one of relative privilege and not open to all gay men. However, this idea seems to be attracting more and more faggots who are tired of being ignored, oppressed, manipulated, and liberally accepted by the dominant straightness of the majority of work situations.

This Bay Area get together was the first of its kind where gay men joined to discuss economic identities and situations. The sponsoring Political Action Group, a study group of six gay men, has been in existence for almost two years. Their previous activities have included work on a Gay Rights Platform in the Oakland municipal elections and distribution of an East Bay Gay Men's Newsletter. Their study group is continuing, and can be contacted at (415) 654-1578.

—Ron DeLuca

# PRAIRIE FIRE:

## A Gay Male Critique

**PRAIRIE FIRE** *The Politics of Revolutionary Anti-Imperialism*. Political Statement of the Weather Underground Printed Underground Summer 1974, 152 pp. paper.

When I was growing up and would come across any book that looked like it might contain mention of "it," I would quickly check the index under "homosexuality" and then avidly read that section, devouring any information that might be a clue to my most secret feelings and desires. It's a habit that has always stayed with me and although I rarely agree with much of what I read about "it," I'm still interested.

The first time I picked up *Prairie Fire* I scanned the table of contents and skimmed the book trying to find out if we had been mentioned. I checked out "The Women's Movement" and found nothing. Then I glimpsed "Women Liking Women" and I knew from experience that this was about as close as we're going to come to any specific discussion of gayness in the book. Sure enough I found something there— something vague, detached, patronizing, and reflecting all of the oppression that the New Left inflicts on gay people, especially gay men.

I must reluctantly admit that my initial gut reaction was one of relief; for once we hadn't been totally ignored, for once a leading revolutionary force had acknowledged that gay people are part of the struggle, a group for whom it will ostensibly be better in the future. To feel relief at such token crumbs says a lot about the way I have been treated, and about the treatment of gay people in general within the movement. But this conditioned response— of getting kicked in the head and saying "thank you, sir"— quickly passed into anger, a righteous anger that has been building to a crescendo since my involvement with the Left forces began in Berkeley about three years ago.

The history of gay people within the movement is a sad one. The original Venceremos brigade that defied the State Department to go to Cuba to cut cane contained many gay people. When their gayness became known, these people were informed that their presence was no longer desirable. The straight members of the brigade were only too happy to help the Cuban officials torment the gay folks. Socialist Cuba, a model of revolutionary development, has a notoriously oppressive attitude towards gay people, who are tortured, discriminated against, and herded into ghetto areas by the state police. Furthermore, the government is determined to eradicate gayness from the country and has embarked upon a strenuous program to do so. The *Declaration By The First National Congress on Education and Culture* reads, in part:

The social pathological character of homosexual deviations was recognized. It was resolved that all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading...

The movement in America is not far behind these kinds of activities. While overt oppression is no longer politically correct, gayness is definitely not a desirable state within the Left, and there is no support for gay people within the movement. The exodus of many gay people from radical organizations is a telling testament to the treatment of gay people by these revolutionary organizations. The Black Panthers, International Social-

ists, Peace and Freedom Party, and other groups have recognized gay people as part of the overall struggle. But this recognition has not really altered the anti-gay patterns which prevail in Leftist organizations. These patterns tell us to

Be quiet, pass for straight and everything will be fine.

Be gay somewhere else.

Gayness is not a priority in my life.

Shut up, boy.

*Prairie Fire's* treatment of gay people is a mirror image. On one hand it reflects the dominant culture's treatment of gay people, which is a total social, educational, and political black-out. You grow up in America and never experience any validation, reinforcement, or education from society for gayness. Everyone knows about it but there is a conspiracy of silence; the specter of gayness hangs over every person's head, so terrifying it is that one never mentions, sees, or hears of men loving men, women loving women. Gayness is the ultimate ridicule, and the threat of gayness is the ultimate terror to insure correct sex role identity.

*Prairie Fire* also reflects the Left's sophisticated form of this same black-out, a prevailing attitude of "benign neglect." This attitude is basically the same as the dominant culture's except that there is vague support offered, motivated by guilt, but reflecting no real effort to come to grips with the Left's total lack of gay consciousness on both individual and collective levels.

So there are no specific references to gay men in the book. Absolutely none. All references to gayness emanate from a lesbian perspective, and these oblique references are basically meaningless. It is difficult for me as a gay man to discuss women with women, but since this is the only mention of gayness in the book I will begin with lesbianism.

Western civilization has always been more tolerant of lesbianism than of faggotry, and *Prairie Fire* follows right along in this contradictory tradition. Today the Left builds theoretical altars to Lesbianism, but its support is mere ceremony. Lesbianism, per se, is not appreciated or lauded but is seen rather as a right-on response to fucked-up men and unbearable chauvinism. Thus, the book reads:

Lesbianism has been an affirmation of unity and a challenge to the partnership of sexuality and domination.

