GAY SUNSHINE

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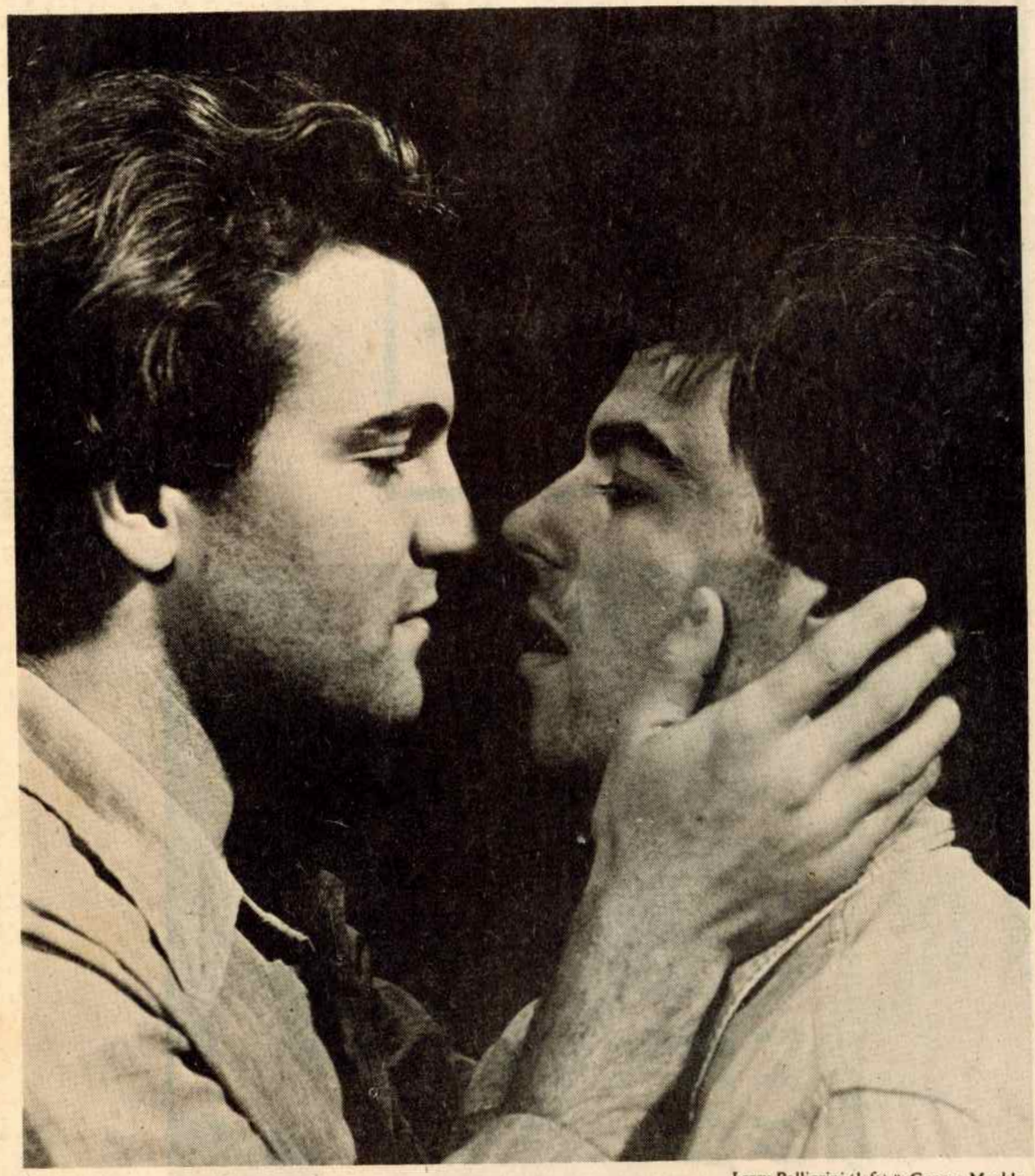

Larry Pelligrini (left) & George Muckle
in the play *Pogey Bait* by George Birimisa

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Robert Peters, Fayette, NY 1975
Photo by Max Yeh

INTERVIEW

ROBERT PETERS

ROBERT PETERS was born on a farm in Wisconsin in 1924. Ph.D. in Victorian literature, Univ. of Wisconsin. He has published books on A.C. Swinburne and John Addington Symonds. He is best known as a poet and has published Zebras of Light *[1973];* Holy Cow: Parable Poems (1974); The Gift to be Simple (1975); The Poet as Ice-Skater (1975); Selected Poems (1976); Shaker Light. *He recently completed a lengthy manuscript of poems in the voice of the mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. His poems have appeared in several anthologies, including the two published by Gay Sunshine Press:* Angels of the Lyre *and* Orgasms of Light. *He currently teaches Victorian literature and poetry writing workshops at the University of California, Irvine.*

The present interview was taped in San Francisco in March 1976 by Don Mark, a Chinese-American writer.

DON MARK: Where were you born?

ROBERT PETERS: In Northern Wisconsin, Eagle River, a town of 1400 people in the resort area of the state. We lived on forty acres of scrub farmland. Sand. My dad was almost illiterate; he could write and read only a little. He was born on the prairies of North Dakota. His mother died when he was two, so he was orphaned early. His dad would leave him alone in a sod house for weeks at a time, with sourdough pancakes to live on. So he had to roustabout early, and worked on threshing crews and with carnivals. He finally went to Wisconsin where his brother was a lumberjack. My dad always had a special gift for language, a natural gift. He invented similies all the time. He also taught himself to play musical instruments—four or five of them. He was like a big splendid happy child, and my own mother was like a mother more than a wife to him—or so it seemed. He had the spirit in the family, showed us the most physical affection. I was the eldest of five kids. And we were really poor. I deal with some of this background in poems in my *Bronchial Tangle, Heart System*. The interior walls of our log house were never finished—bare boards over the logs with cardboard cartons smashed flat and nailed up to keep out the cold. Nailends came through the boards. I recall numerous winter mornings lying in bed with nailends a few inches from my face covered with frost. My dad would usually get up first and start up a fire in the pot bellied stove in the living room. Then the frost nipples would melt and drip down into my face. And, obviously, we had no electricity—I did most of my studying by a single-wick kerosene lamp. And there was the proverbial outhouse—in thirty-below weather it could be pretty cold sitting there. Every spring my dad would shovel out all the ordure the family deposited in the winter and spread it around on the potato and vegetable fields. Good European practice, right, much frowned on in this country.

DM: What were morals like there?

Peters: My mother always stressed being clean, mentally and physically. She had a sense of a different world out there which she (and my dad) were too shy and self-conscious to make their way into and through. This was a world of education and plumbing and electricity. Someday, perhaps. In the meantime, struggle. No member of my family on either side had completed more than a year of highschool. And yet both parents knew that if their kids were to escape into that other world they feared it would have to happen through education. But, you asked about morals. Strange there, because we were lower than middle class, what Oscar Lewis calls subculture poverty, and hence freed of those middleclass taboos. In rural northern Wisconsin girls had illegitimate kids and nobody really thought the worse of them. You sort of made up your morals as you went along. In the early thirties the area was bucolic, unthreatened. But by the early forties the area became popular with the rich from Milwaukee and Chicago (including the notorious Mayor Kelly of Chicago, and Al Capone and similar types). This importation of slick city styles of behavior infected the folk-simplicity and resulted in many damaged lives, particularly among the girls and women who tried to land a Chicago man with money. Pathetic, really.

DM: Say something about your early education.

Peters: I was precocious, I guess. I had taught myself to read and to print words by the time I was four. I learned from ABC cards inserted between layers of Shredded Wheat. You bought these Nabisco boxes of cereal, and there were these splendid cards. I saved them and at age three copied them out on scraps of wrapping paper, grocery bags, etc. Soon I was filling tablets with them, and my mother helped me form words. She walked to the country school a mile off one day and returned with all the books they read in the first grade. By the time I was four I had finished all three books and was allowed to enter firstgrade. The academic side of school was alway possible for me—I worked hard; but emotionally I was always behind the other kids. And there were difficulties when I went to highschool. I was twelve and emotionally immature—self-conscious, afraid of having fights, etc.

DM: Did you have fixations on boys and men early?

Peters: Yes, as early as five or six. There was a cousin in his early twenties. Eventually he, my dad, and I formed a country-western band and played at dancehalls and taverns. I played guitar. A few essential chords. Nothing flashy. Picked up some extra money this way while I was in highschool. I was then something of a religious prig... and found it hard to deal with the drunks, etc. I was "entertaining."

DM: Did you read much when you were a boy?

Peters: No, not really. We didn't have many books at home. Those I read I brought home from school. Since the school was one of those old one-roomed affairs the library was little more than a set of shelves with a few books on it. My mother did subscribe to *True Story* Magazine. I always read those. Actually, we owned only two books: *A Child's Garden of Verses*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *Tom Swift and His Skytrain*. The Tom Swift bored me, so I never read it. I was never really interested in activities most boys are. And the Stevenson—my mother considered it such a special book and fancy (an aunt had given it to me for my birthday) that she didn't want me to wear it out by reading it. And she had named me after Stevenson: my middle name, like his, is Louis. I've come to appreciate my dad in many ways, but particularly for not teasing me for my indifference to his way of life: hunting, farming, fixing cars. He was a superb mechanic, and much of our meat supply came from what he managed to shoot in the woods. He never teased me because I preferred to lie in the hammock and read *True Story* while he built a machine to saw our winter's wood. I liked to pretend I was all the women in those magazines being loved, fucked, and abandoned by these splendid romantic dream men. I hardly knew what I was up to.

DM: Did you have any notions of being a writer then?

Peters: Yes. But first I wanted to be an actor. Clark Gable was my hero. Once my mother came up to me when I was nude standing on the rim of a gravelpit being Clark Gable. My hands were busy too. She didn't say anything, and we've never talked about the incident. Mucho embarrassment. My shyness prevented my pursuing an acting career seriously, although I did manage to do a couple of character parts in highschool plays. I was tall, about 6'2" then, aged 13. Hard to find a girl to play romantic lead to, right?

I tried writing poems early, but never got very far. When I was in third grade my teacher wrote a poem

and submitted it to the county fair as mine. We won seventy-five cents for first-prize. That wasn't really ethical. And she actually did a drawing to go along with the poem. I was in love with her. In highschool I tried my first novel: a grim long thing about that Czech village Lidice Hitler's SS Troops destroyed, shooting all the men as hostages, and deporting the women and children. I was even then something of an esthete; I wrote the novel (I never finished it) in a wallpaper sample book, as a way of making the novel "beautiful," apart from the writing. I was quite proud of it. I memorized a lot when I was in school: one Christmas the teacher had me memorize about 20 pp. in an encyclopedia on Christmas in Other Lands for recitation to parents at our school program. What a boring thing to listen to!

DM: You say that highschool was a period of terrible shyness...

Peters: Yes, and some fun too. I played tuba in the band, which helped me to know people. And one particular teacher, Esther Austin, took a special interest in my case. I was poor in math, pulling off A's in all my other subjects, but C's, D's in math. To discipline myself I'd take all the math courses I could, until eventually I did well. Esther was the school forensics coach, and she coached me on orations. I had no suit to wear to competitions with other highschools. And since I was so tall, there was no other student to borrow a suit from. So the principal loaned me one of his. There I was standing on the stage at Marshfield, Wisconsin about to orate against Hitler's treatment of the Jews (I had won first-place at my highschool) when I glanced down to see the principal looking at me. I shrivelled because of my sensitivity about being so poor to have to wear one of his suits. I forgot my oration and had to walk in tears from the stage without even completing it. Esther was marvellous though. I made a substitute mother of her, without knowing what she was up to all the while. She was keeping a journal on 3 of her students—she was working on a special degree in psychology at the University of Wisconsin—students who needed help growing up. These were detailed journals of her contacts with us. She actually arranged experiences to bring me out of my shell, and kept a tally of positive and negative points as she moved me along towards graduation. I didn't find out until I was a freshman in college and she wrote asking if I wanted a job typing her thesis. She paid me $10. Imagine my confusion when I saw the manuscript. Seeing it, I think, was positive but difficult. I typed the thesis. Over the years I visited her when I was in Eagle River. I saw her last four years ago, and found a shrivelled, senile woman kept in a rest home. She babbles incessantly locked forever in the school gymn at lunchtime where she is supervising students eating hotlunches. She no longer remembers me.

DM: How did you get along with other boys then?

Peters: Well, I had crushes on a number of them, and like them, played heavy macho girl-talk. I was tremendously self-conscious of my body, and found it absolutely painful to be seen naked dressing for gymn or showering. And I figured out ways of diverting threats of fights. I've never had a fight in my life—except verbally. Perhaps if I had had a couple early life would have been easier. I don't know. I concealed my fears behind pacifism, a pacifism based on Christianity. Hadn't Christ said "turn the other cheek?" My ploy with threateners was this: I was generally smarter than they were and sensed their hostility. To divert them I'd cook up some question to ask, to make it appear that I trusted them to give me information. That always turned off the violence. So, I paid for the disparity between my mental and emotional growth. And living in the sticks made it difficult to have friends. You just couldn't run over to somebody's house. The nearest boys lived a mile and a half away.

DM: What were they like?

Peters: They were called the "Dirty Family." By comparison, my family was rich. There were ten kids, and the father when he worked worked in the town sawmill. Three or four people slept in a single bed. There were few dishes and almost no cutlery. A common meal was a huge roasterpan of baked beans, plus fresh bread. The roaster was put in the middle of the table, and the whole family dug in with their fingers. The boys (two of them were my age) liked to play dirty—and I loved it. I found out about masturbation from them, and a few other things. They used to invite me fishing with them too, doing the things finally that boys do. We'd spend whole long wonderful days wading out into a lake to fish, and would hike miles through virgin forests and swamps to reach a good fishing spot.

DM: There's a lot of northern Wisconsin nature imagery in your work.

Peters: True. And I've written a couple of novels using the area as setting.

DM: Do you hope these will be published?

Peters: Yes. They were written about 1958 and 1963, somewhere in there. My dad is a central character in one of them. In the other novel the hero is a tall, black-haired lad growing up in northern Wisconsin, sensitive, etc, etc. Instead of making him gay, though, I give him epilepsy and have him fall in love with an older woman. As corny as it sounds it isn't a bad novel, I don't think. So perhaps someday some publisher will be interested in these books. I do hope so. I put a couple of writing-years into each of them.

DM: What are they called?

Peters: Shadow And Stone—that's the one about the epileptic. The other is *Joseph Lord*, the name of the main character.

DM: Can you say more about your early gay feelings?

Peters: I always had them, but thought all boys did, so wasn't too concerned until high school when I found my urgings to touch other boys almost overpowering. Perhaps I turned intensely religious to find strength to divert my sexual energy into more acceptable channels. I started reading the Bible, grooving on the pictures of semi-nude males. You wouldn't beleive the fantasies I had over Daniel in the lion's den! Although the word had gotten to me that masturbation would either rot your mind or your penis, I, as they say, took the loathesome matter in hand and whipped off, never failing to pray hard afterwards promising God I'd never do it again. But, when morning came... the same old thing. Much of my hunger for men to love was usurped by the anxiety about the future. I wanted to be an actor, writer, preacher, to go to college, to do something with my life. Those immense stirrings. Probably every adolescent has them. And I fell in love with girls, too. Even proposed to a couple, who, fortunately, turned me down. I was a hopeless romantic. I even took a girl to the junior prom, not realizing that she simply wanted to use me as a way to get there so that she could spend the evening dancing with other boys. I was tremendously hurt. And I'd bought the bitch a corsage, too. From this perspective, though, I can see her point. I was hardly the experienced man of the world she wanted. During this whole highschool period I assumed I would marry, that I would fall in love with a woman, that I would have children.

DM: What was your relationship like with your mother?

Peters: Extremely close. I was the oldest, and her favorite of the five kids. She had grown up on a North Dakota farm and had a heavy Puritan ethos. She believed men were "dirty,"—that was her word. My dad wouldn't bathe often enough to please her. We didn't have plumbing, or an indoor bathroom. So baths had to be taken at best once a week in a tub in the living room, one of those metal galvanized tubs for washing clothes. Water was heated in pans on the kitchen wood cookstove, a long process. And all the water had to be pumped from the outside well, by hand, rain or shine, snow or sun. I shared her views about compulsive cleanliness (I'm not as bad about it as I used to be), and saw sex as dirty. The dirtier it seemed to me the more it appealed. And since men were the dirty ones men intrigued me. I had placed Woman on a pedestal, with my mother on the topmost one. (Laughter). Sort of fits the cliched pattern, doesn't it? She was ill a lot then, goiter, too many kids, various miscarriages. So, as oldest kid, it was up to me to take over the housework. I was a pretty good cook then. Became a housewife early.

DM: You took care of your younger brothers and sisters?

Peters: Yes. My dad was a help too, although he wasn't home much, once he had WPA jobs: he had to drive about 20 miles to work in an old Model A Ford, and 20 miles back. And then we always had a cow and usually a steer for winter meat, two or three pigs, a flock of hens... so there was always work for him to do around the forty acres we farmed.

DM: You say that he approved of your sensitivity, etc?

Peters: Yes, he did. He never teased me or called me sissy, and for that I've always been grateful to him. He could easily have whittled me down, since I was so uninterested in hunting, fishing, repairing cars. Of course I milked the cow my share, cleaned the henhouse, fed the animals, planted and tilled fields. But my preference always was to be indoors. Dad sensed that I might escape the poverty, drudgery life he'd always known, and the way was through education. He urged me to go to school and to excel in it. He was a wonderfully patient man: he taught me to drive the Model A Ford. On my solo drive—he was with me—I broke a rear axle, which meant we had to walk three miles home and then get a farmer with a team of horses to pull the car in to be fixed. He didn't even raise his voice at me. And there were nights all through highschool when I was either rehearsing class plays or playing in the band when he would sit and wait for me, so that he could drive me home.

DM: Did you go directly to college from high school?

Peters: No. I was drafted into the Army when I was 18. And on graduation from high school managed to find a job with an insurance company. I took a couple of University Extension classes. But it seemed that my college career, for lack of money, would never happen.

DM: What would you have done with your life if you hadn't gone to school?

Peters: Possibly been an insurance claims adjustor. My fantasy was that I would somehow be a minister. I was very religious then. When I was twelve I had my whole family baptized. I was sure the Apocalypse was due, and none of us was ready. Sects near Chicago were putting on sheets and sitting on rooftops waiting to be assumed directly into Heaven. I was frightened. So one Sunday I decided to walk in to town and join a church. I intended to go to Catholic Mass, because I was impressed with a harelipped girl in the neighborhood who walked there every Sunday, without fail. Once I reached the Church, though, Mass was over. But across the street the Lutheran services were beginning. I knew that a girl I had a crush on went there, so as she was going in, I asked if I could go along. I liked it, and soon, as I said, had the whole family baptized. Eventually I was teaching Sunday School. At thirteen I was Superintendent, leading prayers, collecting pennies, singing, teaching a class.

DM: What happened to your faith?

Peters: That's a big one. Lost most of it in the Army. Went in tears to the training camp chaplain, a Rev. Crutchfield, saying I couldn't correlate Christ's commandment "Thou shalt not kill" with killing Germans. He patted my hand and unctuously said: "Well, don't be bothered about it. All you must do is follow the orders of your officers and ncos. They'll bear the responsibility for any people you may kill." I was horrified. And from that moment I mark the wearing away of my faith. Also, the Minister at home, Missouri Synod Lutheran, a Rev. Joseph Krubsack, had said that before I took Communion in the Army I should write him for permission; otherwise, I'd drink damnation for my soul. I did this for awhile—wrote him; but one day I took a plunge and had Communion on Base (Ft. Jackson, S.C.) and nothing happened. And I liked the Army preacher. So, I began to modify my views.

DM: Did you think less of Jesus?

Peters: No. He was fantasy person numero uno. At home there was a sweet statue of Jesus crucified above the altar—the usual one, of Jesus wearing only a loincloth. I'd spend hours grooving on him. I'd even go into the church during the week (it was a couple of blocks from the highschool) and pray and carry on. Reverently, of course. I idealized him—as I had idealized women. And yet his physical reality was a tremendous turn-on to me.

DM: Was it the GI Bill that enabled you to enter college?

Peters: Yes. I wouldn't have gone otherwise. Wouldn't be at the university or writing the work I've written today. I was discharged from the Army (I'd served in Europe) in 1946, after a three-year hitch. At the University of Wisconsin, Madison, I completed all of my work including the PhD in just six calendar years. I don't know of anyone who managed to do it so fast. And it wasn't that I was brighter than anybody else: I was a compulsive worker, and wanted to use the GI Bill for all the education I could get. I took huge programs ...twenty hours a term, full terms in the summers every shortcut I could.

DM: While in the Army, did you discover writers who appealed to you?

Peters: In a funny way I've never been much of a reader, not an addict, as some people (including my own children) are. Unless I was forced to by a teacher, I seldom finished a book. I'd get into one and get impatient. I seldom read poetry; I didn't know how to concentrate —and this was the case early on in college. I believed in learning by osmosis, I guess: I'd bring ten books home from the public library, intending to read them, would start a couple, and in two weeks would trot the whole batch back unread, and go home with ten more. My anxiety to be educated was enormous; it actually seemed to stifle and prevent the kind of reading I needed to do.

DM: Your own genesis as a writer has been self-generated; that is, you didn't want to become a writer to emulate certain idols.

Peters: I went through a period just prior to the military of reading Gertrude Stein. Although, here again, I never finished anything. I bought *Ida*, her novel, and memorized chunks of it, went around boring people by reciting it, and then tried to write three-or four-page sketches in imitation. I still, even today, hear her rhythms clearer than I hear anyone except Roethke's and Whitman's, Tennyson's and Swinburne's.

DM: Did you ever have an inkling that Gertrude was gay?

Peters: No, I wasn't up on those things. And it didn't dawn on me that women loved women and actually went to bed. I was so naive. I never had any sex in the Army... kept myself virgin until I married at age 25. I had tremendous crushes (less and less on girls as I grew older), but would never touch anybody. Afraid. To be known as gay in the late forties was an immense disgrace. I couldn't have handled it. .So, young man, force yourself into the hetero pattern. A phase. You're just passing through it. Not only did I fear sex with women: I feared sex with anybody! Sad? It was a relief to say you were saving yourself for marriage. But we did things like that forty years ago. I was sure that if I had sex with anybody I'd automatically fail.

DM: Did anybody ever try to have sex with you?

Peters: Yes, and I wasn't even realizing it was happening! There was a friend I saw a lot of when I was seventeen. We hung around this older woman, stayed up late nights (I was working in Wausau, Wis. for the Employers Mutual Insurance Co), danced to such marvellous people as the Andrews Sisters and the Ink Spots. Roy—that was his name—and I danced wonderfully together, practicing all sorts of great dips. Then, you know, we held one another when we danced. We even went to the Wausau High Junior Prom: Roy was in drag, sure nobody would recognize him. But they did, almost at once. I was still so naive, I had no idea what was happening. And I wasn't turned on to him. He visited my family up north that summer—which meant we slept in the same bed. He tried to do things, but I pushed him away and stupidly maintained my virginity.

Well, three years later, once out of the Army, practically the first thing I did was to seek him out and start

the friendship anew. We had a couple of evenings—the first sex I'd had with anybody. I was passive all the way. Had no concept, for example, that sodomy (I'd seen the word in the Bible and thought it had to do with sheep and heifers) was even possible. How would you get that *thing* in there? I've often wondered where Roy is, and what he's doing. He decided to go from smalltown Wisconsin to Chicago, where he could, he said, be anonymous, and live out his gay life. At the time I last saw him, he was drinking heavily.

DM: Some people who form romantic idealizations find it hard to connect any physical contact with that ideal, distant form. Did you have crushes on people in a Platonic sense and crushes on people in a physical sense?

Peters: I don't think I could ever dissociate the two. All these fixations were Platonic in the sense I never did anything. But there were super-physical crushes. I had them firmly in my fantasy-mind whenever I beatoff. Or I'd have wetdreams over them. I was afraid to make the initial contact, and yet I'd hunger for someone to appear and carry me off. I guess I still suffer from that anxiety... afraid to make that initial crossing-over, craving for the person I want to make an unmistakable sign that he wants me too. Most gays go through this, I'd guess. I've always envied the younger gays, for they don't seem hungup in the same way.

DM: These were crushes on both men and women?

Peters: At first, but then exclusively on men.

DM: Do you think that part of the energy that sped you through college so quickly was unspent sexual energy?

Peters: No doubt. And I still divert a lot of sexual energy into my work. The illusion is that I get three times as much done as most people do. For a period of a few months after coming out, I let myself go—went through a promiscuous period trying to see how many people I could get it on with. One month there were thirty, which for me was a record. I was beginning to drink (I'm practically a teetotaler now). Soon I realized that this was all heading down rather than up, so I called a halt and returned my energies to writing, teaching, giving readings around the country. Therapy helped me see this reality, too. When I come up here (San Francisco) which I do often, I seldom have sex trips. I see poets, editors, plays. I do some readings. Visit bookstores. And, too, I have a huge correspondence. I'm compulsive about answering people who write to me. My letters aren't masterpieces of writing, wit, etc.; but there are hundreds of them. The load has trebled since I agreed to help Tom Montag edit *Margins*. He asked me to guest-edit 3 or 4 issues. That work is finished. And I enjoyed doing it; but it meant that for a year I wrote no new poems. Also, I have a regular book-review commentary program on Pacifica radio Los Angeles, called *In Print*. It airs most Saturdays. These must be written out and taped; so that represents a heavy investment of time as well. I try to find out of the way books, with an emphasis on poetry and also on gay works.

DM: Can you tell me about Paul, the friend you've lived with for the past six years?

Peters: He's a very private young man. He's published some poetry in *Poetry Now*, *The MidAtlantic Review*, *Dodeca*. He is a homebody, interested in mystical things like spiritual healing. He's given me great security over these years. I was a mess when I met him. Good things have happened to both of us. A heavy private, personal friendship, with very little sex. My guess is that if we were rabidly into sex with one another we'd been apart long before this. He is a positive, beautiful force. We are about to try a new experiment though—living apart, but maintaining a close friendship. He needs more space and friends. And it will probably be good for me to stand back and get a fresh perspective. We've been living in an apartment house I own in Santa Ana. But next week I'll be moving into a new house in Huntington Beach. He'll stay up here. We're both anxious to see how this experiment works. My guess is that we'll be together in one way or another for a long time.

DM: Do you say you don't have sex at all?

Peters: I have a splendid friendship with a man I love very much. He has other ties, so our relationship can never be permanent. We've been seeing each other for over a year now. Met him at a gymn I go to. I work out on weights, etc., two or three times a week. I like the friendship: I can count on his being there, and on his affection. It has been a growing thing. *I* am not out looking. I don't know what the upcoming months of living alone will bring. I feel good anticipating them.

DM: When did you get married?

Peters: In 1950, while working on my PhD. Jean was another student and a writer. She's just sold a shortstory to *Harper's Magazine*. She was neat. From the outset we never pretended we were romantically in love. Both assumed we'd have a long marriage (which we did—20 years), and that our love would grow. We went through struggles: lack of money, illness, and finally the death of Richard. And the children came along too fast for her to continue her own writing. I've always felt guilty about that.

DM: Can you talk about Richard's death?

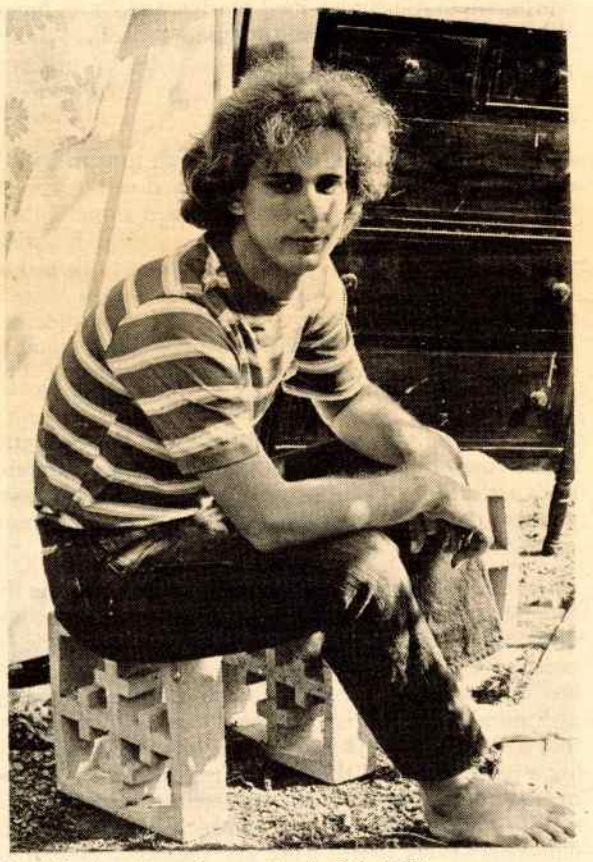
Peters: Yes. My first book *Songs For A Son* exorcises much for me. He was 4½ and had gone to nursery school in the morning, came home (I went to get him) complaining of a stomach ache. We both spent the afternoon in bed, both reading books. I was reading, of all things, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*—a grim work to read while somebody beside you is dying. Finally, he said he was tired and was going to sleep. The last thing he said was "I love you, daddy." I went down stairs, and shortly after heard this gurgling sound. Ran up to find him already in a coma. By the time he was at the hospital, he was dead. Meningitis. This death was for me the ultimate absurdity. I couldn't deal with it. Finally, therapy helped. And writing the poems—I started on them the day after he died. Before then I hadn't written poems to speak of: I'd tried some novels, and had written, edited, and published books on Swinburne's theories on literature and art, 3 immense volumes of John Addington Symond's letters, and a source book on Victorian art. I had also published a raft of articles. I managed even to be elected to the Board of Trustees of the American Society for Aesthetics. In other words, I was a thoroughgoing academic.

DM: Richard's death was the occasion of the beginnings of your poetic awareness. Is there a tie-in between death and your poetry?

Peters: Yes. What experience is more profound, and disturbing, than death? And I think that poetry is a—is the major way of dealing with it. But we needn't be grim about it, right? There is an absurd side to death. Grim humor, if you will. There is pathos in how a dead body looks. Absurdity. So rigid and fragile. So the fragile part... maybe humor isn't the right word, but the sense of the absurd appears, implying that there's an edge of humor in the event. Irony.

DM: The way you describe a corpse is the way you could describe a poem: rigid, yet delicate.

Peters: I get the feeling now that a lot of free long-line verse really isn't rigid: it isn't frozen. Maybe that's one of its faults. To me, if it's frozen it means it's got some strong sense of form going for it, which I like. I like formal poetry. It's a way of shaping something into a tiny form in a life that is probably full of chaos, personal feelings and all that. If a poem is going to be as chaotic as your life, it seems to me that you're missing out on a whole dimension of art. That's why I suppose the Ginsberg line—the long projective verse line... Ginsberg is often boring to me. I respect his achievements as a liberating social force.



Paul Trachtenberg; Laguna Beach, Cal. 1973
Photo by Max Yeh

DM: What about Walt Whitman? Was he formless too?

Peters: Walt Whitman had a lot of form, whatever the word means. Take a look at how he structured "Out of the Cradle..." There's form. He had a fine intelligence, of a sort Ginsberg and most poets equally reknowned never approach.

DM: But Ginsberg considers himself a literary descendant of Whitman.

Peters: OK, but then he gets confused being William Blake, or a Hindu Fakir, or Jeremiah. It's a heavy mix. But why knock him... there's so much dismal writing around, by prestigious poets, who need critical treatment more than Ginsberg needs it. There's a humility about him, I sense, about his awareness of his own limitations as a poet... I'd much prefer a finely tooled lyric by Roethke than reams of the verbal diarrhea in a lot of self-indulgent projective verse poems around today...

DM: There's a quote from Roethke at the beginning of *Songs For A Son*.

Peters: His book *The Lost Son* was helpful and influential for me. Roethke helped me develop my line, because in the 1960's, early, I hadn't read any projective verse. I'd been immersed in the Victorians, including Hopkins, and Dylan Thomas, T.S. Eliot, the usual people. I hadn't heard then of Charles Olson except as somebody who wrote a book on Herman Melville. I hadn't read any of William Carlos Williams except for a couple of poems in a textbook I taught. Robert Creely, I hadn't read any of him either. What I tried to do in *Songs For A Son* was to keep the lyrics simple, so simple a child could understand them. There was a popular song at the time called "Waterloo"—Stonewall Jackson recorded it. "Waterloo, Waterloo, everybody has to meet his Waterloo." That's pretty much how it goes. It had a very strong Salvation Army drum rhythm in it. That immense beat! I would play it at full volume in my study. This was in Ferndale, Michigan, outside Detroit. I was teaching at Wayne State University. I would turn the volume up so loud it hurt my ears, and that BOOM, BOOM BOOM was a way of getting some kind of pattern or metronomic stress into the grief. It made the pain less, simply to have that. It was like beating on the walls. Those rhythms I tried to get into those poems, which helped, I think, to explain my short line; I wanted the lines to be equivalent to what I heard in Stone Wall Jackson's music. So I wrote about 15 of these poems, and put them away for three years, not thinking they were publishable. They were secret, and wounds were healing. Eventually, I took them out and sent one off to the Canadian magazine *The Fiddlehead*. The poem was called "Kittens," the longest poem in the sequence. They took it. That made me think I might be on to something. I sent another poem to the *Western Humanities Review*, the poem called "The Burial of the Ashes" ("Ceremony" in the book). They took that one, so I set out then to organize the whole, to see it as a patterned work, as a single poem. I happened to notice in an issue of *Poetry* that Denise Levertov was editing a series for W.W. Norton, of poetry books. I sent the manuscript in. She wasn't sure whether the poems had the quality she was after, or whether she was intensely moved by the experience itself—so she thought it over, for about 5 weeks, while I waited and waited. Then the contract came. A super break, indeed. I shall always be grateful to her for helping me launch a fairly busy career. That Denise liked my work enough to publish it meant a great deal.

DM: How old were you when you felt the closet door coming off the hinges?

Peters: (Laughter). Perhaps it was one of those roll-up doors. I'm lousy at dates. I think Richard's death... and then my wife was convinced we couldn't have more children. Her solution was to adopt one. Well, I didn't want to, thinking we'd be asking for more trouble. But I acquiesced. It proved a disaster—but I won't go over the details here. We adopted a girl, a product of child-neglect, aged a year and a half. We brought her home from the foster home the very day our own third son, Jeff was born. He's now fifteen. It was all chaotic. There was a growing apart between my wife and me, which I take much responsibility for.

I received a Guggenheim Fellowship to England in 1966, to write a new book on Swinburne. In the meantime, I began a new book of poems about being eighteen in northern Wisconsin. Worked-in a lot of nature. Publishers turned it down for a number of years; it finally appeared, *Bronchial Tangle, Heart System*, published by Granite Books. I had always feared nature, being alone in it, even in northern Wisconsin, still to me the most beautiful region of the world I've ever seen: the glaciated lakes, pine trees and forests are incredibly beautiful. But I always feared the woods—a kind of mythic fear, I suppose. In the book I take a canoe back along the Deerskin River to a remote lake. I find it weed-choked, and I force myself as a testament to the site—because I wasn't sure I was going to come back from the war. I said something earlier about my attraction for my father: I was always afraid (and I guess most adolescents experience this) that he would go hunting and have an accident and die. Could I deal with his death? Where would I find the courage? So, in *Bronchial Tangle* I deal with his killing animals, which he had to do for our foodsupply. I also wrote poems about my mother—she's seen them and seems to like them. I have poems also to Rimbaud, a crucial poem in my own development: boattrip, right?

DM: Were you hiding your homosexuality in your poetry then?

Peters: Yes. And in what was my second published book *The Sow's Head and Other Poems*, much of the violence I felt, the butchering of pigs, the surrealist images of threat, John Dillinger—always a fantasy figure for me, sexual, as Jesus had been—Much of the violence was my own incredible tension desperate to be out of the closet and terrified of taking the responsibility. Hardly a day in my life had I been alone... in the military... at college... twenty years of marriage. How terrifying to face up to the risk that there may never again be anyone to share a life with. And once the step towards self-declaration happens, there is rarely any return.

DM: Did you send messages in those poems?

Peters: Unabashedly. I hungered, hoping that some attractive reader might sense that he was needed by me and appear. He would pick up the book and say, "Oh, poet-man wants me." And he'd come to my door and say, "Here I am."

DM: Who helped you? Anybody?

Peters: Well, yes. Yes. A former student, who is the figure in my *Cool Zebras Of Light*, my most thoroughly gay book. I call him *Lee*. He's dead now. Shot himself a couple of years ago, after many wrist-slashings and attempts to OD.

DM: How did you meet him?

Peters: My marriage at the time was pretty much shot, although neither my wife nor I were admitting it. During the European trip, on the Guggenheim, I had endured a real mental crisis over a young Welsh poet. He was a superb muscular man who wore nothing but old levis and a blue t-shirt. And that was it. He'd been a teddy-boy, gangs, etc.

DM: That's a very Marlon Brando image.

Peters: Yeah, and he was built like young Brando. We'd go out walking along the river Cam and lie down. I'd have my head on his stomach, looking up at the stars and talking. Never really able to do anything. Afraid. He was married, although his wife was in a severe series of shock treatments. I hungered for him as I had no one before. We had a falling out because of some confusion over a camping trip we were to take together. The experience is still painful.

DM: Tell me something more about Lee, of *Zebras*.

Peters: He'd been in one of my classes, but was no longer a student. He was telling me one afternoon that he'd answered a sex ad in the *LA Free Press*. I said, "Why do you need to do that? I'm sure there are students around here who think as you do." He said he was either going to do something about his homosexuality, or crack up. And I said, "If you know someone who turns you on, tell him; all he can do is say *no*." He replied: "I am in love..." "Well, who is it? Why don't you let him know." He said, "He's in this room." I looked around, and there was nobody but the two of us! That is when and how our affair started. My wife had gone back to England, so Lee moved in with me until her return. The friendship was crazy and intense. But it's pretty much all there in *Cool Zebras Of Light*. I have a lot of his poems, too, I hope to get around to editing some day...