Nowhere is there real encouragement for the development of relationships between women for their intrinsic value, as a way of exploring an area of one's being that is strongly denied by the dominant culture. There is, however, an emphasis on the unity it will build to topple male domination. Lesbianism is still seen as part of the larger heterosexual framework and not as a source of revolutionary love, joy, and liberation which it truly represents.

The whole tone of the section on gayness is liberal, patronizing, and indicates a total lack of gay consciousness. For example, with what sounds like a commandment from a liberal Bible, the section concludes:

We support the right of all people to live according to their sexual preferences without discrimination or fear of reprisals.

Then there is talk of "...the dominant culture's treatment of homosexuals (sic)...because they don't conform to standard sexual roles and morality..." and that sounds like leftovers from McGovern to me.

That kind of liberal shit is exceptionally patronizing to gay people. There is not even the remotest hint that any gay people were involved in the writing of this section. The "we's" who are supporting the "thems" or "those people" are clearly viewing gayness as an aberration which is far removed from their own lives, something which afflicts only a few (unfortunates). In addition, the use of the word "homosexual" as a designation for gay people is totally offensive and as a gay man I strongly resent it. Homosexual is an adjective; it describes an act. To describe one's being by this one adjective is absurd. Gayness is not homosexuality. Gayness is a cultural expression which permeates every aspect of one's being. People who meet me know that I'm gay before they know who I sleep with. My making love with men is but one aspect of my gayness, and I am tired of the Left's refusing to recognize this fact. Get the hell out of the fifties.

*Prairie Fire* blindly refuses to acknowledge the struggle of gay men to live their lives as they choose under sexist ideology. So under the heading "Anti-Sexist Men," one reads:

In response to the challenge of women, many men have begun to make a commitment to struggle against sexism.

This is true, but short-sighted. Gay men have had to struggle against the domination of sexism to survive, and many have been unable to escape unscathed from the experience. If you grow up in America and think sensitivity is more important than pushing a football down somebody's throat, you are in big trouble. But the authors of *Prairie Fire* could not get it together to say anything specifically relating to gay men's struggles, aspirations, strengths, and strivings.

Furthermore, the Left refuses to open its eyes to the *ipso facto* value of men's relating to men and, like the dominant culture, refuses to lend reinforcement or validation. Thus *Prairie Fire* can blatantly ignore gay men and say:

Mutual and expressive sexuality is part of the human potential for liberation. This has become a striving and a strength of the women's movement, in relationships between women and men, and in relationships between women.

The Left simply refuses to acknowledge gayness as a positive force, as a force which might possibly solve some persistent problems, and, most importantly, as a force which is present in every man and woman. People on the Left who have rejected the propaganda of capitalism/imperialism/American Destiny find it excruciatingly difficult to reject the same system's sexuality.

Leftists will tell you sincerely that they want to live and work with gay people. Gayness is chic this year, and the presence of some token gays (as study objects) wins a feather for any collective's radical bonnet. But I have been that token gay a number of times and these experiences convince me that the Left has no idea of how to live, work, and meet the special problems and needs of gay people.

Radicals are so threatened by intimate relationships with members of the same sex that they refuse to grow, to explore that part of their being. There is no continuum of sexuality here, only a sharp distinction around the gay people, who are tolerated, and considered to be very different from everyone else. Thus I have found myself continually frustrated and alienated in Leftist organ-

izations. No one knows how to deal with my gayness, which is either ignored or viewed as a mysterious and chronic annoyance, something I had damn well better get over. It has always seemed highly ironic to me that the ability to love a member of the same sex, which has been so strenuously and systematically repressed by the dominant culture, is just as strenuously and systematically repressed by these so-called liberated people.

Gayness itself is no panacea, no perfect solution, nor are gay people totally together by any means. But gayness should at least be recognized as a positive force, an energy which can go a long way towards eliminating machismo, competitiveness, war and open up new vistas for personal exploration, development, and freedom. Liberation of gayness offers equality, the absolute core of all revolutionary struggle.

*Prairie Fire* is in many ways an admirable book. It is an analysis of the Vietnamese War, the anti-war movement, and the meaning of America's loss to its imperialistic plan. The book also provides a much-needed outline of the history of resistance to the American Dream from the Indians to the current struggle. *Prairie Fire* analyzes the crisis of imperialism in light of the rise of the Third World and the organized resistance from within the empire itself. It goes on to explain the tasks ahead, lists some pitfalls to avoid, and offers possible directions to pursue.

But *Prairie Fire* basically ignores gay people, refuses to acknowledge our struggle, energy, and contributions. Just as the dominant culture doesn't want to see me, so am I invisible to *Prairie Fire* and most of the Left. I'm getting totally frustrated at how the Left relates to gay people; it freaks me out to suffer the same oppression from movement people committed to destroying the Empire as I do from the Empire itself.