DM: So *Zebras* sounds like a gay man's *Fear Of Flying*.

Peters: (Laughter). I hope it's better. I'm not sure I like the comparison. I smothered Lee. I couldn't bear him out of my sight for ten minutes. And he was always trying to make it with a surfer. He was hung up on them. But he had trouble relating to people right off—they sensed him as weird and wouldn't respond. He had the most superb brown eyes.And his body was lithe and taut.

DM: You imply that if the affair wasn't turbulent, violent, and pressured it wasn't worth anything?

Peters: Right, right. I suppose we were arrogant enough, or stuck on ourselves, to feel ours was going to be one of the literary liaisons of the age. Rimbaud and Verlaine! Lee was keeping his journal. I was keeping a journal. No scrap would be lost.

DM: Sounds rather self-conscious.

Peters: Well, it was. Pathetic too, I think now. It was a sick period I couldn't avoid going through. And Lee was always suicidal, schizophrenic. I thought that reason could always win over irrationality, so I tried to convince him that his talent would be heard, that life was worth living. After two years, I realized that I had to break off the friendship. I was taking too many risks emotionally—he could never settle down and be content to build on our relationship.

DM: Did you play psychiatrist to his patient?

Peters: No, no. When we were home from Europe I continued to see him often. He had to live fifty miles from me to go to school. I was largely supporting him financially—a difficult feat, since I was also paying a huge sum in alimony and child support. I could never say "no" to him...

DM: The poems in *Cool Zebras Of Light* have such an immediacy to them. They seem to have been almost written "on the run."

Peters: They were. Most were written in Europe. Lee was off wandering Berlin, hoping to get picked up. I knew that I had to let him go, to find breathing space. Yet I believed he was out to betray me. The only way I could keep from screaming, of passing the interval until he returned, was to write. Modify the pain. Later I wanted the poems to transcend the tackiness of my self-pity. They should be universal somehow, larger than the limitations of the actual experience behind them. I don't think of the poems as "homosexual." They are love poems, in the largest sense. They happen to reflect an experience between two men.

DM: Were there difficulties finding a publisher?

Peters: Yes, I had to decide whether to publish it in my own name or not. I was using a pseudonym for some articles I was writing for *Queens Quarterly*, a gay magazine out of New York. I though of using that name for the poems. Sensitive? Well, it's taken me this long to come to the point where I feel comfortable being interviewed by *Gay Sunshine*. Three years ago I couldn't have done it. And I'm sensitive about being pegged as a gay writer; I trust my work has many ramifications, topics, directions—gay experience is a part of a larger whole. I've published some thirteen books of poems since 1967... and I am not boasting, rather simply stressing the bulk of a work I've tried to vary.

DM: That's a tremendous spread of work in so short a time. Do you think there's somebody out there who's read all thirteen books and has the critical ability to appreciate them and sum them up?

Peters: There are some good things happening. I think Tom Montag has read them all, and a couple of poet/critics, Billy Collins of *The MidAtlantic Review*, and Clifton Snider who teaches at Cal State Long Beach and who has written some marvellous reviews of them. But it is a lot to expect a reader to have and to read the books; half of them are hard to find. I haven't been what you'd call a best-seller. *The Gift To Be Simple*, the recent book of poems in the voice of Ann Lee, the woman who founded the Shaker religion, has sold well. But, what's 3500 copies? That's marvellous for poetry. For novels, it's nothing. It's so quiet, so quiet.

DM: What other interviews have there been?

Peters: There should be a piece in the next *Poetry Now*, an interview by William Childress. And a couple of years ago *New*, the Crossing Press magazine, published a lengthy interview by Billy Collins. And William Matthews produced one for an issue of *Granite* featuring my Shaker poems. The Collins interview has just been republished in my Selected Poems *Gaugin's Chair*, published by Crossing Press.

DM: We've gotten off the subject a bit. We were talking about the difficulties you ran into publishing *Cool Zebras Of Light*.

Peters: Yes. Well, the Cummington press took the manuscript, the editor saying that we'd "have a good book." I assumed that meant that he was publishing it. Three years went by and I waited. The publisher wouldn't answer my letters, nor would he return a couple of phone calls I made. I was beginning to worry. This was a prestige press, and the printing would be limited. That's why I waited as long as I did. In frustration, dismay, and contempt I finally sent the book to Melissa Albers of Christopher's Books, Santa Barbara. She agreed to publish it. I then wrote Cummington withdrawing the manuscript. I still have bad feelings about the matter. I am convinced though that Harry Duncan of Cummington could not have published the book more attractively.

DM: I want to get into talking about your involvement with the Shaker Movement, its history and how it's related to your poetry.

Peters: It's the first time I've consciously tried to break from my own life and write about something remote from it. And yet, the connections are there, because Ann Lee, the founder of the Shakers, lost four children in infancy. So, considering the grief I experienced in the one dead child, how did she manage to survive the deaths of four? That was connection. Then, I was also writing in a woman's voice, with, I suppose, whatever feelings I have that could be called female. One of my favorite poems in *Gift* is one in which Ann sleeps with her husband.

DM: When I first heard you read publicly—it was at a program that included Paul Mariah and Carol Berge. Whom do you consider good company?

Peters: You mean for readings?

DM: Or would you rather go solo?

Peters: It depends. I like to have enough time to build a reading. I think that reading you heard worked pretty well. Generally, I guess, I prefer to read alone. I think the kind of intensity I try to project... I think it is difficult for another poet to feel he hasn't been swamped by my energy. Apparently I come across strong because of my size, voice or whatever... some flash develops, and I think it's difficult for another poet less flamboyant, or one of another attenuation, to get equal attention. This is not to say I haven't given some dismal readings.

DM: What do you think about the tie-in between poetry and performance? Do you think poetry is more valid if it's performed? There seems to be a movement among younger poets now that whatever one *writes* one must *speak out*.

Peters: I don't see it that way, quite. Because for me the experience is still primarily on the page. I've done some thinking about this, because I've heard poets put down because "Oh, well, he's a *"performer!"* As though somehow that was bad. There's a feeling that if he stood up and mumbled words into his beard (or into her purse) that is somehow better and less charlatanesque than giving a performance. I think if you're going to be invited to read poems aloud you are expected to keep the audience (assuming there is one) awake. I'm tired of readings where every fourth word gets mumbled down into the page. If I go to a poetry reading I want to be moderately stimulated. No matter how dramatic, well-delivered the poems are that's not going to violate my experience of them on the page afterwards. In fact, it may enrich, enrich. I strongly believe then that a reading has to be a performance. Poets should go to school to be actors.

DM: Who would you go to see to keep awake?

Peters: Oh, Robert Bly, James Dickey, James Wright, Diane Wakoski, Clayton Eshleman, Edward Field—especially in the *Variety Photoplays*, Arthur Gregor, Michael McClure, Robert Duncan, John Logan. And there are others. I've never heard Richard Hugo read, and I hear he is good. I won't give you a list of the bores, but it is long.

DM: What kind of responses do you get from your audiences after a reading, I mean, besides that they enjoyed you?

Peters: I've been lucky. And I work on the readings. I memorized a set of the Shaker poems last year, and try to do them half from memory, half not. Since I don't have the usual coterie connections—Iowa, NY, St. Marks, San Francisco, etc. I've got to move for myself. I not only write numerous letters to get readings, but feel I have to present the poems the best I know how to. Hopefully I reach people and they'll remember and even buy my books. The people I reach best are generally younger than I am, which I like. Even poets my age, Creeley, for example: now Creeley and I have exchanged books, and he's written me notes on one saying how good it was; and yet I hear from a mutual friend who mentioned me to Creeley, who supposedly said: "Well, I've never read his work." So there you are. Not all poets are this way. Wakoski, for example, reads a lot of current work. But I'm sure that Ginsberg can't read much other than by people he already knows—he knows so many, and it must be a chore just keeping up with the work of his friends. Poets, I find, are notoriously non-readers of other poets' work. Poets are the worst-read literati in America.

DM: That makes it hard for a fresh, young writer.

Peters: Yes. So once he gets a few poems published, and a small book, he should circulate among established writers and try giving readings locally, and branch out from there.

DM: You've been guest-editing *Margins*. What kind of people do you think you'd bring up front now?

Peters: Just one example of a poet who intrigues me is Barbara Holland, who lives in New York. She's a kind of wonderful eccentric. I don't know her personally, but she looks as if she's been through a lot, and she's beautiful at the same time. And another lesser known poet is Katy Akin, a former Riverside, Calif. woman, who is now in an ashram in India, after wandering around Europe dancing, selling her body, etc., using her wits to keep alive. Recently Hanging Loose Press published her *Impassioned Cows By Moonlight*. Now, as guest editor I got together a forthcoming feature on Holland, and wrote a substantial review of Aikin's book. Editing gives me a chance to emphasize poets I care about who've generally been overlooked by the critics. And I'm sensitive about this, because recognition of my own work has been slow in coming. Until *The Gift To Be Simple* my books were largely ignored. *Poetry* has yet to mention or review one. *APR* likewise—although I have had difficulties with Berg, the editor, over a piece (highly negative) I wrote for *Margins* called "Poetry Biz, or *APR* is Shot From Guns." The best response I've had is from E.V. Griffith of *Poetry Now* who is refreshingly free of coterie connections, and as editor is open to all varieties of verse. He took to the Shaker poems and featured several from *Gift* and from a second book *Shaker Light* (forthcoming from Liveright/Norton in 78). He spread the poems over a number of issues. Interestingly, my best review coverage has been in *The Advocate* (Karl Maves) and *Gay Sunshine*. I've appreciated that the pages of the latter have all along been open to my poetry and criticism.

DM: During our conversation you brought up poetry and personality. When one thinks, say, of a poet like T.S. Eliot, one doesn't think of an autobiographical "I" coming to the forefront. But with many contemporary poets their poems are unabashedly autobiographical.

Peters: Somebody's called what's happening in American poetry the "New Romanticism" because it is so personal, confessional. I hope we're moving away from that intensely personal, confessional work. That's what I've tried to do with the Shaker poems—move out and away from my immediate self-concerns.
And my next book (I wrote it this summer at Yaddo) is a long work in the voice of Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. I feel connections with him. If I believed in reincarnation or karma or setting back time, I'd love to have built those fantastic castles, loved all those handsome grooms, and sponsored Richard Wagner. Ludwig is an archetypal esthete, one whose nerves were so attenuated he'd orgasm listening to Wagner's music. He had whole operas staged just for himself, sitting in his immense Residenz Palais in Munich. And he has his horse to dinner, dined alone on a gilt table elevated through the floor, built a grotto arranged with machines to change the lighting according to his moods, had his hair curled every day so that he could better enjoy his food, etc. He was a great eccentric homosexual; but he was not insane, Being Ludwig for a month was a marvellous experience. This spring I'm going to Bavaria to see his castles.

DM: So, historical figures provide an antidote to confessional poetry?

Peters: Yes, their lives do. But you needn't obviously limit yourself to history. A writer who specializes in himself soon gets dull; we get to know who he is fast.

DM: But those historical poems take a lot of sustained writing...

Peters: True, but there are various kinds of poets. Some have full-time, demanding jobs and have to write on the run—they're generally limited to short poems. Others, luckier, like myself, can manage vast chunks of time to sit down and write.

DM: Is there such a thing as "gay writing?"

Peters: Yes, but I don't want to be seen exclusively as a gay poet. My poems are all part of a larger whole. There is a splendid amount of good gay writing around. *Gay Sunshine*, *Fag Rag*, and Andrew Bifrost's *Mouth Of The Dragon* publish most of it. And Ian Young has been publishing good gay books for quite a while. Bifrost's *Dragon* is consistently the finest in literary quality; his recent volume featuring Kirby Congdon and Paul Mariah is one of his best. And Mariah's own *Manroot* has made considerable space for gay writers, a landmark magazine and press. I suppose that a spate of bad poems has to occur when any minority is being heard. There is a place for jackoff poems, and there are some good ones; but they don't do much as literature, except stir the groin a couple of times. And that's not bad. Most poems are expendable, right? Poems you read along with the morning paper and forget. I guess there has to be a whole subcontinent of these for the sake of the few peaks emerging from the waters.

DM: Sounds snobbish.

Peters: I don't mean it that way. And the tremendous amount of gay writing published over the past two or three years, no matter how ephemeral much of it is, is crucial to the emergent gay consciousness. Anthologies will continue to appear, as they have, to make the best of the ephemera a little more permanent. The first of the anthologies was the Crossing Press *The Male Muse.* And it's done well. And the more recent *Angels Of The Lyre*, published by *Gay Sunshine* and Panjandrum Press. And Winston Leyland's new anthology of *Orgasms Of Light* comprising poems which have appeared in the pages of his magazine. There's a lot of activity. I suppose there are more gay poetry readings in San Francisco than anywhere else. There's an unusual group there, of some two hundred gays over forty who meet bi-weekly for seminars, talks, poetry readings. I recently participated in a GayThink Conference at Cal State University Long Beach. A poetry reading with some half-dozen poets. So with Boston, New York, Chicago.

DM: So you think it's important to publish all this gay work?

Peters: Definitely. We're still a persecuted minority. The more vocal we are and proud of our subculture the more the bigotry quiets down. Our art is as legitimate as any around, and we should feel good about it. There's more to gay life than the Continental Baths and alcoholism and whacking people with purses. We must demand respect from the straight world, more than their tolerance, that is.

DM: Do you behave differently as part of a minority than you might otherwise behave, or think?

Peters: Yes. I know that in my teaching and in my personal relationships I try to excel. I feel a real pressure, since it is generally known that I am gay, to allow the straight world no room for complaint. What I mean is that if what I do is tops they'll have to acknowledge it. They can't say: "Oh, he fucked up because he's gay." Look at the tremendous record culturally of the Jews, who've been persecuted and suppressed for centuries. Their contributions to art and science are unparalleled. Drive comes from threat, unfortunately. But the drive to excel is part of our very tissue. Obviously, if you don't believe in your minority culture you aren't going to shake up the majority culture. I've never felt that the Jews ever believed that their culture was inferior to any other; and in the face of vast injustices they persisted, producing some of the finest minds in history. Our record should and can parallel theirs. The tradition of gay artists, as most gays know, is old and extensive. We need to move more vigorously than ever, demonstrating first to ourselves that we are an homogeneous culture and second that we are among the most gifted folk in the universe.

DM: Do you feel more alienated from straight culture since you've come out?

Peters: Oh, certainly. But it doesn't bother me because my life is rich with people and professional doings. I do have a few deep straight friendships: Paul Trachtenberg, Carol and Max Yeh, Bill Collins, Arthur and Judy Lane, Lyn and Ron Sukenick... But there is the structure of "the couple" in society; it's hard for couples to make room for singles whether they are gay or not. I have felt, though, that my interchanges with straights are minimal because I am gay. But I don't miss that sociability. I have good relationships with my three children—there were struggles and terrible problems for a time. And my life with Paul Trachtenburg has been rich and satisfying. And I keep busy professionally. So there's not all that much time for socializing anyway.

DM: How gay do you feel the literary world is—people who write plays, novels, poems?

Peters: Quite gay. In drama you think of Williams and Albee, the two biggest ones. And William Inge... who apparently couldn't handle it. In prose, there's Vidal, Isherwood. Tons of poets: Ashbery, Ginsberg, Wieners, Logan, Jonathan Williams, etc. It's assumed that artists and hairdressers and interior decorators are gay... that's the cliche. Right? But not politicians and businessmen. How long would the President of Continental Can or AT&T survive if they came out gay? How long would a senator, like Hayakawa say, survive if he declared he was gay? Of course, this is California, and one never knows. And preachers... old Hargis swinging both ways... a couple he married compared notes and found he'd slept with both of them. Well, Sin has always been part of Christianity; the bigger the sin the more you can be forgiven and hence can walk away as the superior Christian. Sick. Sick.

DM: Is this a ghettoizing of occupations?

Peters: In a sense it is. But again it relates to the problem of minorities and culture. Leave the ephemera for the outgroups. Let the Jews loan the money, if usury is the deadliest of sins to the Christians. Let the queers dress hair and arrange color schemes for rich women. Let the queers write the poems and plays: it's all peripheral activity anyway. Just keep them out of the stock-market and the corporations...

DM: The rumor is that you're something of a successful businessman.

Peters: Moderately so. I invest in properties, houses and a few small apartment units. Playing Monopoly, I call it. Most of my life I spent being contemptuous of business, believing it was sullying to a sensitive soul. As I grew older and gathered up some extra money I looked around and saw lots of people much dummer than I making money via investments, business, etc. So I thought I would wise up and give it all a try. I'm currently thinking of less demanding ways of moving though. I love dabbling in real estate—every deal is different, and especially in southern California the possibility of good returns for your trouble are high.

I'm also thinking of activating my own press. I have the name *Poet-Skin Press.* Got the idea after a bad sunburn: peeled off delicious layers of skin and pasted them in my journal. My thought was: skin is of the same substance as hair. People clipped off hair and saved it for mementos. Why not glue some of this skin into a journal where it might be available for inspection years hence? So, good symbolic meanings behind Poet-Skin too. Yes, I wish I were a tycoon, so big other people took care of my investments, and I tended to my writing, people, and made big business deals out by the pool, in between lifting weights and drinking high protein shakes. Say, do you know of any gays who've won the Nobel prize?

DM: Not off-hand. Auden didn't. But Dag Hammarskjöld did, didn't he?

Peters: But if he was gay, I don't think that was known...

DM: Perhaps the whole macho thing is lessening.

Peters: The world I see is rarefied and non-typical, university world, professional world of writers, editors, publishers. I know almost nothing of the red-neck world out there.

DM: Do you think that intellectuals and particularly those who are gay are living in a kind of *Garden Of The Finzi-Continis?*

Peters: No. We are creating our own vanguard for social and cultural change. There's more going for us in the straight world... the recent spate of movies and TV programs (even Bob Newhart the other night got into the act) show this. The gays on *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* were not at all the cliched gays. And *The Family*, the new series, presents the gay youth as the most attractive person on the show. How deeply the tolerance goes, of course, remains doubtful. There may be a growing tolerance in the sense that the straight world says: Do your thing, but don't let us know too much about it. And don't expect us to rub up to you—we'll keep as much distance as we ever have. You might contaminate our kids, German shepherds, and poodles.

When I was a student at the University of Wisconsin (1946-1952) I knew I was gay, but was afraid to come out. The poets I liked, or the novelists, were ones with homosexual trends in their work: Christopher Marlowe, Truman Capote, Isherwood, Auden, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Wolfe, to name a few. I used to fantasize throwing myself between the knifer and Marlowe's body, sparing him. I probably confused him with Leander in his poem, that super stud who swam the choppy waters to visit Hero. Marlowe real was probably very grubby.

DM: Had you been stabbed you wouldn't have enjoyed him anyway.