Is *Prairie Fire* really for me? No, and neither are the present organizations of the Left which are persistently oblivious to the oppression and needs of gay people, as well as the very existence of gayness itself. Participation in straight movement activities, collectives and cadres is cultural suicide for gay people.

This reality poses quite a dilemma for gay people, many of who have strong leftist politics. But the insensitivity of movement people to our existence precludes our establishing meaningful relationships and deep commitments to present left groups. Gay people's first priority is to ourselves, to our own fight for liberation, whether from the dominant, counter, or movement cultures' oppressions. This is not to advocate total withdrawal but to indicate the general direction that our energies might best be channeled. We can still and should support other oppressed peoples' struggles. For example, the recent anti-junta demonstration in San Francisco attracted a large contingent of gay people, who were not involved in the planning and direction of the march, but who showed up en masse to indicate their support and sympathy for the Chilean people. Until such time as the movement recognizes gay people, their oppression, and the universality of gayness, gay people will be forced to remain apart, struggling against both the Empire and the radical movement in our fight for freedom.

— Ron DeLuca

# Burroughs

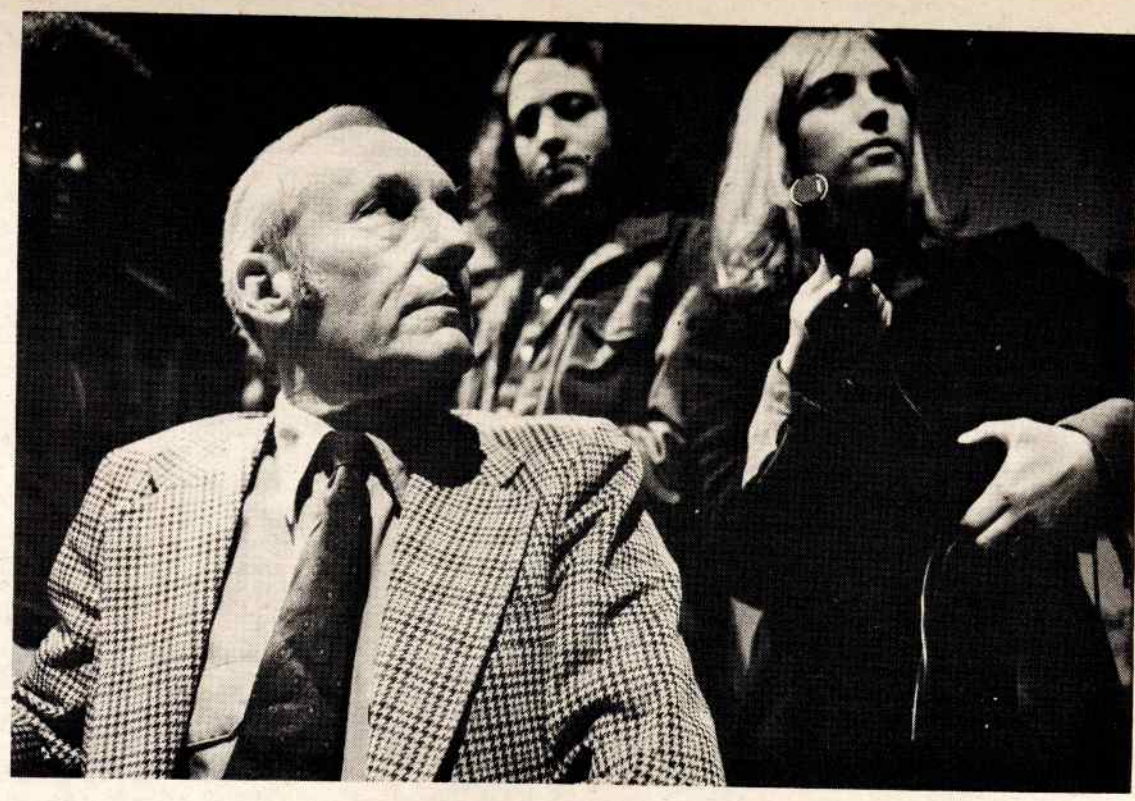
The following essay by William Burroughs was published in somewhat different form in The Gay Liberation Book [Ramparts Press, 1973]. It has recently been revised and expanded by Burroughs and appears here for the first time in the new version.

## SEXUAL CONDITIONING

Sexual morality in the Western world is based on the Bible and especially on the teachings of St. Paul which presume to impose one arbitrary and dogmatic standard of sexual behavior on all people everywhere and forever. The teachings of St. Paul are now dead and unworkable. Dead since the pill has separated sexual pleasure from reproduction. Dead since overpopulation has made reproduction something to be curtailed rather than encouraged. Dead since experiments have shown that sexual desire is a matter of stimulating certain brain areas and that such stimulation is *purely arbitrary*. Admittedly homosexuals can be conditioned to react sexually to a woman, or to an old boot for that matter. In fact both homo- and heterosexual experimental subjects *have been* conditioned to react sexually to a boot—to an old boot. You can save a lot of money that way.

In the same way heterosexual males can be conditioned to react sexually to other men. Who is to say that one is more desirable than the other? The latter-day apologists of St. Paul who call themselves psychiatrists have little to recommend them but their bad statistics. Psychiatrists say they need more money and more personnel to deal with the ever-growing problem of mental illness, and the more money and personnel channelled into this bottomless pit, the higher the statistics on mental illness climb. It is indeed an ever-growing problem at this rate. Personally I think that mental illness is largely a psychiatric invention.

On December 3, 1973, the American Psychiatric Association decided that homosexuality would no longer be considered a mental deviation. Well, if they have more mental patients now than they can handle, it would seem to be a step in the right direction to remove homosexuals from this category. But the decision has caused a storm of protest. One psychiatrist compared the decision to "a psychiatric Watergate which we hope won't be our Waterloo..." They just don't like to see any prospective patients escaping; it could start a mass walkout. Doctor Charles Socarides, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the Albert Einstein clinic staunchly opposes the new APA approach: "The APA has done what all civilizations have trembled to do...tamper with the biologic role between the sexes."



William Burroughs at Gay Sunshine Poetry Reading, San Francisco, Nov. 4, 1974.

Photo: Diana Church

Fancy that! And in a letter to *Playboy* in June of 1970, Dr. Socarides says, "Five hundred million years of evolution have established the male/female standard as the functionally healthy pattern of human sexual fulfillment."

Just a minute here, Doctor—the human species is not more than one million years old according to the earliest human remains so far discovered. Other species have had a longer run. Three hundred million years have established a big mouth that can bite almost anything off and a gut that can digest it as a functionally healthy pattern for sharks. 130 million years more or less established large size as functionally healthy for dinosaurs. What may be functionally healthy at one time is not necessarily so under altered conditions, as the bones of discontinued models bear silent witness. But sharks, dinosaurs, and psychiatrists don't want to change.

The sexual revolution is now moving into the electronic stage. Recent experiments in electric brain stimulation

indicate that sexual excitement and orgasm can be produced at push-button control or push-button *choice*, depending on who is pushing the buttons control. Buttons to the people. None of these bits of technology are in the future. The knowledge and most of the hardware exist today. In terms of human sexuality what could it mean? It could mean you can plug in anything you want.

Experiments in autonomic shaping have demonstrated that subjects can learn to control these responses and reproduce them at will, once they learn where the neural buttons are located. Just decide what you want and your local sex-adjustment center will match your brain waves and provide a suitable mate of whatever sex, real or imaginary, while you wait. It is now possible to provide every man and woman with the best sex kicks he or she can tolerate without blowing a fuse.

Any candidate running on that ticket should poll a lot of votes and bring a lot of issues right out into the open.

from EPSILON/the silence

1.  
turning his eyes toward the street  
& unbuckling the silver-dragon clasp on his belt  
  
he gathers the red-flushed ligaments of his body  
under THE ONE;

abdomen, like the coleus on the wall  
twisting, reaching down/outward

towards the promise of light & moisture,  
to heal & awaken the dormant-flamed ecstasy

of the soul. BUT not this time.  
this is not the one. TURNING his eyes

he dreams of nights that run  
like a stream of faceless bodies,

& his face, that nameless face  
that passes

on the naked concrete of the street  
with a cigarette & denim-clad torso.

& the feeling slowly edged from yr loins  
it has been a few years since tears fell  
since the body was consumed in surrender  
by another's breath

2.  
alone, he dances on center stage,  
tight-ornate strap, a serpent of beaded silver

around his loins, shimmers  
under the bouncing flood of coloured

lights. THIS drunken winter  
dancing, caught by the salted stares

of others talking/touching towards  
the thrust of his pelvis. he moves

& moves & moves across the dance floor  
thru bodies, thru the haunted city

of whispers —  
waiting to touch

& dream the unknown center/  
lover.

poem continued above

ended: you thought it would have  
death from smack,  
  
waste of the body:  
nights in a prairie of seduction  
hoisting yr cock back forth back forth,  
& those loving you you never let touch,  
only the demons/vipers  
with their cachet of dollars

—Kenneth Lee

### FURTHER OUT

gently irresistibly  
  
OUT  
to throw off the straight  
jacket strangle hold of madison avenue  
cowboy movie consciousness

to break out blessings from disguise  
and dance on the grave of frozen concept

to open up and out in sensitive  
witness to the well within

to laugh at dire thought consumed  
as a drop in the whole of the new world

to swallow the word to the hilt  
in smiling defiance of  
the gag reflex complex

to know the reflection in five  
dimensions to make love in the sixth

to let pegasus fly  
into breathing fleshy existence

—Bill Mitchell  
Gay Yellow Star

may we place down our arrows  
may we place down our arrows?  
i am a bow before you  
my back arched, not unlike a halloween cat

i am placed before you my hands outstretched for yours  
your palms downward  
touch my forehead and cover my eyes  
adding dignity to your reply

soft beneath you, putty  
angels soft inside your hands  
my teeth force me to be as a trapped wasp or hornet  
but my tongue to sooth the sting  
the pain it will bring as calming as your breath in my head