Peters: Right on. Well, I figured I was probably *thicker* than he, and the knife would do less damage. I imagined he was fragile, yet lean and muscular. I also read and grooved on Whitman, had a special illustrated edition, with a couple of naked men being mystical. I sought in literature resolutions of my own sexual tensions, obviously. And I fell in love with Thomas Wolfe because I thought that anyone with that much sensitivity had to be gay. When I was in graduate scholl and had to decide on a dissertation, I was attracted to the English writers of the eighteen-nineties, Wilde's decade. I was also something of an aesthete who wore levis before levis were in, as they are now. I was playing "Northern Wisconsin Farmboy" in the face of what I thought was a slick university decadence.

DM: What was your dissertation subject?

Peters: The English Poetry of the 1890's And The Several Arts. I was interested in inter-relationships, the ways in which poems crossed over to or borrowed effects from the other arts. Sort of esoteric. But it took me into the murky people of the 1890's: J.A. Symonds, Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, John Gray, Simeon Solomon, Aubrey Beardsley, etc.

DM: Say something about your work on Swinburne and Symonds.

Peters: Well, Swinburne intrigued me because of his algolagnia—he craved being whipped. I loved his eccentricity. And once I mastered his poetry I was amazed by the beauty and skill I found there. The idea was to write a book on the poetry to guide younger readers into it. Instead, as a prelude, I was fascinated by the criticisms he wrote—tons of them—and produced a study of that instead: *The Crowns of Apollo: Swinburne's Principles Of Literature And Art.* It was well-received by the academic world. I wrote a lot of it on diet pills, not knowing then that I was taking speed. A doctor had prescribed them. I'd come to a block of writing, pop a couple of pills, rev for two days, write like crazy, then stay in bed for a day to recover. Swinburne probably would have approved.

DM: What of Symonds? that occupied eight years, didn't it, to bring out those three fat volumes.

Peters: Yes, and because of my compulsiveness I nearly had a breakdown working on that one too. Wasn't into diet pills then, but simply pushed. Both Herbert Schueller, my co-editor, and I found it hard to trust anyone else with the drudgery, so we wound up doing nearly all of the project ourselves. I typed nearly all of the 2,000 letters from the originals—photostats. We both made trips to England and Europe following Symond's tracks and meeting people who either collected his letters or who knew something about him. Schueller, a superbly gifted man—musician, theorist on the arts, editor—had written his dissertation on Symonds as critic. The whole project was his idea. I was a young professor, excited by the invitation—a real professional break. We advertised here and in England for letters. They came in from all places, but the largest collections from the University of Leeds and the Dakyns family.

DM: You seem to have a knack for getting into people's psyches. Did that happen with Symonds?

Peters: It sure did. I began to think I was Symonds, and I am sure than the intensive work I did on him hastened my coming out. Symonds was also a married homosexual, with four children (I had four). He was an enthusiast of Whitman's Uranian poems. He had a couple of mental crises over his homosexuality. He was in love with art, and particularly with Greek male-love. He lead a double life, in his own home in Davos, Switzerland. His wife hated sex, so Johnnie simply had his handsome Italian gondolier imported into his household as his servant. There was also a Swiss lad in Davos—Symonds helped his family buy a hotel to accommodate the English tuberculars who swamped Davos for the cure. During this period my own marriage was shot, and gay fantasies became increasingly dominant. I admired Symond's courage, wanted my own Swiss lad, my own gondolier.

I found a couple portions of a gay epic Symonds spent a good number of years writing and never published. He called it "John Mordan," the name of a London newsboy. Either his wife or his friend Henry Graham Dakyns destroyed most of the poems. But two remain: "Eudiades: An Athenian Love-Tale" and "Gabriel." I published Gabriel, with Timothy d'Arch Smith of London, two years ago, in a special, expensive limited edition. A blank verse poem about Apollo who comes in the guise of a beautiful youth to stay with a group of monks. The year is 1000 AD. He by this time has converted the whole monastery to gay love. It's Easter, and the monks are about to make their yearly procession up a mountain to venerate a statue of Christ on the cross erected there. But an old hermit races in from the shrubbery and rocks, pulls off Apollo's magic belt, and denounces the monks. Apollo (or at least the youth) dies. In grief, the monks take up the beautiful body and carry it up the mountain. As they reach the statue of Christ, Christ bows.

Symonds' letters are full of his stresses and strains. That's what makes them valuable. He was pretty much a second-rate writer, although his multi-volume history of the Italian Renaissance has currency with historians. And his translation of Cellini is the one you're apt to read. He also published good critical studies of Shelley and Whitman. The book on Whitman, almost symbolically, was published on the very day Symonds died. He also wrote 3 books of poems, none of them very good, but interesting because he had to pretend that his lovepoems (comprising most of the books) were all written to women, when in fact they were written to male lovers. His autobiography, which should be published soon, clarifies a lot.

DM: Well, the idea of concealment in literature, isn't new, is it?

Peters: Auden did the same thing. Until Robert Duncan and Ginsberg most gay poets hid their real selves, switched pronouns, were evasive. I think Duncan was the first poet to say "cocksucker" in a poem meant for general consumption—in the literary world, that is.

DM: How did you handle the problem in you first books.

Peters: I didn't in the first one, *Songs For A Son*, the elegy for Richard. We've already talked about *The Sow's Head And Other Poems*, the concealing yet hopefully revealing message-sending I was into there. *Cool Zebras Of Light* is my break-through book. And my most recent manuscript, *Picnic In The Snow: Ludwig Of Bavaria*, has a lot of gay material in it, since the rococo king was an acknowledged homosexual.

DM: What is the reaction to you in the university. You are a full professor right? Does the subject of your being gay ever come up?

Peters: Not really. I've had tenure for a long time... I've been teaching since 1950... so have a certain immunity a young beginning professor would not have. And I had proved myself academically and professionally before I came out. I am at a terrific school, Univ. of California at Irvine; the department is first-rate; everybody seems to do his work, respecting what everybody else is doing. I've been in some truly shitty departments—brutal in-fighting: the worst was when I was at the Univ. of California Riverside and the critic Frederick Hoffman was in his final paranoid years. He brutalized students, and he tried brutalizing colleagues he thought disliked him. That was vicious. Academic bitchery par-excellence. And the University of Idaho in 1953 was grim: the chairman had wiped out all courses in poetry without consulting anybody, and all courses in literature in foreign languages. I would have been fired had I not moved. Ohio Wesleyan University was another grim spot in the late fifties. There were so many old bloody feuds there, it mattered, if you were a young instructor, by which of the oldies you sat at department meetings. I was axed there by the one woman I thought was befriending me. I even was green enough to ask her for advice. Years later I found that she was the villain. And at Boston University, a similar problem. But River-

side was worse than all of the other schools lumped together. All of this is a long way of saying that my current department is splendid. They respect what I am doing and even read my books. They also allow me to further my professional life by arranging the numerous readings I do. I am lucky, really lucky. And the matter of my being gay never comes up, at least overtly. Most departments would, I think, fail to give a young gay professor tenure, if he made much noise about his being gay. There's still a built in thing. I suppose the argument is that if you are heterosexual you don't go around the department advertising the details of your bed behavior and your tastes, kinky and otherwise. Who knows how many crotch-sniffers and bicycle-seat sniffers one may be teaching with? So, it seems an academic law that the more you advertise your sexual interests the less your chances are of being hired permanently. For better or worse, it's in the nature of the beast. Perhaps a gay instructor would fare better in the social sciences than in humanities or science. The latter are apt to be rednecks in their thinking; the former threatened because so many English professors are closet cases.

DM: Do your students know you are gay?

Peters: I'm sure some of them do. But, again, I never push the matter. I try to keep a professional distance between myself and my students, at least while they are in my classes. Occasionally a gay student will come up and say, "I read your *Cool Zebras Of Light* and really dug it." But that's rare. I usually respond by thanking him. Again, I teach at a very special university, and am grateful, so hope always to be above reproach. My sexuality has nothing to do with my students, it seems to me.

DM: Do you suppose though that there are advantages to not entirely revealing yourself in your writing?

Peters: There's a complexity if you can keep your reader guessing. A lot of Duncan's earlier poems are this way. You can read a poem like "Returning to the Rhetoric of an Early Mode" as a moving, beautiful apology for male love—or you can read it as a metaphor for the spirit working through earth and earthiness. I prefer subtlety and complexity in my art, whenever I can have it. So, why not play the chameleon? Be straight. Be gay. Widen the range of possibilities for yourself as a writer. Why stay locked into your own nitty psyche—the sterility of much American writing today is because poets confine themselves too much. Hide behind the cosmic eye, as Whitman did, once in awhile. Maybe you produce better art if you do some concealing.

DM: You've mentioned that you have some unpublished novels.

Peters: Yes, would you like to publish a couple of them?

DM: I was going to ask if you wanted them published.

Peters: I'm not sure anymore. One of them is on loving feet, which is not my thing. A friend told me of a kinky guy he sees from time to time who is into feet. He owns 250 pairs of shoes and spends a whole evening trying them on his beloved. I wrote this novel, and another, as pop-collage novels. They are in *frames* rather than chapters: the theory is that you should be able to read them as fast as you watch television. I was heavily influenced by William Burroughs and *Zap Comix*. They don't seem very funny to me anymore, or outrageous, as I thought they were. They currently reside in my archives at the University.

DM: Your archives?

Peters: Yes. The university Special Collections is gathering all my papers, letters, etc., on an indefinite loan, thinking that someday if and when the government again allows tax breaks for gifts to libraries and museums, they will receive the collection permanently. I retain (and my children) complete ownership, and can withdraw the batch in part or in whole at any time. It means to me that numerous boxes of clutter are out of my house and in good hands. The library will make a list catalogue. And nobody will read in the collection without my permission. The most sensitive things there are the daily journals I kept during most of my life with Lee.

DM: You said you were influenced by Burroughs.

Peters: Naked Lunch is an incredible book, one of the handful of seminal ones of the age. I think Burroughs really changed American writing, and, like Ginsberg, helped to open it up. Not that B is accessible; he really isn't. Reading him stoned is probably the right approach... seriously, though, he influenced my style, encouraged me to introduce elements of grossness, fashioned a vision. I've worked through a lot via him, I feel. And that's why those two novels seem to me now of a very remote past.

DM: You have others?

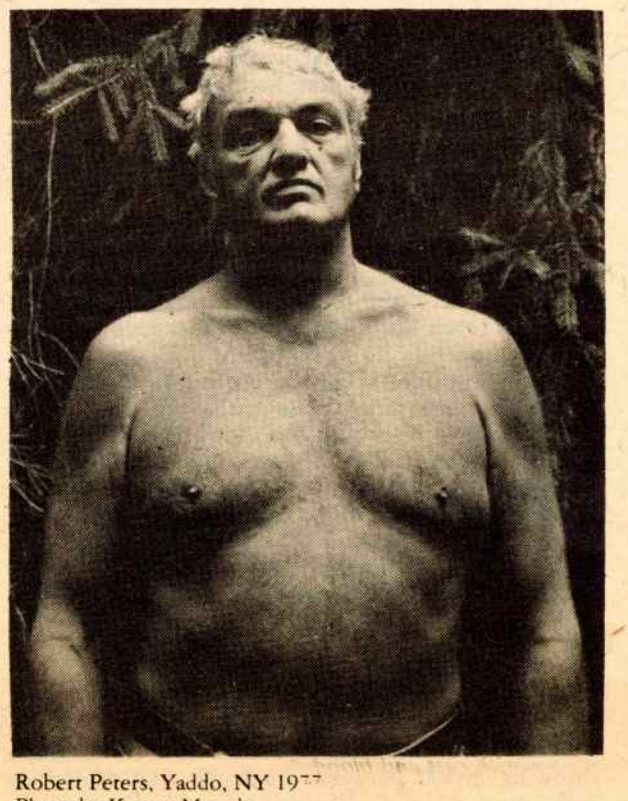
Peters: Yes, I mentioned them earlier in the interview ...traditional sorts. And I wrote a third called *Paul* which never made it either. I thought it might, treating as it does a lad who works at Disneyland and has an affair with a black older woman who works there too. I thought I could bring off a black psyche, but failed.

DM: Can you say something of the poet as a center of mystique rather than as center for poetry. It seems that some poets draw a mystique around themselves, groupies—acolytes—while others don't. Self-publicity and advertisement.

Peters: We are a celebrity-conscious culture. We demand celebrities on every corner to gaze at and cheer. The celebrity figure is the one who makes it, like Charles Bukowski who holds forth in rock palaces and packs them in at $3 or $3.50 a head. Last Halloween Bukowski sold out the Golden Bear in Huntington Beach. Followers don't know what he'll do up there on stage, but they're sure they're sure there'll be a show. They ask him non-literary questions like "What color was your shit this morning?" "When will you vomit again?" "Do you drink women's piss?" etc. I guess that results in a celebrity mystique. *Rolling Stone* featured him a few months back, giving him more space than they did to George Harrison. And there are lesser figures. One is Anne Waldman who does her thing with *Fast-Speaking Woman*. I've had my critical say on her and the celebrity problem (and on Gerard Malanga too) in *Margins*. People flock to see the poet-celebrities. Those people, I'm convinced, don't read the books. They like a show.

DM: Well, you seem to be contradicting yourself. Earlier you said a poetry reading must be an entertainment, or something like that.

Peters: True. But what I meant was that a poet should rehearse his reading, for maximum effectiveness. I didn't mean that he should strip naked on stage, throw grapes at the audience, slink about for effect. There's a difference, I think. So much of the public aspect of poetry today is diseased by the celebrity thing.



Robert Peters, Yaddo, NY 1977
Photo by Kotaro Masuda

DM: You wrote a poem to Bukowski in your recent book *The Poet As Ice-Skater*.

Peters: I like Buk's early poetry very much. I still remember reading it for the first time; I felt as if all the windows in town opened up. There was an empathy for the underdog I admired; now, I feel, he is apt to be cruel where earlier he was sympathetic. But, more on that celebrity problem. Gary Snyder is another figure who as a celebrity drags semi-literates in after him who believe in the virtues of building your own sauna and drinking manzinat-berry tea. Mindless kickers. Ginsberg draws similar people. I am not knocking the quality work both of these men have done—do understand that. But a critic has to sort out finally what matters in the poetry from the personality hype. Maybe Ginsberg's penis and Snyder's beard are poetry to some people...

DM: You've written much criticism. Will you publish any of it in a book?

Peters: There's one in the works. It should have been out months ago. Montag of *Margins* is publishing it. I'm calling it *The Great American Poetry Bake-Off*. It will gather most of my pieces on contemporary poets, the pieces I care about saving. The title essay is on W.S. Merwin, another celebrity poet of a less outrageous sort, a groves of academe celebrity, and a fine poet, but one I feel who has taken to writing emptily over and over what he has already written. He has the veneer, or knows the combinations to carry off the bake-off prizes. Strand is another poet like this, so is Kinnell. All are good, once-terrific poets, especially Merwin and Kinnell. The news isn't in yet on Strand—he seems to have a new device or two up his sleeve.

DM: Tell me what you think of interviews like this one.

Peters: Gay Sunshine interviews, I think, are the best around. Some of them are classics: Ginsberg, Isherwood, Rorem, Williams. Interviews are a way of building a culture by identifying its writers. Obviously details from lives appear in interviews that otherwise wouldn't be public. Hopefully, by appearing in the mainstream of gay culture, I want younger gays to feel kinship, strength. But we'll wait to see what happens, if anything.

DM: Do you have any close attachments with any gay writers?

Peters: They're mostly casual: the most complete is with Paul Mariah. And there's Harold Norse—we compare notes once in awhile. And I see Robert Duncan sometimes. Bill Barber. Louie Crew. Edward Field.

DM: You can see a dichotomy in gay life styles. There's the single man who's usually in an urban setting, standing on street corners, lingering at bars, terribly alone. Then there are the couples, who carve out a nest in suburbia or in the country, but usually remove themselves from the desperations of their gay brothers caught in loneliness. Do you find yourself falling into this latter category?

Peters: You mean sedate? My house: I try to arrange it so that it's quiet—I'd like no turbulence when I go home. It's a center I return to from a hectic life travelling giving readings, radio programs, teaching. My home is simple: pictures on the walls, few books (I've given most of them away—as part of a periodic clearing out that I do), simple furniture, almost no bricabrac. I wish my mind were equally uncluttered. A lot of people feel secure with a lot of objects and plants around; I don't. Plants make demands on your attention. I wouldn't consider for that reason having pets.

DM: Bob, you were married nearly twenty years. Do you ever find yourself counselling married men who are gay but who haven't come out but want to? Do they ever ask your advice.

Peters: No. But I would try to help if they came. My profile, as they say, must be low, not even the gay students on campus have ever asked me either to meet with them or to speak or read to them.

DM: What of gay men who want to have children in their lives, do you ever run into them?

Peters: Not really. But I don't invite a lot of people into my space.

DM: What do you think about relationships between women and gay men? Some straight women are attracted to gay men. Do you ever wonder why?

Peters: Not too often. They know obviously that you aren't going to threaten them. And perhaps they don't like sex much, or they are tired of the male/female game as it feeds through the commercials and movies. I have a couple of excellent friendships with straight women. But nothing sexual. Occasionally though I do still meet a woman who turns me on. They are usually self-reliant but feminine... different-looking, non-cheerleader types.

DM: You've done such a wonderful job with the Shaker poems, in the voice of Ann Lee, the female Christ...

Peters: Thanks for the compliment. Becoming the woman Ann Lee was a letting go of feelings I've always had as a woman. I recall a game I used to play with my sister. We would take the kitchen chairs out on the lawn and arrange them in a circle and play "pig family." It seems absurd now. But I was always the sow. I would lie down and pretend I had huge dugs and that all these little pigs were sucking away like mad. Maybe Ann Lee persona is a way of letting more of that out again.

DM: In ancient cultures and today's so-called primitive cultures the shaman or witch doctor is a poet. The curative powers come from magical words. Do you think poets have a greater ability to drop their everyday personas and to don other masks?

Peters: It's tough. My complaint is that not enough poets are willing to try moving outside themselves. Go back to old John Milton. Blake said he was of the Devil's party without knowing it. And Satan is the most interesting character in *Paradise Lost*. Blake was saying that Milton in order to write convincingly as the fallen angel had to assume the identity of that fallen angel. Keat's notion of the poet as chameleon. Writing is then a kind of acting: I've always seen it that way. It's great stimulation to try to be someone completely foreign to yourself. I'm hoping next to be the Norweigan explorer Hansen who in 1895 walked across Greenland. Isn't all this shifting of identities what good art is all about. The reader too absorbed in a work shifts his identity. That's the play behind art, an exchange of identities on various levels.

DM: What are your feelings about poetry readings?

Peters: I like audiences who aren't overexposed to poetry. But I don't mean I want to face a room full of deadheads stoned on dope. Usually you give a reading and the people who come are the people who either read poetry or write it; so reading to another kind of group is satisfying. I believe in my *Cool Zebras* as one of my best books. My feeling, though, is that most gay groups, for example, the gay student group on my own campus, aren't interested in literature per se. Jackoff poems possibly. Jackoff pictures definitely. Stills and flicks. Primarily they like group-encounter programs, where some hack psychiatrist appears to help them straighten out their lives. They waste endless time saying how good they feel to be gay. Much of it is a drag. A gay student is most apt to go into sociology, psychology, or medicine than literature or science. Maybe, to be fair, these rap sessions are crucial; younger gays (and older ones, too) must need them or they wouldn't continue.