Gavin Dillard

## LETTER TO WALT WHITMAN

1.  
Sometimes, when I'm at the beach I see your muse.  
He's tall, goodlooking, has dark blond hair  
and a bulge in the crotch of his blue bikini.  
I'm sure you would have enjoyed running  
your hand up his thigh or rubbing the sand  
out of that longish blond hair, Old Walt.  
He'd understand a lot of your poems, be a camerado,  
and might start wearing a golden calamus root  
on the same chain with his lambda sign.  
It's terribly hard to work, Walt, when he's around.  
Perspiration just rolls down my chest, when he's on  
the beach, and not simply because it's 94 in the shade.  
Don't know how you ever got your work done,  
but bet you had a lot of fun.

2.  
Walt, it's time for you  
to send out the poets to the heartland,  
tell them to eat corn on the cob,  
throw quarters across the waves  
at the Delaware River Water Gap (like George.)  
walk under the Brooklyn Bridge at night the way Hart  
Crane did,  
paint a Maine in bright colors country of Marsden Hartley,  
and stare down the throat of the Continental Divide in  
Colorado like a hummingbird looking in the vagina of a hibiscus;  
tell them to go grope some Grand Teton lumberjack  
and sing with the wolves and coyotes a song of Jack London,  
fish for giant Marlins in the Caribbean with a beard grown for  
the occasion like Papa Hemingway's,  
sip mint juleps and talk to magnolia belles with honey-voiced  
Tennessee,  
cheerfully drink water from skulls & cacti alike in Death Valley,  
wrestle with our Indian brothers who built Louis Sullivan's Chicago,  
shoot up and wail blues with the black brothers in New Orleans  
& Harlem,  
recover spirits and minds on peyote buds in New Mexico,  
and having done this and all these other American customs,  
will be able to fill lines rich and ready like reeds with music,  
harmonize the old & dying words,  
give a boost to all the minorities  
including all your sisters from Alaska to Hawaii  
and your own minority, your gay brothers and sisters.

And help us, Walt, dream our dreams  
torn from America's underside  
polarized America, America in trouble, and let's  
lay low delayed Victory, that tart & scrawny bitch  
& let's have America speak through us:  
Old Walt let's offer a  
poem together  
to the twenty-first century.

R. Daniel Evans

## GAY LITERATURE, continued

use of mythology a tactic of evasion? How serious is Proust's deliberate distortion of homosexual experience in order to save all the life-affirming qualities for his pseudo-heroines? How much pseudo-homosexual literature can be uncovered if we earnestly endeavor to discover the manipulation of other-sex personae? What are the results of a scientifically-conducted study of readers' reactions to identical poems with other-sex authors, and what does this reveal about prejudiced reading patterns (a project that certainly deserves funding by a research agency!)? To what extent have homosexual authors been duped into condemning themselves in order to satisfy their readers' expectations? The constantly-recurring "problem" that critics have set for themselves — whether homosexual literature in general is "normal" or "abnormal" — is abysmally dull in comparison to the wealth of other topics crying out for research and criticism: How does male homosexual literature differ from female homosexual literature? Is lesbian literature written by males (e.g. Balzac, D. H. Lawrence, Henry James) a "bastard genre"? What are the archetypal initiatory patterns in "the school story"? What is the formula of gay confessionals? What is the extent of inter-imitation in homosexual literary circles such as the Beat Poets of San Francisco, and is it more creative than in-breeding? What are the sexual politics of contemporary gay women's poetry in the underground media? Why are pederastic themes so scarce since 1920? How are anti-gay editorial policies implemented by learned journals and publishing houses, and how does this distort our sense of what is being researched and of critical interest? Is sickness a metaphor for self-discovery, and is this metaphor still viable in a gay liberation context? With what frequency is the typical beautiful girl modeled upon the archetypal beautiful boy? Homosexual literature in itself and in relation to its 2000-year-old tradition is a vastly intriguing topic, its rhetorical topoi and themes quite worthy of investigation for their own sake, with a diversity sufficient to engage a lifetime of critical endeavor for the critic who is truly a literary critic rather than a moralist.