DM: You're beginning to sound sarcastic. What are your attitudes towards psychology, and what it can do for gay people?

Peters: Well, if it pulls Mary Hartman through, it can pull gays through. I don't knock it at all, although I think about 75% of psychology and therapy is absolute fraud. It's witchery rather than science. If it's seen as witchcraft, OK; but don't pretend it's science. I was helped by a good analyst, and I am thankful. But I lucked out. The possibilities of helping yourself are greater if you don't relinquish your psyche to a psychiatrist completely. Mine was more of a guide than he was a man with answers.

DM: Do you have any opinions about your own work? Do you have a favorite poem a book you'd like to for

get? Or do you even consider yourself a poet above everything else.

Peters: Oh, sure, that's what I think of myself now—a poet. But I don't feel compulsive about it. If I find that the well is dry I won't be too upset. I can then become a realestate agent, write criticism, etc. You asked about the books: I'm generally proud of most of my work. The books I'm closest too are *Songs For A Son, Cool Zebras Of Light,* and *The Gift To Be Simple.* There's so much, though: the most recent book, published by Paul Mariah, *The Poet As Ice-Skater,* has a number of parodies and poems satiric and otherwise to various poets living and dead: it's a book I'd hate to give up. The best poems (as I see them) in my first books is out as *Gaugin's Chair: Selected Poems* under the imprint of the Crossing Press. The work I want to save is gathered there. And Crossing publishes beautiful books. And New Rivers a year or so hence is publishing a book *The Drowned Man To The Fish* which contains a lot of gay stress-poems.

DM: But writing about Mad King Ludwig seems an odd subject for you?

Peters: Why, Don, don't you think I'm crazy enough?

DM: I'll let you answer that one.

Peters: I've been interested in estheticism and decadence in the arts for a long time. And Ludwig, as I said before, is the archetypical esthete. I want to see if I can evoke his tremendously orante personality in a fairly simple voice. His castles were all baroque; his life style was too. He hated wars—was threatened by politics and finally deposed. The consummate aesthete commanding entire performances of Wagner for his delectation alone. But there's no real paradox about my writing this book—*Picnic In The Snow.* My fantasy life has been thoroughly baroque. I like mice racing through chandeliers. I see Ludwig's life (as I once saw my own) as a "drunken boat." There are tie-ins with Swinburne, John Addington Symonds, and my work on the eighteen-nineties.

DM: You mentioned the explorer Kane before.

Peters: "I'm hoping next to be the American explorer Elisha Kent Kane who tried to reach the North Pole in the 1850's and had to abandon his ship in the ice."

DM: You have scope in finding subject matters. You don't seem to feel any limitations of time, place or cultural barriers.

Peters: Yes, I feel at the top of my writing powers. For me the clue is energy. I hope to keep vibrant, moving, even impulsive until the end. Loving life is most of it, and that includes caring healthily about the people you love and about yourself.

Wild Blueberry Crop

The Gift to Be Simple, A Garland for Ann Lee, by Robert Peters. Liveright, 1975. 114 pp. $6.95 hardcover

The Poet as Ice-Skater, by Robert Peters. ManRoot Books, 1975. 52 pp. $2.95 paper

Gauguin's Chair, Selected Poems, 1967-1974, by Robert Peters. The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, N.Y. $4.95 paper; $8.95 cloth; $12.95 signed ltd. edition.

Hawthorne, Poems Adapted from the American Notebooks, by Robert Peters with etchings by Carol Yeh. Red Hill Press, Fairfax, California. $4.00 paperback

Reviewed by Charley Shively

Robert Peters' youngest son died suddenly on February 10, 1960. That death began a conversion/coming out whose full force is still being realized by Peters. His had been an all-American success story: impoverished childhood, veteran, hard work/marriage/Ph.D./family/respectability/moderate wealth. As he rapidly climbed the ladder to full professor, Peters found a crack in his picture window. Like Dante midway in life (35 years old) Peters came upon an extraordinary mountain discovery: neither his poetry nor his sexuality could be repressed any longer. His straight life/lie has been unraveling/revealing itself ever since.

While unique in itself, Peters' awakening has corresponded to a wider revitalization/rebirth. During the time of his incubation — graduate school, assistant professor, etc. — there was much talk about despair and the cruelty of April. The death of poetry had been predicted and in 1960 one reactionary heralded *The End of Ideology* by quoting Machiavelli: "Men commit the error of not knowing when to limit their hopes." What was dying was Straight/White/Male/Capitalist Supremacy. As Bob Peters' son died so died the commitment of most poets to a death culture. Forces of rebirth appeared in Africa/Asia/Latin America/Native America, which inspired insurgencies within the United States. Suddenly hopes became unlimited and electric: the hopeless (prostitutes, prisoners, perverts, drug addicts and all sorts of backcountry/alley people) found a long denied voice within themselves. Among faggots, this phenomenon has been defined as the Gay Cultural Renaissance: "a rediscovery of the Gay Cultural heritage and its expression, especially since Stonewall, through art, music, literature, film and in many other ways." (Winston Leyland, *Orgasms of Light*, 9).

Bob Peters is both a product and a formulator of this renaissance. He has tapped a deep (previously underground) river/lake. First the childhood burial of his dream/hope/sacrifice/his sexuality gone underwater: "The Sow's Head" deposited,

I knelt, chopped through
layers of ice until
water, pus, spilled up
cocking the wound. I widened
the gash. Tchick! Tchick!
chips of ice flew.
Water blew from the hole,
the well, a whale, expired.
My knees were stuck to the ice.
(*Gauguin's Chair*, 19)

Hazardous, reckless, wild, breath-taking, *The Poet as Ice-Skater* cuts circles with his skates into our skin:

Poets are anybody's
property. They skate
along where the ice is
red or green, thick or thin.
Stuffed admirers
provide an illusion of
protection hope the
surface of the ice
will crack; dump him in.
(*The Poet as Ice-Skater*, 3)

No question about it, Bob Peters is willing to go into channels unexplored, feared, previously silenced. Travelling the Lake District, he found vision in a trick/stud (like Dillinger on his own Wisconsin Bear River?) "Coniston Water: In Memory of the English Speed-Boat Racer Donald Campbell." Coming out of the closet, walking/skating on water, the poet like the speed-boat racer comes to us exposed, bare-ass:

Is daring suicide?
Is it degree that matters
swaggering before
the skeletons of others
pushing
while doing the same?
To live is to stand
with ankles bare
and tendons bare.
(*Gaugin's Chair*, 72)

At the heart/head/font hangs the body/flesh. Peters' meat-hook holds the sow's head and the lover in equal awe and revulsion. "The Butchering"—

He sliced the throat
The eye closed over.
Hairy ears stood up, collapsed.
Her blood soured into gelatin.
She had begun to shit.
(*Gauguin's Chair*, 14)

—is a form of making love, is a form of love. It cannot be separated from lovers (either together or trying to separate from each other). "You Have Mattered to Me,/ I Have Mattered to You" could be said of the pig no less than of Lee:

I want to go in
deeper than your teeth
deeper than your throat
into your brain
to find a space there
and make it out
with rust and blood
a place with a bed
magnificent, and a
lust-rose chanting
splendid, ravished.

Now, when you cough, or cry
missing me (do you) does
your brain shake, as mine
shakes, crashing its love-
furniture over the floor
tinder under a prow?
tell me now:
has it been simple?
have you done it
with a knife? can you
really put me out of your life?
(*Gauguin's Chair*, 96)

The link between the sow and the lover lies in Ann Lee, a woman whose work Peters has understood in the Shaker way: experientially. Ann Lee comes directly into the hearts of her believers and has continued to do so since her outward death in 1784. She saw the end of the man-white-western world and realized that she was herself the word, the very language of god. God had come first as a man (detumesence) and failed; god was in her coming again in multiple orgasms. Ann Lee was the second Christ coming as Female. Even after her worldly death, followers have received Word from her. Robert Peters, *The Gift to Be Simple: A Garland For Ann Lee* (1975) contains both poetry and prophecy via Ann Lee.

In her own time, Mother Ann saw heterosexuality as a curse, especially a curse for women. In her coming she atoned for the sin in Eden which had made women instruments of reproduction. Ann Lee was in her husband's bed Jezebel:

King Jehu trod her body
with his horse, anngling her.
He left her in the street,
entered the palace to drink
and eat, then ordered her
lifted up and buried:
she was a king's daughter.

They went to bury her,
found a skull, feet
and the palms of her hands.
The palace dogs had eaten
Jezebel. They shat her out
upon the fields of Jezreel.

Jezebel was Ann is Robert Peters is all faggots is all women who have suffered the agonies of the sexual organs. As the children in the street, the bullies, gesticulating obscenities — as they lift stones to destroy us, Mother Ann finds an angel to save us from destruction, if not from the sting, stigma.

In her time, Ann Lee (and to this very day her followers) have practiced celibacy. In *The Gift to Be Simple*, Peters only brings Ann to leave England; his later work will unquestionably illuminate the terrifying relations between body and spirit as they were experienced in upstate New York. Ann Lee and her sexual politics must be studied by all those who take seriously the present transformation of consciousness. Ann Lee and her followers explored celibacy; they rejected male supremacy, sexual reproduction; they have survived over two hundred years. At the core of her inspiration is an answer to a multitude of fallacies.

Linked to the animal, prophetic part of Robert Peters is his locale, landscape, territory. If Ann Lee is where he has reached, Wisconsin is home, base, origin, point of departure.

Locale is a symbol
is a violet
which near path or walk
trembles as it unfolds.
(*Bronchial Tangle, Heart System*)

Somehow, I think there runs an axis between Jack Spicer's Grand Rapids, Minnesota, Lorine Niedecker's Fox River, Wisconsin, and Robert Peters' Bear River, Wisconsin. A tape or tapestry of wild flowers, hard lessons, long winters, taciturnity, trap, water from the well.

That blanket of snow and trout (which Herbert Hoover saw in Eagle River "as nothing to shout about," *Gauguin's Chair*, 10) unfolds in various ways to its inhabitants. With Bob Dylan or Jack Spicer — you'd never dream they were from there; yet their every syllable is informed by the mighty struggle of keeping out that cold river well water. Oh, it freezes the heart. With Lorine Niedecker, you can't imagine her ever leaving; she even circumlocovated Lake Superior itself. Perhaps that's why she's so inadequately celebrated: she became her landscape in perpetuity. And just too few city people are interested in the Fox River.

Bob Peters' tact with the Paul Bunyan country is instructive: first of all, he got out and has stayed out. Yet his poetry: even when he's in bed with his lover in Germany or England — striped with cool zebras of light — still the Wisconsin landscape shadows fall sharply in his writing. Goethe skates not so much Frankfurt as Bear River, Wisconsin. Everything Peters touches passes through that sieve/seine.

Eagle River, Wis. is Paris,
Eagle River is the Seine,
the old Lutheran church
is Notre Dame.
(*The Poet as Ice-Skater*, 5)

Hawthorne seems more Wisconsin than New England: "I bathed in the river/ which was as calm as death./ I plunged down into the sky." (*Hawthorne*, "Moonlight.") Perhaps more will be coming from the poet, but to date he is curiously quiet in regard to Orange County, where he has been for more than the last decade. Nothing of that garish and dismal landscape: Irvine ranch, Laguna Beach, San Clemente phlibitis, John Wayne's estate, dried thirsty land, where even Africans have bleach/beach blond hair. None of that surfaces; maybe it's still on the way. But I suspect the contrast between Eagle River and Orange Country has made the former more visible to the poet. In *Gauguin's Chair*, Peters seems to prefer looking at California from Mt. San Gorgonio, 13,400 feet above sea level.

Likewise in history, the poet uses the past to distance himself both from Eagle River and from Orange County. *The Gift to Be Simple: A Garland for Ann Lee* allows Peters an intimacy easier than in life itself (as one senses in reading the searingly real love poems in "Cool Zebras of Light"). The use of ancient sources figures in the title poem of the *Selected Poems*, "Gauguin's Chair," or in his "Rimbaud" and so many other of the poems in *The Poet as Ice-Skater*. (Many times the poet seems to miss his mark as in his more contemporary parodies (?) of Ginsberg among others.) His latest book, *Hawthorne* (1977) remarkably relives, relines, underlines Hawthorne's *American Notebooks*.

For gay readers Peters' most extraordinary historical poems are still appearing in fragments, "Ludwig, The Mad King of Bavaria." Parts have been in the *Mouth of the Dragon, Gay Sunshine, Orgasms of Light*, and *The Mid-Atlantic Review* (1977). Like Ann Lee, Ludwig is reanimated by the poet; however, a sharper contrast cannot be imagined. Ludwig seems to lack any moral

stamina or sense whatever; the embodiment of foppishness. He buggers the rose gardener after the latter has drowned in the lake. Another poem "It's Time" may capture Peters' own disaffeaction with his upbringing and his present kingdom:

It's time you stopped building block-castles, Prince.
Don't sit under a parasol in the sun.
Stop dressing up as a nun.
It's time you played battle, clubbed frogs to death,
for fun.
Music is always a sham.
A stage is paste and glitter.
It's time you swinked girls and had a mistress.
Don't leer at the groom who curries the horses.
Let the gardener be, trimming the parterre.
It's time you studied politics, tactics . . .
My body has skin! My body has skin!
There's too much fire, let the wind in.

It would perhaps be asking too much to demand more of Robert Peters—that he somehow transcend the difficulty anyone who is both gay and a poet feels—the dichotomy between *our* passion and the tact or professional prowess of poetry itself. The parts of King Ludwig now public seem to smack of "degeneracy" in the true sense of the word. And Peters' fabulous "Cool Zebras of Light" are somewhat cooled down as they appear in his *Selected Poems*. And quite a few of his extraordinary poems have not been selected ("Ode for Johnny Rio" for instance). We are left with a harsh dichotomy between our lives and a literature not quite our own. *Gauguin's Chair* begins with Charles Olson's question "Shall you uncover honey/ where maggots are?" and concludes with a hardon and a prayer:

Mornings
our bodies assume
a special beauty:
warm hairs wet
with sleep, nipples &
phallus brought straight
by dreams, by visions
of those we lack, by
the excesses we crave—
the malodourous armpits
of an anchorite.
. . .
as we move, move
expecting honey among
the thorns, splendid ichor
flooding the rocks; we should glow
more than be lost or
merely endurable! we did
not seek these straits!
we should be beautiful
in your sight.

(*Gauguin's Chair*, 119-122)

Prayers to god (even Ann) to forgive us for being what we are seem to me the ultimate in self-betrayal. The distance between Ludwig and Ann Lee is partly an artifact of our culture which has its official purity and on the side its seamy underworld. At the heart of the revolutionary strategy is the hope, desire, demand, struggle, search to break through that dichotomy. In a sense revolution (gay revolution) is the only cure. In 1960 with the death of his son, Bob Peters made one break; in Cool Zebras of Light (Part IV of *Gauguin's Chair*) he has made another breakthrough. He continues writing at a stunning pace; hopefully his gay poetry will illuminate the distance betwen Mother Ann and King Ludwig. In the meantime we are left with the poet fleeing the California Desert and ascending the mountain (Dante again; but what would that Italian ever have made out of California?).

The flesh, wild, persists.
The ox shudders and drops.
The flesh, wild, persists.
The kid who has pissed her pants
cowers. The dancer crumples.
. . .
We reach the summit.
The snow burns; we feel it.
Our feet
no longer beat but shuffle,
constricted by
snarewire drawn tight.
Our lungs crowd our throats,
our ears snap and burn.
Air
cuts over, through,
freezes sweat
on chest, loins
and back, smashed
the self.
We are mirrorless,
utterly.

(*Gauguin's Chair*, 118)

Charley Shively is a Contributing Editor to GAY SUNSHINE and author of NUESTRA SENORA DE LOS DOLORES. Thanks to Salvatore Farinella for suggestions in writing this review.

INTERVIEWS

GAY SUNSHINE INTERVIEWS (Volume 1: Ginsberg, Isherwood, Norse, Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Lou Harrison, Burroughs, Orlovsky, Giorno, Charles Henri Ford, Rechy, Jean Genet) Edited by Winston Leyland. Gay Sunshine Press, 1978, 320 pp. $7.95 paperback; $15 hardcover.

Reviewed by Jacob Stockinger

Held by its fascination and prevalence, we forget that the interview is a recent form of communication. Although chronicles, diaries, letters, and other forms of literal and figurative memorabilia survive from past ages, the interview is largely an invention of our own. And at its best it is a valuable one indeed for its capacity both to entertain and to instruct. It seems such a straightforward, uncomplicated exchange of information. And yet the interview is really quite paradoxical. It tries to make a public figure more privately accessible with destroying the distance needed to sustain admiration; it aims to serve both our contemporary taste and the historical perspective; and it indulges our need for frivolity even while providing serious psychological, sociological, historical, and cultural data. Successful interviews do all this, and perhaps one thing more: indirectly, they help us to interview ourselves.

It is difficult enough to speak about the interview, for it is not a generally recognized and studied genre. To judge specific interviews becomes even more problematical since there is usually no plot, organized argument, or stylistic originality to help define a critical point of view. But perhaps interviews resist commentary less if we look to our own expectations for standards of judgment rather than to the interviews themselves. And by just about every one of those standards, *Gay Sunshine Interviews* stands, with only minor qualifications, as a success.

The axis of every interview is, of course, gay sexuality. Many will wonder whether that is a sufficient basis for interviewing prominent personalities, for there is only so much one can say about being gay. One of the ironies to emerge — if it was not expected in the first place — is that even the finest of artists do not differ very much from the rest of us in their sexuality: they differ from us in their art. It is simple observation, but one which violates many of our reasons for reading about famous gays. Yet the need to question such persons from a gay perspective is a necessary one, given the previous reticence of earlier interviewers and even of some of the same men interviewed. It is just this situation which makes the publication of the collected *Gay Sunshine Interviews* an important event in the contemporary cultural scene.

Obviously, the first thing readers expect in a volume of interviews is the presence of persons sufficiently well known and sufficiently important to be interviewed. On this score, the *Gay Sunshine Interviews Volume I* more than lives up to expectations. Over half of the dozen interviews are with writers who have been and remain in the public eye nationally and globally, recipients of praise, prizes, and that surest sign of enshrinement, inclusion in academic curriculums. Just to read the names of Gore Vidal, Christopher Isherwood, Tennessee Williams, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, John Rechy, and William Burroughs is enticement enough for most readers. Such a selection ensures that the appeal of the content will be very broad, relevant not just to gays but to anyone interested in contemporary letters. These interviews cannot be ignored by non-gay critics. Of course, many will try to ignore or avoid them — as we know only too well, homophobia is habit forming. But to do so would amount to overlooking a new primary source. And to do that is a grave sin in the even graver world of the secondary critic. It is hard to imagine doing new work on these figures without taking some account of these interviews.

It would have been easy with persons of such public stature to subordinate gayness to stardom. And if that were the case, the interviews would have failed, for perhaps their main justification is to allow the parties to speak out in a consensual and undeniably gay context. For the most part, however, that danger was avoided. One reason is the treatment of the interviewers who generally seem conscious of the possible trap of idolatry.

Just as important a reason, however, is the balance of the content. That is, the remainder of the interviews are devoted to artists who are less well known than the first group: Harold Norse, Peter Orlovsky, Lou Harrison, Charles Henri Ford, and John Giorno. They themselves are not "gayer" than the others except insofar as they have wider recognition by the gay public than by the general public. But as this volume demonstrates, they deserve more attention from both. You may not care much for their art—I myself am quite put off by the self-conscious avant-gardism of John Giorno — but it cannot be denied that these persons provide some of the most welcome and unexpected surprises in the collection.

Perhaps the one which stands out the most is Lou Harrison. He is the one artist out of the twelve who seems most divorced from literature. As a musician, he provides a refreshing change from the belle-lettrist point of view, and offers some challenging ideas about the relationship between his gayness and composing music. And though he does not lack the literary acquaintances which make for much name-dropping in the volume, it is particularly interesting to hear him recount his meetings with Ned Rorem and Virgil Thomson. The appeal of this interview makes one regret that there weren't more which concentrated on

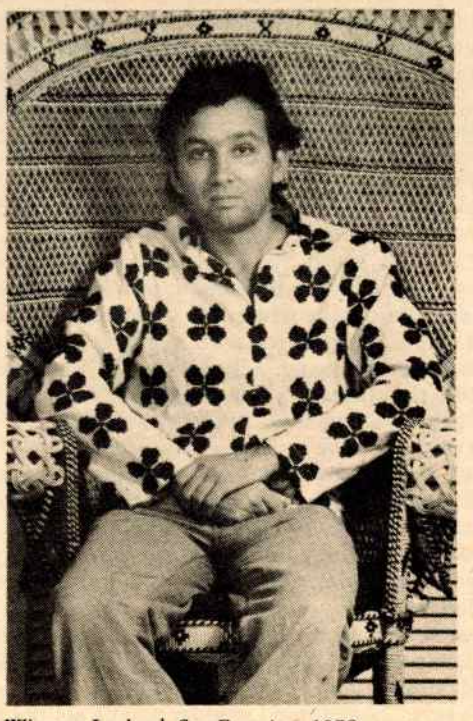


Photo by Steven Lafer

Winston Leyland, San Francisco 1978

the visual and plastic arts and music rather than on literature. Perhaps subsequent volumes of the interviews will expand on the range of subjects — both people and activities—in order to provide more contrasts.

The second aspect of an interview that a reader looks to is the competence of the interviewer. We have every right to expect an interviewer to be well-informed, incisive, and provocatively to the point. And generally the *Gay Sunshine Interviews* do not disappoint in this respect. But it must be noted that one of the inherent weaknesses of the volume is that the interviewing has been done by twelve different persons, often working in teams of two, over a period of four years. As a result, there is a certain lack of cohesiveness, and the disjointed voices of the interviewers lead to uneasy jumps and shifts in both the questions that are asked and the responses that are given.

Some interviewers get more out of their subjects. Through Winston Leyland's interview with John Rechy, for example, we find out about the genesis of Rechy's major works, his theories of "imposed schizophrenia" in the gay world, his concepts of the "conservative homosexual" and the "sexual outlaw," his arguments against the S & M scene, his defense of promiscuity, and his response to the much criticized seaminess in his portrayals of the gay world. Leyland has done his homework and does not meander; the result is an interview that brings Rechy, a creature of shadows, out into the light.

A good contrast to the Leyland-Rechy interview is the Mitzel-Abbott interview with Gore Vidal. Interviewed almost weekly, or so it seems, Vidal always manages to give his questioners the slip when it comes to pinning down his views on, and experience of, gayness. In the course of his interview here, Vidal drops the word that he is "much more interested in economics and class than in sex." But his interviewers fail to pick up on this and push Vidal toward a class and economic analysis of the gay movement. Instead a wonderfully chitchatty atmosphere is maintained, and we arrive at such profound insights as Vidal prefers "faggot" to "gay," stays away from tearooms and baths, believes that plentiful sexual activity helps rather than hinders his writing, and prefers Latin sensuality to its northern alternative. It is irresistible and vintage Vidal: style and more style, generous with details about other persons' gayness but sparing with his own. Vidal, as always, is the master of the impersonal art of the pose. But it is too bad, for it seems an ideal chance to question Vidal about the composition of *The City and the Pillar*, his refusal to go beyond suggestions of bisexuality in public, and his ideas about the relationship between eroticism and literature.

Yet the personal tastes of the interviewers must, in all fairness, account for only a part of the discontinuity and tedium that occasionally creeps into the interviews. Other explanations must be considered. One is the span of three years over which most of the interviews took place, from 1973-1976. Just as there would have been a greater sense of continuity in each interview as well as throughout the collection if all the interviews had been conducted by one person, a certain continuity would have also resulted if all the interviews had taken place within a shorter period of time. For whether implicit or apparent, the changes that have taken place in the gay movement over the last several years are necessarily reflected in the questions and responses of the interviews. Furthermore, one need not necessarily regard the discontinuities and contrasts that resulted from the length of time as a weakness. It is just as possible, and probably more enlightening, to view them as a record of the currents of gay consciousness as a history which asks for our reflection.

A second reason for discontinuity and some blandness has no doubt to do with what the interviewer conceives to be the reader's interest. And as every interviewer knows, readers like personal details — to put it bluntly, "dirt." And so every interview seeks out the personal details of sexual habits, tastes, judgments, and the like. The wise interviewers and wise respondants spend a minimum of time establishing the essential facts, then pass on to more important matters. But often enough, the reader faces paragraph after paragraph about the sexual penchants of the people being questioned. Many, maybe most, will find this to their liking. And when it appears in one interview, I confess to indulging my own fondness for gossip. But when you are dealing with collected interviews, and not just a single one in a separate issue of *Gay Sunshine*, a certain monotony results. It is a feeling we all know from when we saw or read our first pornography: the highly personal too soon becomes impersonal, the intruiging becomes dull. Perhaps it can all be explained by a pendulum effect: we have had gay details of the great withheld from us for so long that we now ask for more than we really need, and probably really want, to know. Still, the gay movement cannot yet throw off the corrective phase of awareness, of getting the gay record straight. And the *Gay Sunshine Interviews* will remain a central document in that effort for quite a while.

It would be a mistake, in the wake of the preceding criticisms, to think that the information contained in these interviews all pertains only to the individual artists and their art. Though much of it occurs as side comments, there is a great deal of information in these interviews which is not announced by the names of the figures questioned. To read the remarks of Ginsberg, Burroughs, Orlovsky, and Giorno is also to find out about the role of homosexuality in the Beat movement from the very people who created that movement. Burroughs and Norse provide some fascinating excursions into homosexuality in Arab countries. Isherwood's interviews acquaint us with Auden and Spender and the inter-war gay scene in Germany. Charles Henri Ford brings us insight into the homophobia and authoritarianism of the French surrealists, who seemed in their own time so outrageously erotic, and helps to explain why Jean Cocteau and René Crevel were subjected to pressures that never weighed on the official surrealists. Jean Genet offers some illuminating comments about the relationship between homosexuality, prison, and Third World politics. And by the end of the volume, nearly every person interviewed has somehow mentioned New York, so that we end up with a collage history of the city from the 1930s through the early 1970s as seen from a gay cultural perspective. There are many more examples I could cite, but the purpose would be the same: to show that to read the stories of these people is also to read our own. The interview is an identity quest for reader and respondant alike.

It is perhaps this facet of the volume which, even more than the particulars and information it contains, makes *The Gay Sunshine Interviews* necessary reading. But if you are still not convinced, perhaps the following general observations will prove provocative enough to persuade you to read them.

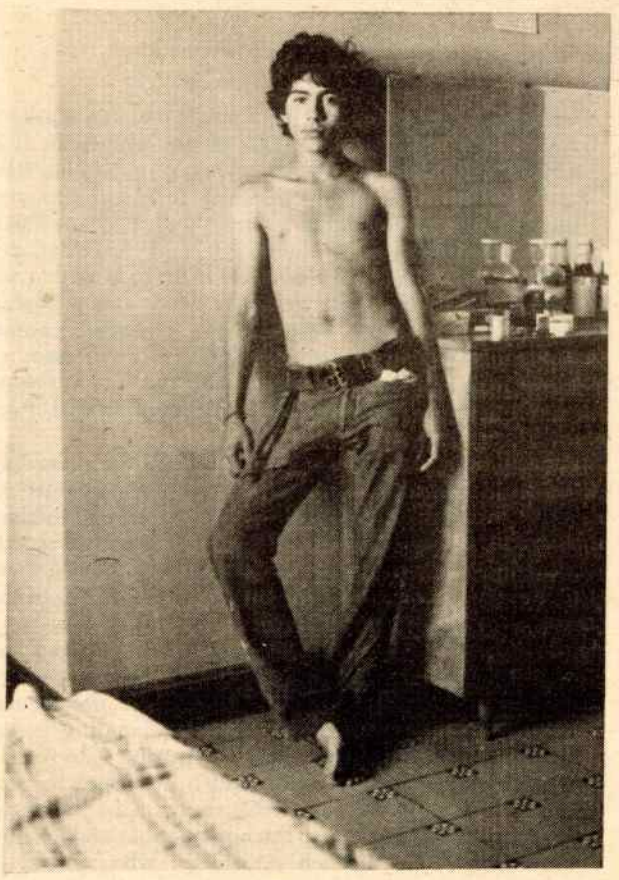
These interviews provide eloquent proof of "the gay case." But, despite what the format might lead us to believe, the case that it makes is not separatist. More than ever, I am convinced after reading these interviews that there is no such thing as a wholly autonomous gay culture or gay sensibility. That we must couch our case in such appearances suggests that it is the power of non-gay persons and perspectives which are separatist and which have forced us into a separatist posture merely to present ourselves. This is not to say that art matters more than politics, that the two are unrelated, or that ideology is unimportant. It is to say that, just as the concerns of the respondants flow into those of the readers, the concerns of gay artists lead beyond narrow conceptions of gay art or *the* gay artist.

This is a timely volume on several levels. For one, the collected poems of Harold Norse, *Carnivorous Saint* recently appeared from Gay Sunshine Press, and Avon Books has been releasing Isherwood reissues at the rate of one a month since November. Last year was, we are told, the year that gays finally broke the Madison Avenue publishing barrier. Yet how poor a crop we reaped is easily shown by comparison with this volume, which is a more direct, compelling, and significant contribution to both gay and non-gay interests. Finally, it is timely because it raises again certain political, social, and cultural issues which have of late been silenced or displaced by other concerns, about the direction of the gay movement. Just the remarks of these famous people is an homage of sorts to the countless anonymous gays who created that movement and in large part made it possible and desirable for these people to speak out.

Despite Jean Genet's well spoken warning that "The truth is only possible when I am alone. Truth has nothing to do with a confession or a dialogue," there are many truths, if not Truth, to be found in these interviews. It is hard to predict what the impact of this volume will be, though there will surely be one. But this much is certain: just as the gay movement was created by coming out, it can only continue by speaking out.

This book is available by mail from Gay Sunshine Press—see listing elsewhere in this issue. Volume 2 will be published in early 1979. You can place your prepublication order now. Just indicate the fact when you order Volume 1. We will reserve a copy of Volume 2 for you and bill you upon publication.

Editor's Note: Thanks to Jacob Stockinger for his perceptive review of *Gay Sunshine Interviews* Vol. 1. I must, however, take issue with his contention that "there is no such thing as a wholly autonomous gay culture or gay sensibility." My experience in the gay movement as editor of *Gay Sunshine* for seven years has led me to just the opposite conclusion. For more on this, see my remarks on the Gay Cultural Renaissance in the introduction to *Orgasms of Light* (1977). Our autonomous gay culture *is* emerging—especially in fiction, poetry and drama. Elsewhere in this issue Richard Hall's essay on gay theater gives witness to the emergence of a truly autonomous gay theater.



Luis, Guatemala City circa 1974
Photo by Erskine Lane

GAME-TEXTS

Game-Texts: A Guatemalan Journal by Erskine Lane. Gay Sunshine Press, 1978, 160 pp. $4.95 paperback; $15 hardcover

Reviewed by Will Inman

Erskine Lane's *Game-Texts, A Guatemalan Journal*, draws fragments of our life and vision, thru his life and vision, into a kind of ongoing dance, as a *jongleur de notre vie* might work, an artist who does not manipulate so much as use the magic of his way of looking, toward *melding*, in his own alchemistry of elements and processes, what has been kept apart so carefully by the powers that use life and us against ourselves.

Linear-minded critics might see Lane as just another faggot who, unable to cope in his own heavily competitive society, has emigrated to another country where he could feed his fantasies and body-needs on vulnerable third-world boys. That there are flavors of this working in the book, I won't deny. That Lane's essential vision is far more *ungrunded* in his primal life experiences and in his basic human role, I will assert unequivocally.

My perception of Erskine Lane as he emerges in *Game-Texts*, focuses upon him as a shaman born out of his time, one who does not try to 'go back' to original tribalism, but rather an androgyne who works along the fringes, the living but decaying mantles of human awareness that overlap tribal, feudal, and capitalist societies, sharing with youths who could, often do, easily slip into rigid roles of machismo and proletarian beat-downess.

Game-Texts works with interslashes of varying and alternating dimensions of being and feeling, as viewed and experienced by Lane. That he chose Guatemala to live in—is one of those happy, significant examples of synchronicity: a volcanic country, earthquake prone, one with a large Native American population, where Spanish and various indigenous languages are spoken, where the landscape is now florid with growth, now rock-stark, moving from jungle tropics to chill Andean heights—surely projects in microcosm the potential of the whole human-natural world in its present drift and ultimate inevitable upheavals. Lane shares with us his sense of rich personal-nature interworkings, poetic, brooding, cosmic. He brings us into his bedroom and lets us take part in his love with tribal and mestizo and Spanish youths. He looks into tropic flowers as he looks into volcanos as he looks into the lust and givingness of boys. He is frank, unsentimental, but neither clinical nor cynical. The youths are not just rough trade, they emerge as individuals, persons thru whose brief-flashed existences Lane reveals growing, decaying, fermenting—and possible—worlds.

From when Lane was a small child, he recalls: 'This memory. One night when I was very young I went with my father to see Jed Myers. I don't remember why he went.... A long walk—it seemed like a long walk—on the little gravel road bordered on one side by a forest of pines all reduced to one undifferentiated mass of blackness in the Alabama night. On the way back I got tired and my father carried me in his arms. As he walked I looked up into the cool lucid swirls of stars above us. He told me that the faint band arching across the zenith was called the Milky Way."

That experience from Lane's earliest memories—was germinal in setting his ongoing life-pattern. Since then, he has been holding youths in his own arms, as he does us in *Game-Texts*, and bringing into his love and sharing and flesh-dance those "cool lucid swirls of stars"—and in that magical union of immediate earthy love and cosmic-most distances, he likewise brings us into the presence of our whole ranges of self. He does not do this in justification of a tepid "camp" life: it is a generativeness of Being as seminal as getting babies, only it is his way of helping the boys, and us, to get born to our own real selves. I will not claim that Lane makes love with youths just "to bring them to life," but that that, in some instances at least, is what he is doing, because it is in his nature to do so. Naturally, yet consciously, he has become one example of what Walt Whitman called for in one of his prefaces, an individual who comes to be his own priest. But since no priest can be independent of an order and still be a priest, I shall put another word into Whitman's intentions and, again, suggest he means *shaman:* that is, one who heals, wakens, inspires, generates life in the one to whom and with whom he ministers in his words and in his sharing of his body and being. Like Whitman, Lane refuses to fall into the obscenity of separating body and spirit, and his "game" is ongoingly to let the rhythms of the one interwork with the rhythms of the other. His body landscapes and his outer landscapes merge in a growing spiritual dimension of awareness that is visceral and cosmic and sensually vital and whole.

He says: "Sitting in the cacao grove today, eyes closed, mind quiet. Opened my eyes just in time to see millions of leaves around and above me fill with a swell of gentle air and tilt their pale undersides up into the brilliant sun. And as they lifted my whole consciousness lifted, tilted up and flooded with light."

He says, "Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here. But the same question came to me much more frequently when I was back in the States... There I knew people who could discuss Proust at great length. But no one to touch. Here it's the other way around. And, for the time being, I feel that touch is more essential, more nourishing."

And he says, "My vision roams about his body, all the lines, shapes, volumes, and from memory I fill in the most intimate details that remain hidden from the world by his clothes. Beneath his shirt, the navel with its thin growth of hairs, the curve of his shoulders, his dark nipples against the lesser darkness of his chest. Loins, cock, and thighs hidden by his pants. Toes and ankles inside his shoes, and, hidden by his cuffs, the black hairs that have emerged since I first met him.

"I watch and the feeling of distance and closeness combined is something exquisite, pleasurable beyond words, and, at the same time, vaguely painful, too.

"In the center of the mind they all come together—the special beauty of a line of music, the sculpted rhythms of words in a poem, the lay of valleys and hills, the entasis in the line of his forearms and thighs.

"I understand more and more—or feel, rather, since this is not within the realm of understanding—that all beauty is somehow one, the same, whether I see it in landscapes, flowers, art, or boys, and that I could not conceivably love one without loving all the others.

"The moon rising over a mountain ridge or setting over the sea. A boy's stomach and thighs, the modeling of wrists, calves, back, ass, shoulders. The dangle of cock and balls. The shape and color of a flower, or the form of a seashell, or the melody or a birdsong or symphony. All the same."

These are not inventories of fantasy but, rather, the lineaments of creation working in film-flashes, as Muriel Ruykeyser once said of Whitman's "lists" which highschool-level critic mentalities in their sophistry have not been able to allow livingly into their stilted immobile awarenesses. To show us these many levels of Being working together requires a genius of vision that must unencumber itself and us from the linear habits of our academic training and give us back to the elemental processes and dialectics of a Life which is undivided in its manifold workings.

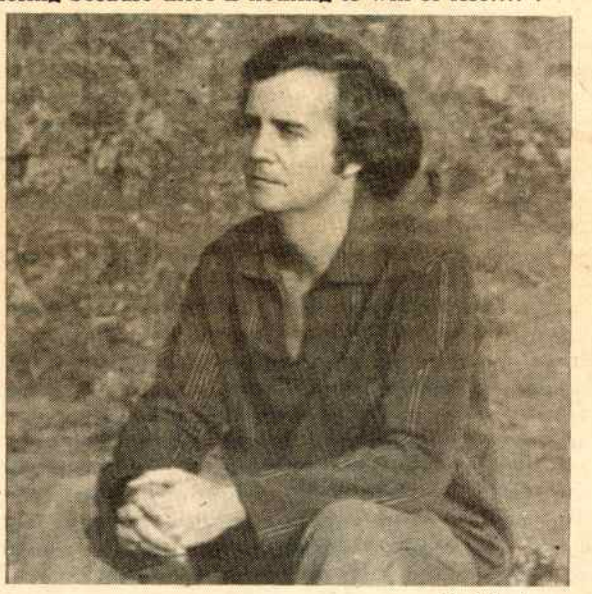
Lane quotes a Chinese fragment, then goes on to observe, "Space in which the mind can dissolve. Momentary freedom. All the doors and windows thrown open, horizons pushed back, fresh breeze blowing. The ego, if only for a moment, ceases its quibbling, and all its deceptions fall away."