But the barriers will be difficult to overcome. The strategies of degradation have been so successful that modern readers confront any literary expression of homosexual love as a *bizarrie*, supporting our western cultural prejudice that homosexual love itself is a rare offshoot from the mainstream. The abominable sin unfit to be named among Christian critics is forcefully buried if it is named, just as devout medieval monks literally defaced with tar innumerable manuscripts containing gay drinking songs. The reconstruction of what has been lost of the tradition will entail a program similar to etymological back-formation. The ingenuity spent upon literary stigmatization — and the term "unnatural" still goes unchallenged in dissertations by doctoral candidates who should have a greater awareness of biological possibility — seriously impairs the credibility of most heterosexual critics and scholars. When even that most humane and tolerant of translators, Helen Waddell, translates the last line of a poem by Ausonius as "Flowers that were once bewailed names of kings" — omitting "and boys" (*et puerorum*) and thus censoring the reference to the homoerotic mythology of sacrificed boy-gods — the critic-gay-liberator realizes the inherent untrustworthiness of virtually all heterosexual lovers of literature who wrote before the year of the Stonewall Riot (1969), and most who have written since. More accurate information and perceptive commentary on homosexual literature and authors can be gleaned from such periodicals as *Arcadie*, *Gay Sunshine*, *Gay News*, *Him*, and *Fag Rag* (and the now-defunct *International Journal of Greek Love*), etc. than in all the scholarly journals indexed in the Modern Language Association's annual 80,000-item bibliography. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that our educational and critical traditions, originating in the homosexual environments of the Greek palaestra and the English boys' school, should have become the staunchest oppressors of the homosexual's rightful literary heritage.

— Rictor Norton

## MACHISMO, continued

part of the other's life. In an authentic sexual relationship there cannot be an active partner and a passive partner: the two subjects-eventually, more than two — who participate are equally active, they do something for their partners. The authentic sexual relationship is not a possessive bond like the one which ties the owner to his property, it is rather an act of common creation, a shared task.

Nor can *machismo* account for a feeling of love among persons of the same sex: the *macho* loves his female the way he subjects the objects that belong to him; therefore there can be no love between two people equally capable of subjectivity and of activity, neither of whom would be ready to be the other's object or property.

For the purposes of the discussion, let's make an anecdotal digression: it is clear that some movies shown recently in Buenos Aires ("Passionate Women", "Two Loves in Conflict", etc.), have disgusted many spectators by showing amorous relationships among men of average masculine state-of-being. The *macho* man can't credit what he sees, he tears his hair before this reality which escapes his narrow formulas. Here the system of fixed roles is inoperative.

What happens to him deep down is something with more impact: here he recognizes, that he himself can have a "bad moment," that he is not free from the danger of "taking wrong turns". The assumed, conscious, practicing homosexuality of those other *machos*, as *macho* as himself, triggers all of his latent, closeted homosexuality, and hence his uneasiness: to have to accept that all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, are homosexuals. In short: to have to accept that sex is not a question of roles or a "man's" role, except in the event that the sex is toward a reproductive end. There is a plurality of erotic and sexual functions, hetero and homosexual, of which one alone is good for the official morality, and the rest bad.

One has to come to the conclusion that it is our culture that furnishes us with the unconscious guilt and misery which later, affectedly, it undertakes to charge to Nature's account.

footnote

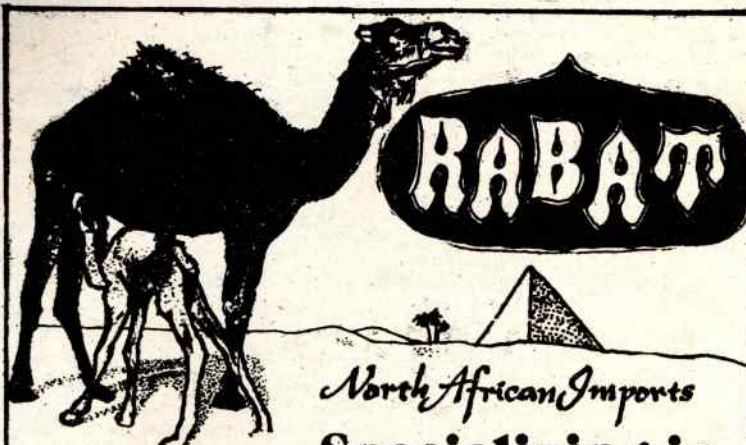
\* Throughout the Latin world, "straight" men can fuck faggots and get sucked off by them without considering themselves or being viewed as homosexual. Just as in the prison world, in the U.S. the "active" role entails no loss of masculinity according to this macho sexual system. Hence, the use of the phrase "sanctioned aggression" in reference to these acts. — translator