Sometimes I get the impression that Lane inadvertently nurses traces of the stiffnecked christian consistency of his Alabama background as he treats of the negating or "letting go" aspects of Chinese and Indian Vedic wisdoms, as though he feels uncomfortable when he uses them to get out from under the values of "modern progress" and plasticity and yet does not also negate the sensual in his own life. Thanks be to his pagan androgyne gods, however, he sheds off such tendencies to be consistent with those ancient ways and healthily goes right ahead with his own vital, Whitman-kin vision of integrating sense and spirit, self and beyond-self, in his ongoing *game* that is no church ritual but is an organic way of being multiple-levelled at the same time he is intricately whole and entire. *Intricately integral*, someone will murmur. All right. I will not try to quote all the high points of *Game-Texts:* that would be to take those instances out of context and thus to rob them of their energy in the whole flowing fabric of his bittersweet Real.

Without being pompous, Lane preaches, observes, camps, seduces, mocks, caresses, and, above all, serenely communes, in counterpoint, in some of the most exquisite language and keen awareness I've seen in our age. His *Game-Texts* work like poetry, but not like secondhand literary exercises. No. He might be lying beside you before or after making love with you or with a volcano or with a mountain lake you both shared or with feet padding down a wet mountain path or with some horny boy who wants his cock sucked to get money to go to the movies. And if you can't imagine making love with feet padding naked down a clayey mountain path, then get out of my bed because you won't really be making love with me.

Erskine Lane says, "Once upon a time, way back, I felt that there was a determined body of knowledge that I should acquire, a set bank of information of which I could not, as a cultured man, afford to be ignorant. That feeling forced me to wade through many books I did not in the least enjoy or understand. I had to acquire culture, had to fit myself inside the limits of a rather ill-defined ideal. It was serious business. And, like all business, deadly. Fortunately, I grew through that phase. From busyness into idleness. Now I want simply to amuse myself."

"At last we have elevated everything to the status of a game. No compulsion. And no concern with winning or losing because there is nothing to win or lose....".



Erskine Lane

When he speaks of wanting simply to "amuse" himself, I suspect he is a little fearful of seeming simple-minded and therefore has to sound sophisticated. For, actually, his "amusing" game is more of a dance, even withal his rare slippage into camp talk, a self-conscious disease of modern defensive faggotry, with which he is far less infected than most articulate androgynes. He reveals his deeper intensity in a further passage, "To find my way again into the natural ecstasy of things. This huge tree's shiny dark-green leaves quivering in the silent rain of light. This field of pale grasses that at times I can feel to be my own body stretching outward under the sun. This white cluster of flowers that dibbles in the breeze beside me. To feel it all as one body, one being. To be no longer divided from the woods and mountains. To think no more of life as something withheld, something exterior to myself."

Yet, he is keen enough to intuit that, should the "game" get to be too fixed and blindered a *habit*, it would lose its lightness, its necessary cosmic fickleness in which Nature knows it is whole and does not hesitate to seem inconsistent. "Ramon... Black hair and black mustache. Dark flashing eyes. Smooth olive skin. Nineteen. Not slender but not heavy, either.... As he undressed I noticed that his cock was hard already, the head of it jutting out through the leg opening of his tight brown underwear. I sat down on the bed and he stood in front of me. You're getting what lots of people—guys and girls—have wanted, he told me, and then he thrust his hips gently toward me and asked in almost a whisper if I liked it. Yes, I said, amused and strangely turned on by his attitude of superiority, that masculine arrogance which at other times I might have found annoying. Education, accomplishments, a broad experience of the world—such things count for nothing against the time-honored formula which says that the fucker or suckee is automatically superior to the sucker or fuckee. But sometimes there seems to be no particular advantage in compulsively chipping away at the world's brick wall of myths and misconceptions. Any struggle, beyond a certain point, becomes academic and defeats its own purpose of clearing the way for life. Better, maybe, to slip through the interstices, to tunnel under, or to learn to

leap freely back and forth, leaving the wall to its own inevitable collapse. In other words, it was time for sex, not for theories and dialectics. I slid his underwear down his strong thighs, letting it fall to the floor, and he lay down beside me. "I'll bet you can't put it all in your mouth," he said. "Give me a little time," I told him.

In another passage, Lane hears the beats of rain and blood and loins falling together, unforced, in a religiousness that is not separate from breathing. He recalls Alvaro. "Alvaro came back after dark last night, slightly tipsy. The city had already grown quiet, so quiet that we could have been alone in a hut far back in the mountains. His weight on me, all the formidable length of his cock pushed inside. And the sudden sound of a heavy shower pattering on the terrace against the windows, on the big leaves. One or two livid flashes of lightning. Some far-off thunder. After he came we lay together for a long time, still joined, his face nestled against the back of my neck and shoulder. The involuntary post-ejaculatory flexing of his cock, like a movement deep inside me, a reaction of my own body. We waited as the pulses grew further and further apart, weaker and weaker. At the same time, with the same pace, the rain died away."

Again he observes, in overtones of a liberated Hesse, "Intellectually I know that reality is sufficient as it is. No need of special supports, no artificial emphases or underlinings, no embellishments or alterations called for. But knowing something intellectually is one thing and feeling it in the bones is another. The only real project now is to extend into a general and habitual vision what I can only glimpse fleetingly now through the dross of ideas. That is the real game. The master game."

He teaches out of his own existential anguish: "Late yesterday I saw a boy sitting on a boat landing at the end of the beach. Not more than sixteen or seventeen. With a yellow shirt and bell-bottom jeans, barefoot, he sat gazing across the silvery surface of the lake, hardly speaking to the friend beside him. His beauty matched the beauty of his surroundings—the lake, the sky, the mountains. I wanted to stop and stare at him, to go touch him, or at least to hear his voice. It was not a question of sex, because I felt no particular need or desire. Just something much more directionless and diffused. A loveliness that needed to be acknowledged, and, in me, a gratitude that needed to be expressed. In a sane society I would have felt free to walk over to him and tell him he was beautiful, but we have no sane societies yet and so I did nothing."

But he did do something, after all. He told us about that incarnation and his recognition. He planted in the ears and yes of future readers the possibility of recognizing, too, even if not of overt approach. He was wise enough to know, both in himself and possibly in the feelings of the *other*, that there is yet in our longing at least as much of grab as there is of wanting to commune. So he went on by, letting his resonances of love and joy continue to work in him and thru him, to us, unafraid and still working, doing the necessary healing that can bring us into a closeness that will embrace deep but not have to fasten on.

There is a thin line between that vital recognition of the godbeauty working in all beings and all things, kinly, and the need to own and control that magic... between the excitement over the presence of wonder and the obsession to have it for one's own self.. between real interflowing love and the insecurity that makes us want to guarantee loyalty. We msut learn to love ourselves enough to know that mountains and woods and beautiful human individuals and the presence of gods and stars are indivisible from us and that we are theirs and themselves, as they are ours and ourselves. Once we deeply know this, we will not need to exploit or seduce or waste or fasten down: our reverence for life will instruct us in fresh ways of being. Lane's *Game-Texts* gives us a living vision of such a process. He is, shamanlike, giving us back to our deepmost vital selves in a time when we are repeatedly told we are nothing.

This book is available by mail directly from Gay Sunshine Press, P. O. Box 40397, San Francisco, CA 94140 for $4.95 paperback; or $15 hardcover + 50 cents per copy postage. California residents should add 6% sales tax.

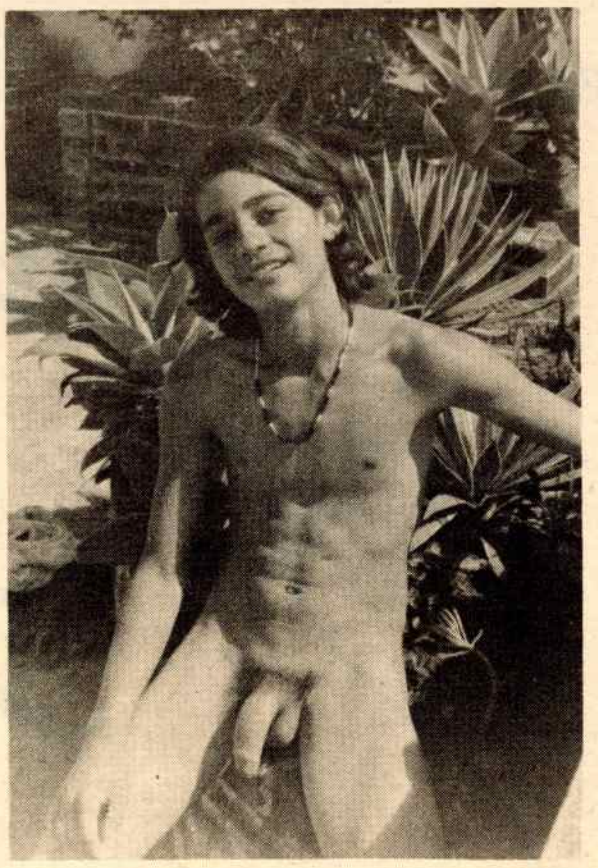


Photo by Erskine Lane

GUNSLINGER *for Edward Dorn*

The gunslinger slipped out of his
disguise, unsheathed his long sixshooter
hidden there between his bluejeand thighs,
notches, hundreds of notches for his
various lays, boys in Juarez and Nuevo
Laredo, cocks in Clovis, blonds fr Dallas,
alkali on his big sombrero, the dull
look of the moon on machetti in his eyes,
inscrutable as the tall cardon cactus
so erect in the desert night where he
had pulled out a bronze hardon at sunset
and took a piss down into the red canyon

—Dennis Kelly

CATULLUS: TO AURELIUS

Thanks a lot, Aurelius—
For taking care of my chicken from
Cassino, pagan as the Tiber, the jets
Coming down into Ciampino with
More Queens to adore our Roma,
Ragazzi da vita, your Lesbia and
Mine, Juventius (that yng hustler
You like so well, drool over, swoon)
Smiling behind the wheel of my new
Alfa Romeo as we tool our way to
The Baths of Caracalla to stain
The damp stones once again with our
Love; yes, Aurelius, he likes my
Sportscar, the one with a sun-roof,
So that he can give the 'finger'
To his friends on the street.
Rumi! Ducati! Rumi!
I hear you've been hanging around
Paolo Pasolini a lot lately,
You little whore, selling your lips
For bit-parts, still hustling the
Handsome ones, Aurelius?
Still can't get enough?

—Dennis Kelly

MESON BRUJO

The boy brought in the logs to start the fire.
A gust of night and nature blew in with him,
of animals out prowling in the dark.
His cheeks were bright with cold; his skin was white;
black hair hung low across a narrow forehead.
From my cold bed I watched him stack the logs
in a kind of pyramid, the small ones under,
the bigger ones on top, then saw him stick
chips of pitch pine among them, strike a match,
and light a sliver; and the room soon filled
with the resinous odour of *ocote* smoke.
Then he blew on the spark of fire he had created,
till the chips burned brightly, wrapping in their flame
the small erlogs, which in turn would ignite
the larger, to the largest one, on top.
And the room blossomed roses. All the while,
crouched at his task, he had not spoken, not looked at me,
but fixed his gaze on his logs with a concentrated
beetling frown, across which light and shadow played.
Now he got up, asked awkwardly if the fire
was satisfactory, and prepared to go.
And I answered yes, the fire was satisfactory
and no doubt would burn for at least two hours more,
time enough for me to fall asleep, while I thought
there was something much more satisfactory than fire
which would warm me even more. He left. I dozed.
Or perhaps I slept; the fact is, some hours later
—how many, I don't know—I heard, at least
it seemed I heard a sound, a hesitant tapping
at my door, and I rose in the fire's ambiguous light,
glided half-asleep over the hard, flat tiles,
opened the door effortlessly, as one does in dreams,
and the log-boy came in, cheeks bright red with cold.
There in the fire's dim glow I watched him undress,
saw the white body define itself from layers of dark clothing,
saw him stand, legs apart, in the rosy dying light,
black hair ingathering round an opening rose,
felt his icy skin, glabrous as myrtle bark,
as he slid into bed beside me. He was an expert
at lighting fires, but now it fell my turn
to stroke for the first time that cold virgin skin,
caressing rubbing it to raise a spark,
blowing on that spark to fan it to a flame,
wrapping him in my arms and legs to warm him,
plying each trick of friction, till at last,
like wood still green, he caught...The hard logs crumbled
to white ash; the last embers closed their eyes;
and in the darkness we were our own fire.

All night the log-boy tossed there in my arms
in intervals of sleep and waking dream,
all heat and flame now, in a bed as warm
as roses. Till I heard, just before morning,
another distant tapping at my door,
and the fire-boy noiselessly, as one does in dreams,
rose and in the white light of the false dawn
donned slowly his dark clothing, slid across
the smooth tiles to the door, opened it effortlessly
and was gone. And I lay asleep in the half-light.

The next night, after dinner, when the hour
for the guests to retire and the fires to be lit
arrived, I lay in bed, awaiting him,
but a gray-haired old man came to light my fire,
place the pine chips, build the log pyramid
in my cold chambers at the Méson Brujo.

—E. A. Lacey

LIVING WITH PLANTS
A PARABLE
for Michael

1.

There is this question
it involves the space between

Like stars it is a way to envelop the sky
your arms arched your back so that the body
bends around the form and holds within
the nucleus of love

Where can it be we are losing from?

2.

In the morning you decide to wear the sun

You turn and make the best angles
lovers are like that
haughty

Able to live

I thought they were dangerous you said
Dangerous? there is no loss

3.

In the afternoon we disguise
you make a face like a leaf

There is this question

4.

Now the buds are blue and green
a yellow rose to rise up over
our small advancements

There are these words
these shades

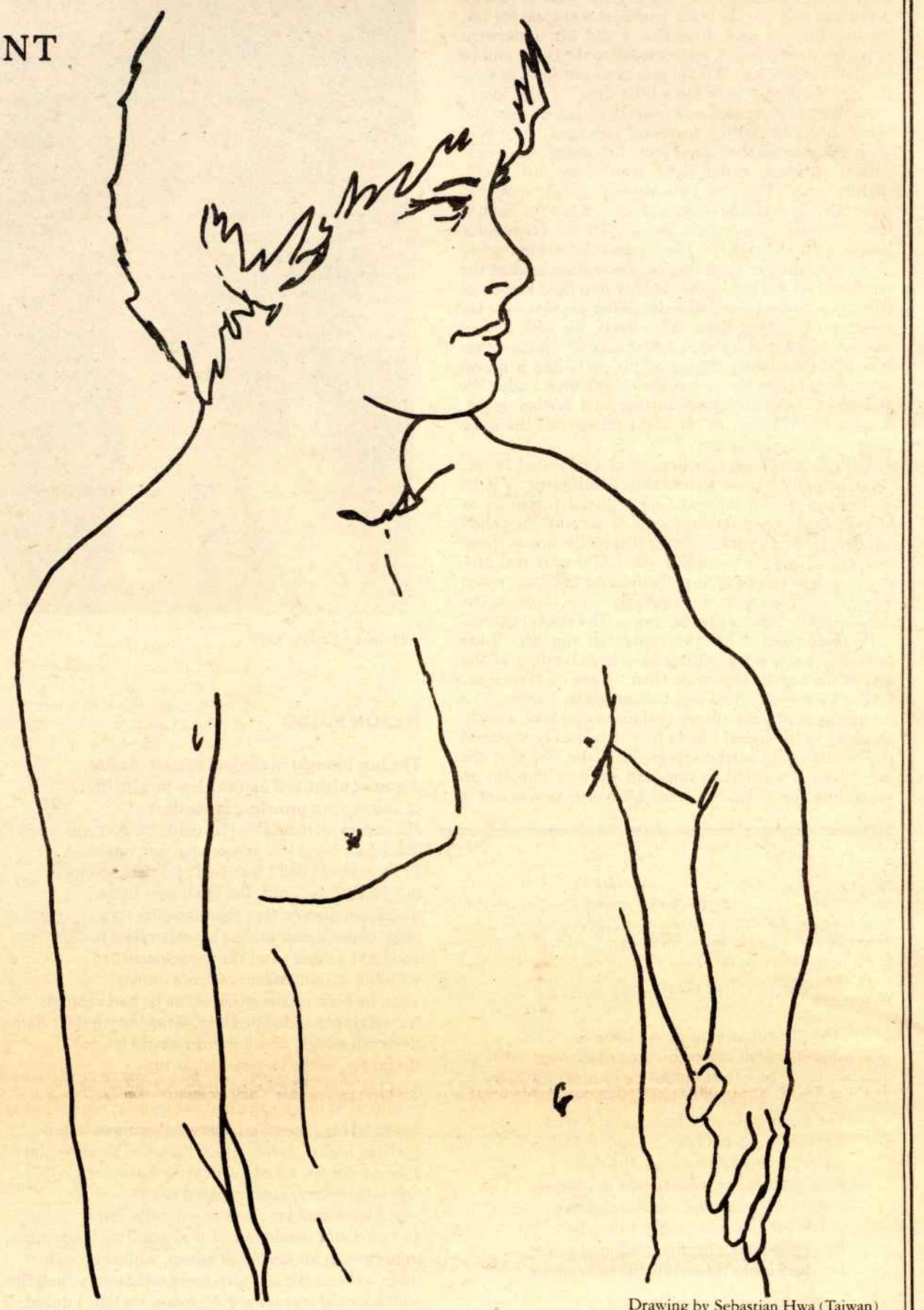
The integral rains
we have chosen to live by

—Stephen J. Herman

AKIND OF FULFILLMENT

A Short Story

By Don Ronk



Drawing by Sebastian Hwa (Taiwan)

Hundreds of bodies crammed into the 100 yards separating the two department stores. Many of the arms and hands linked together in twos, threes, even fours—strolling. Too many of them for comfortable mobility. Enough though for groping hands.

Sunday afternoon. Like all weekends, it seems like half the Chinese population of Hong Kong is doing its weekly outing at the two giant stores, shuffling showcase to showcase through the aisles. "Wall-to-wall Chinks," he sometimes says in jest to friends.

Eyes sweeping in search of the mass, looking for the clues that aren't quite tangible even to his own mind, but do exist. Slender legs. Hair a bit shorter than that of the bobbed-hair girls. Boys' shoes. A boy's cut to the shirt. Clues. Attractors.

Shoulders, elbows, hips. He jostles through the mass that ignores him, or at most casually glances, slowing here for extra-slow saunterers, speeding into this gap, skirting that potential blockage. Eyes always moving. There is a hunger within that is so strong he sometimes fears it will show to those passing by at such close quarters.