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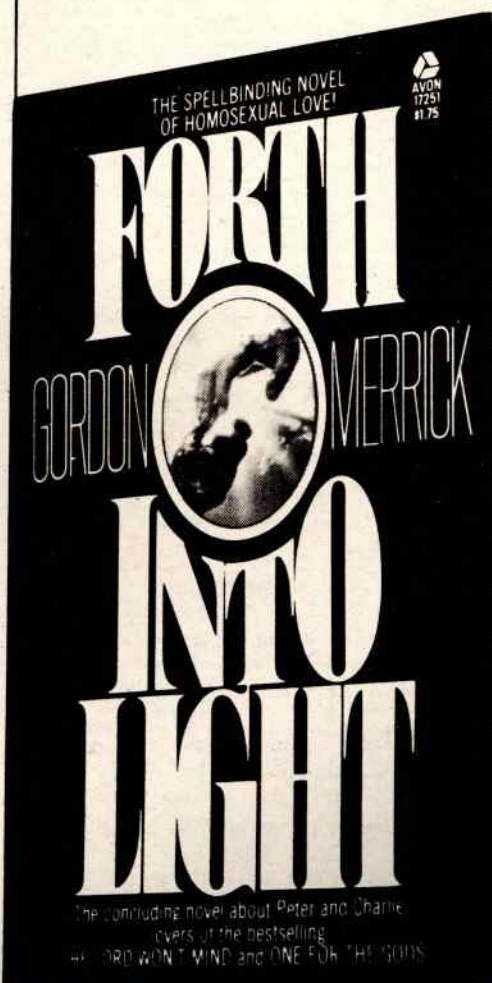
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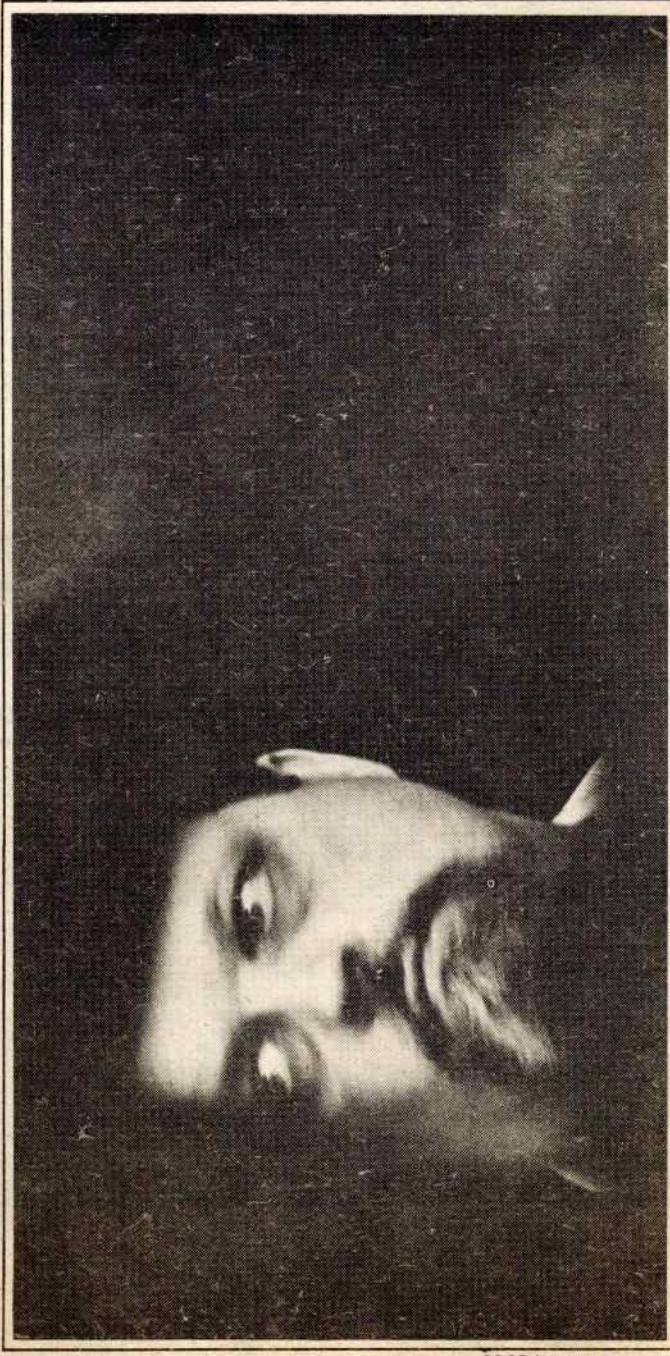
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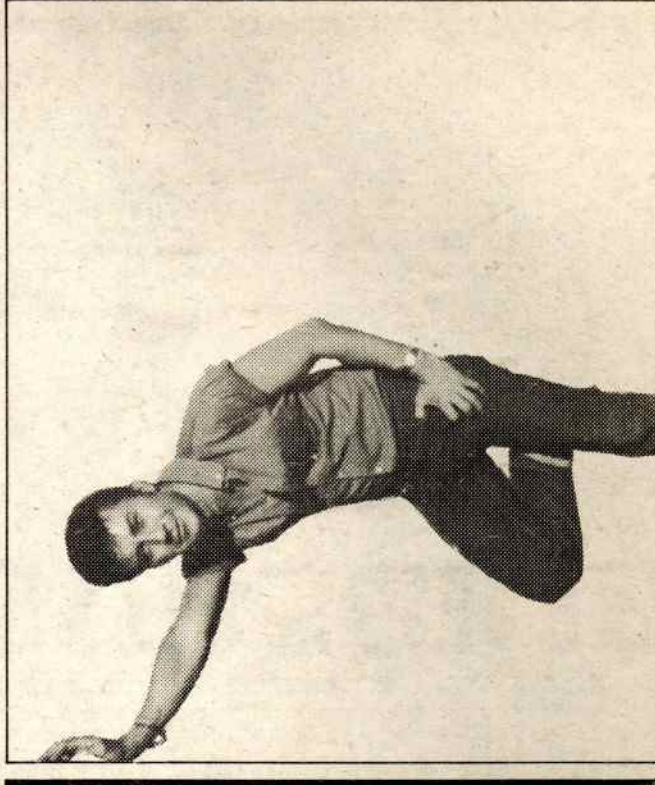
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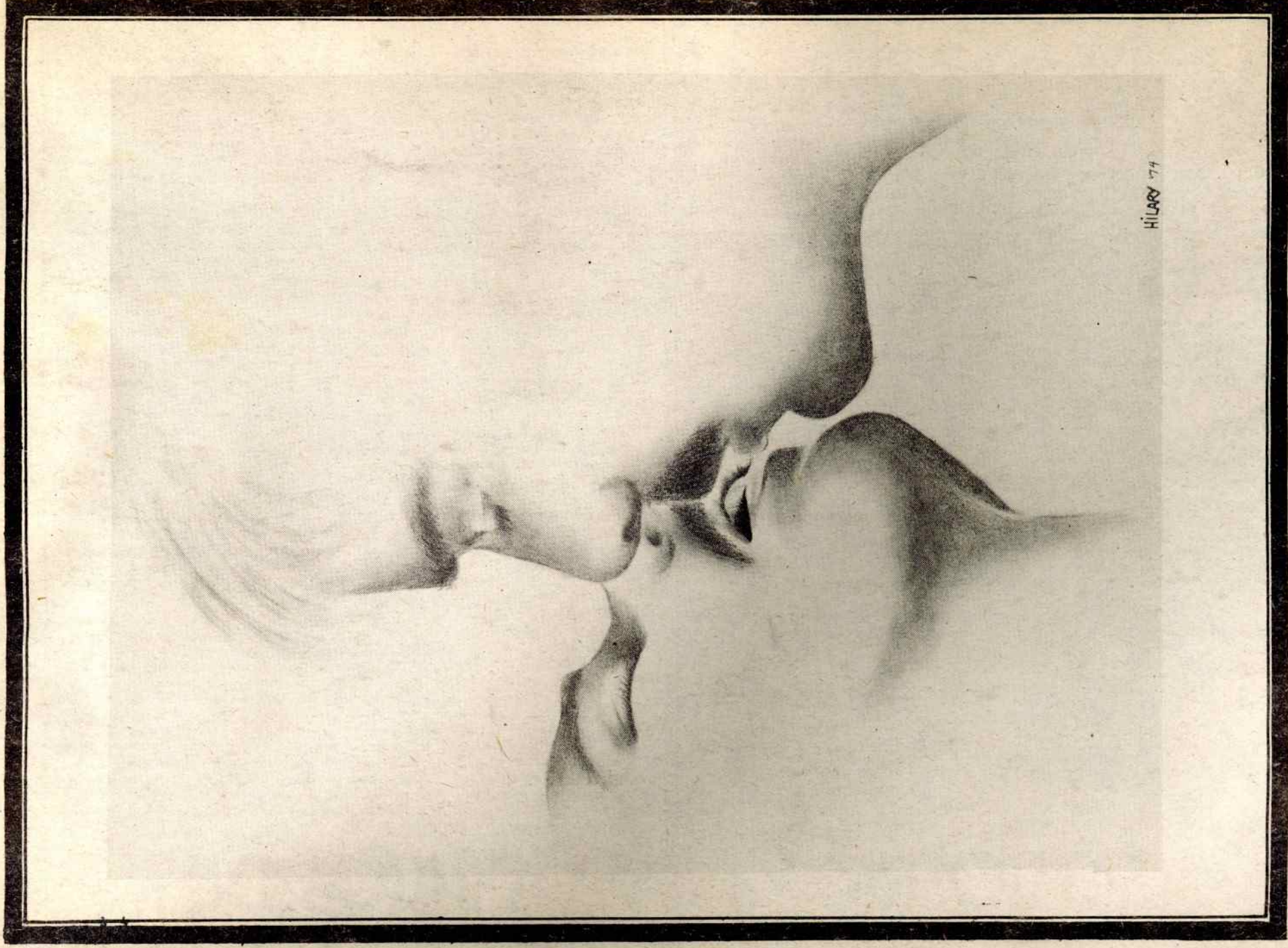
Lou Harrison, 1965

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INTERVIEWS  
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