Midway across the second street of the intersection between stores one of the clues in sight 50 feet ahead—a glimpse caught through an interstice. White shorts. Narrow hips. Short hair. A woman's arm draped loosely across narrow tee-shirted shoulders. The shape of the head some' w says yes, pretty. Ane he already knows, demands, that it be a boy-child.

Quicker now through the crows to close the gap. Another flash of the light green tee-shirt, the white shorts pulled tight over full hips. A glimpse a moment later of the face—clear, soft featured, young but not too young. Thirteen, his mind whispers loudly. White tennis shoes. White anklettes. Already envying the woman; her to conscious familiarity with him says "auntie." He tries to feel that arm on the boy's shoulders.

Twenty feet into the mens' section from the front entry of the store and the need to stop as the group slows, then stops to look at shirts. The "auntie" consulting with the boy while the lingering foreigner's eyes drift up from the rack of belts 15 feet away to watch.

Pretty. God, pretty, the mind says, and wants to let the mouth say it loudly into the great room. Perfect. Eyes looking the boy up and down, sliding over the hairless legs below the white shorts, momentarily checking where the outline of underpants through the taut cloth over his hips should show. The shadow of a ridge from the undergarment disappointingly there.

Softness to the face. Softness of the skin, of the complexion. Leavening provided by two lighter patches of skin on one rather full cheek—perhaps the leavings of some earlier abrasion. A darker patch on the other cheek. The blemishes excite, break up the possibility of his being *too* pretty.

The boy turns to almost face the watcher at the belt rack now, but is not seeing him, as strongly as the watcher wills it. The man's eyes dart to the front of the shorts. A not-large but still vaguely discomforting smallness to the bulge there—and he notes the bulge is pulling high in the crotch. It is indistinct. The shorts are too full in front, the underpants pulled too tight. No outline at all of what lies beneath.

For an instant their eyes are in contact. But not long enough.

No longer the simple watcher, he moves forward with a smile, with an expression that says, "come, we'll be friends." The women with the boy and the other, younger boy don't even notice as the foreigner casually walks to the boy and winks over his smile. The boy smiles in return, at ease. The man's hand lifts, cups the softness of the boy's cheek in the palm and gently squeezes the flesh between thumb and forefinger.

No words. He simply looks into the boy's brown eyes and knows they share a secret. As they exchange the knowledge his hand slips across the flesh, his fingertips caressing the softness as it slides downward across the cheek, down onto the soft-muscled neck, over the shoulder and along the separation between back and side. For a moment the hand hesitates, as though awaiting a sign from the eyes, then briefly cups and squeezes the boy's buttock, falls away.

"Will you be my special friend," the man asks, feeling some embarrassment at the childish simplicity of the question.

The boy smiles at the corners of his mouth. Perhaps it is a simple recognition, perhaps he sees the question as slightly ludicrous. "Yes," he murmurs, "I would like that."

They are moving now, further into the store and the watcher follows close behind, his eyes, as much as his fear of being observed will allow, caress the smooth legs, watching the slight ridge of underpants appear and be gone, the rising and falling of the tendons in his legs. He minutely examines every part of the boy his eyes can absorb, caressing, possessing, sharing an intimacy.

The boy's hair is very fine and curls ever so slightly at the ends. No oil or preparation. Simply clean. It lies flat on his head and is a slight brown color, not much darker than the very pale tanness of his naked legs. The watcher wants to run his hands over it, then his finger through it. He wants to touch an ear of the boy, pinch one of his earlobes gently, wants to squeeze-caress the neck just below the hairline.

Cutting in front of another family group, he arrives at the short stairway leading up to a raised level of the store just as the boy and the others turn above him. His eyes lock with those of the boy over the banister and hold just that extra moment that strikes the awareness of the watched. The man knows it has happened but detects no animosity and no discomfort in the boy. He follows.

They are looking at women's blouses now, the two boys behind them and they talk about merits, or whatever it is women discuss over clothing, and Ghinese women at that. The smaller boy—and the watcher now notes as he pauses behind them that the little one is also beautiful—is looking away while the older looks slightly in the watcher's direction, but pointedly at something else.

The man knows he's aware. The boy's concentration elsewhere is slightly too intense—and the boy's eyes come up to meet those of the man again, locking there. His face now reflects some discomfort. A minute tightening around the mouth says it. None of the others are aware however, and the man is certain the boy will not make them aware—at least the women.

No longer the watcher, he moves forward with a smile, with a smile that says, come, we'll be friends. The boy smiles in return and the man knows he understood the bit-too-long locking of eyes that took place on the stairs. The others pay no attention.

He winks as he walks forward and the boy returns the wink, moving into an aisle away from the smaller boy and the women. The man follows.

With the counter just above waist level and no one else in the narrow passage, there can be no observation. The man reaches out beneath eye level and cups the boy's white-shorted hip for an instant before slightly squeezing it. He lets the hand drift downward across the buttock, feels the slight ridge of the underpants beneath the texture, feels the hem and end to the leg of the shorts. His fingertips momentarily caress the soft boy-flesh just below the shorts.

"Where can I see you again?" he tries, hoping the boy speaks English.

"I meet you ... at seven o'clock tonight at ...." and the man's imagination fails him.

"OK, and please do come. I want to know you," the man says as his hand continues on around the boy's upper thigh and slides onto the inner thigh, caressing the soft warmness with fingertips. He caresses with a slow up and down motion before withdrawing his hand.

"At seven, then," smiling a seal on the agreement.

The boy is now very obviously aware of the watcher just down the passageway. He tries not to look at the man but he seems compelled to dart his eyes upward and back at the man, seemingly examining clothing just a few steps away. There is a definite troubling about the boy's eyes, a very slight quizzical frown, but he makes no effort to escape the watching eyes.

The boy's failure to move away from the line of direct observation stumps the watcher when coupled with that slight frown. The boy is obviously aware of what the man is and wants. The frown, no matter how slight, tells the watcher that. Yet the boy remains out in the open and, more significantly to the man, remains at least partially facing him, the front of his shorts exposed to the glances that become lingering looks in that direction.

The man moves now, deciding to pass the group as it stops at still another counter, to look backward and get a direct view of the boy from the front. He anticipates they will shortly move again. His movement forward is geared to a group approaching the boy from the opposite direction. He is able to alter direction just enough in passing the others to pass close to the boy. But the boy moves slightly himself, obviously aware of the man's maneuver. His tee-shirt sleeve brushes ever so slightly against the hairs of the man's arm. He wishes the brushing could communicate something, and he settles nearby, turned slightly toward the group.

He turns back toward the little group the boy belongs to, noting as he does that the rest of them are engrossed in something on display and in conversation with one of the salesgirls. He is smiling and the boy is smiling in return, as though expecting the man, as though wanting him to approach. They move into a deserted aisle, everything below the waist hidden from view.

"You understand, don't you?" the man says, more than asks.

"Yes, I understand."

"I want to know you ... to become your friend. I think we would be good friends. What do you think?"

"I will like that," the boy responds, the half-smile broadening across the tan features. "I don't have many chance to be friend with foreigner. I like foreigner friend."

"Can I meet you somewhere ... alone ... later?"

"Yes, I have my name and home on paper," he responds, drawing a bit of note from the small pocket of his shorts. "You telephone me and ask for Nicholas. Then we will talk."

The boy speaks good English, with a bit of problem with the grammar and a slight, musical accent. The man is excited by the interchange and with the possibility of talking to the boy, not just passing the time, he tells himself, but in really talking to him ... probing around in his mind. More, the boy understands, there's no question about that, that something more than just a passing acquaintance will develop between them.

Just to be certain, he asks: "Do you understand?" as his eyes dart down to the front of the boy's shorts.

The boy smiles knowingly as he answers in the affirmative. There is a slight flush to his face.

"Good, then I'll call you tonight about seven o'clock."

"OK, I be waiting for you calling."

The man's hand has slid along the edge of the counter against which he leans, moving to within an inch of the bulge in the boy's shorts. He's watched the boy's eyes following the slow, incremental movement of the hand. It is now at a level with the bulge. There is an invitation unspoken and the boy accepts. He moves his body slightly forward, resting the bulge against the knuckles of the hand, moves his hips sideways ever so slightly, rubbing the organs against the knuckles. The man feels the taut ridge of his penis and, despite the excitement, immediately estimates it is about four inches long. There is a throbbing in his own middle and a weakness in his legs. He turns his hand over to touch the tautness with the more sensitive fingertips, tickling it with a fingernail.

Once again he decided to try maneuvering past the boy for the feel of his shorts, or better yet, the flesh, against his own. While the boy's eyes are diverted he again gears his approach to someone coming from the opposite direction and squeezes his boy into the narrow space remaining. His knuckles slide along the taut cloth over the boy's buttocks, feel momentarily the beginnings of the cleft. He allows the fingers to open completely but they refuse, as on their own, to touch downward and brush against the naked flesh at the end of his shorts. And he is past.

When he turns the boy is looking at him expressionlessly, but in the lack is the statement that he knows what has just happened. There is no anger, but neither is there pleasure. It happened, the immobile face seems to say, but I would take no pleasure in it happening again... and I might talk.

They move again and it's obvious their stay in the store will end soon. They are working in the direction of the entry now, moving a bit faster, a bit bored with poring over what they are not going to buy. And the boy is now obviously not allowing his body available for viewing by the man. There are still momentary lockings of eyes across counters and down aisles between sauntering lookers. It continues, but the boy is now evading his eyes.

"Hopeless," the man's mind repeats over and over. Yet he pursues.

They have talked now. The phone call was about half an hour before, and the boy has said, yes, he's alone and, yes, he can come out for a couple of hours and, yes, he will meet the foreign man near his home and go there to talk some more.

The boy is wearing the same light green tee-shirt and white shorts of the afternoon as he walks to meet the man, smiling, and God, how the man loves that knowing, slightly coquettish smile of greeting.

They walk the block to the man's apartment building, go up, enter his flat, sit and talk. Details are lost, flicked over, ignored as distractions from meaning. The man is aware only of the boy being there, of their entering his bedroom, of the boy suddenly turning to him, moving up close with a question tinged with desire written into his expression, of their lips meeting and the feel of the boy's back as he slides his hand up under the tee-shirt and pulls the slighter, softer body against his own.

Their lips remain locked together and he almost roughly massages and rubs the satiny back under the shirt, pressing the whole surface of his hand against the small of it. He can feel very, very fine hairs in the small of the boy's back just above the cleft as his fingertips skim its surface. He slips the hand into the tight space between waistband and skin, pushes his fingers downward and a short distance into the top of the cleft.

The boy pushes his groin against the man's upper leg, twists, even moans very low as he clutches the thick man-body tightly.

"Oh, please, please," the boy whisper-moans just below the man's ear. They sway drunkenly. The man tries to work his hand around to the front of the shorts but it becomes entangled and then will not slide past the boy's pelvic ridge. As the boy feels the hand trying to get around his body, and it seems to reassure him, his own hand slides over the organ of the man and rubs then squeezes it through his trousers.

Finding no way through the entangling underpants, shorts and friction, the man turns the boy around, places his arms over the narrow shoulders and, while taking the boy's earlobe in his mouth, reaches down and slides the shorts and underpants together down enough to allow the rigid organ to pop from its cloth prisons. The man grasps it at the base between thumb and forefinger, holding it away from the boy so he can see.

It is not circumcised, but then the man didn't expect him to be. The foreskin is, however, broken loose from the membrane, allowing the purple-brown head to emerge slightly more than half-way from its sheath. The fingers work the skin down, releasing the head completely. The boy shivers ever so slightly at the man's touch. There is no pubic hair, only a very fine down above the organs. The down catches and refracts minute particles of light. He knows he'll shortly have this in his mouth and smell the faint, exciting odor of urine.

"Jesus, Jesus, it's so beautiful," the man murmur-moans as his palms caress along the upper thighs of the boy, his knuckles bumping and rubbing against the soft ball-sack and penis. Even the feel of the tiny lump of lymph nodes in the groin excites. "It's been so long, so long—so goddamn long." And the boy knows he is murmuring of more than a physical thing. He shakes his shorts and underpants on down to his ankles, steps out of them, breaks away and takes off his tee-shirt, kicks his shoes away. He turns full to the man watching and lets the smile break like a gentle sea-wave across his face.

He knows it is all finished as he saunters behind the group the remainder of the distance to the entry of the store, weaving his way through the crush of strollers. His eyes still caress the smoothness of the boy's full, white-shorted hips, still watch the appearance and disappearance of the underpants ridge, and he still longs to touch, to caress, to possess. But it is finished.

Reaching the sidewalk outside the store and the crush of humanity that swallows them within itself, they are gone. Only the already lessening tautness of his own organ remains.

A boy about 13 in tight denims breaks from the continuum of people along the front of the store and strides toward and past the man and into the store. He is a tougher, harder looking little rascal, the front of his jeans taut over the lump within. Turning, the man watches the boy's hips covertly as he passes into the store. The man follows.

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WESTBETH PIER

Under the darkness of the sunken sun
Anonymity plays
Pocketpool
While the rest get warmed up.

I've been ready too long
In moonshade
by treestump. The
Fragrance of my mysteries
Like mushrooms
Enlarge
Till my cobwebs
Cacoon my brothers
As they approach
        the coal blue chill
That wafts salt dirt
From Hudson squalor.

A twinkling star survives this
But no guiding light
it sheds. Perhaps
Beguiling skyscrapers? and surely
passengers on thruways above the
Cumuli. From

Her a fragile roar
Like a dream. And

My yearning sets sparks
Burning
        that ignite, flintlike
        the grit of my approacher's heels.

His smile
        clouded by obsession.

—*Ronald Lazard*

BURNING THE SECON

for Bo

1.

Some came to light the wa
to touch the soft-haired ski
burning with fever

Of this there is nothing wri

2.

Long beaked birds
warbled their multiple tun

Hooded beasts for the last t
and viewed him

All that we loved in him yo

3.

I never knew Boccacio
the way you knew him

He thought you were stron
his sore eyes a form of fire o

You never let him down
dying on a red cushion

For you it was a moth befor

4.

Now there are words enoug
to fill one thousand tales

There is this consolation

You sit in an egg
the frog in your dreams
hands you the reins

—*Stephen J. Herman*

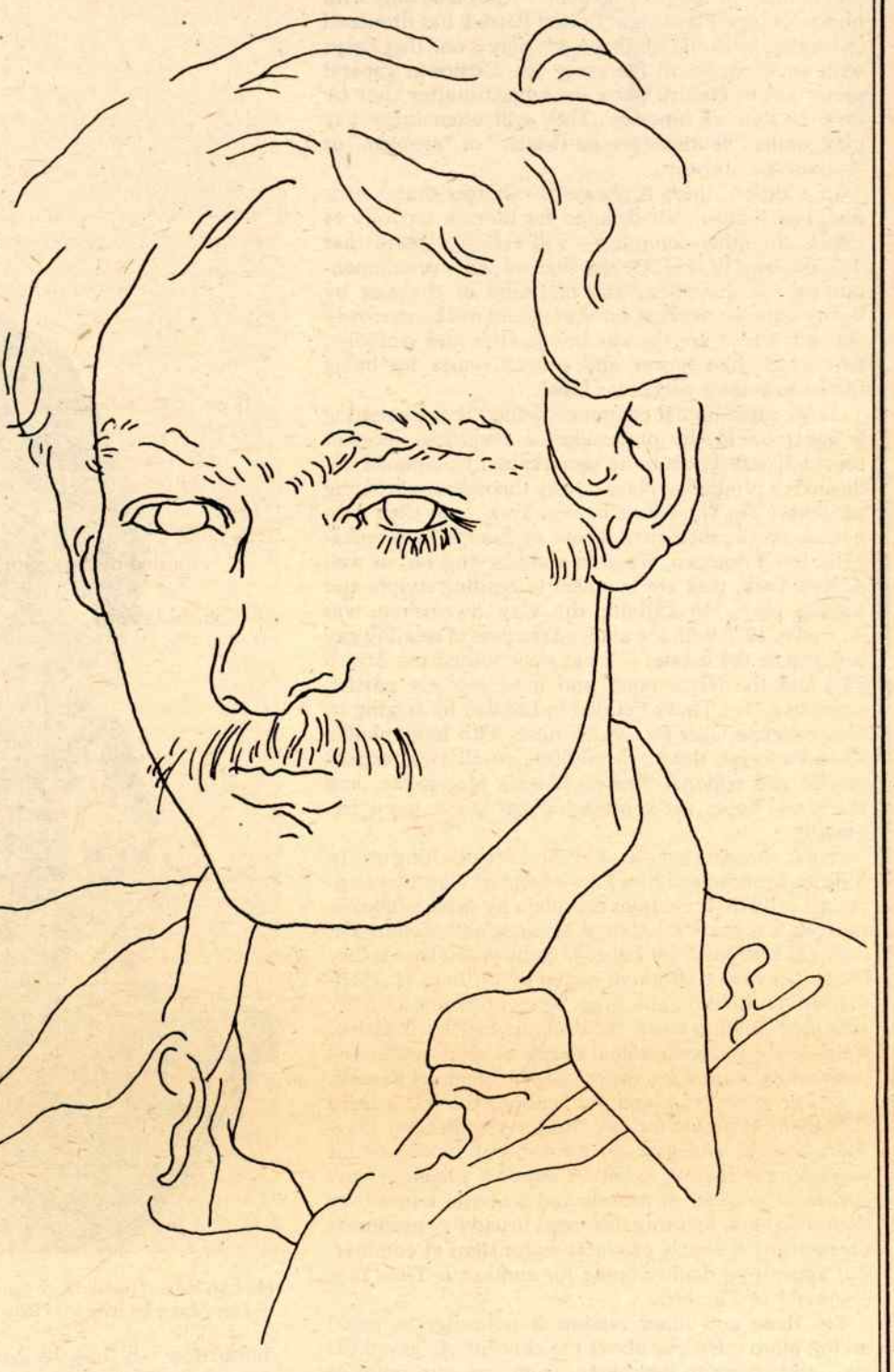
HINDU WEDDING: TRINIDAD

I remember there was a kind of thatched hut, set apart,
in which bride and bridegroom sat, both swathed in white,
she with a frightened expression, he sullen, refusing presents
from her father (clothes, money, all heaped on the floor), till in desperation
the old man offered a cow, which was accepted; then they were married
by a sort of pundit wearing only a dhoti,
while local musicians played discordant pentatonic
music on a combination of gongs, drums, sitars.
Also that the festivities were supposed to go on all weekend,
and this was only the first day of the feast.
This was all outside, in the heat, under a saman tree.
We guests ate at a long board table, with our fingers, on something
which was not banana leaves, but looked just like them,
and the menu, endlessly repeated, like the music, consisted
of curried breadnut, rice, plantain, yoghurt, potatoes
(all of which you had to roll into a ball and eat
accompanied by roti, washed down with white rum),
and the bride's brother, who was drunk and a little aggressive,
sat by my side with his friends and said "Eat youh fill, white man.
What don't kill's fattenin'. Afterward
we boys gon take you dong by de rivah an' tread you."
Which they did. Hindu wedding hospitality.

—E. A. Lacey

Centerfold art work by Wayne Douglas Quinn

Wayne Douglas Quinn is a San Francisco artist whose work has appeared in many exhibitions, competitions and museums. A book of his work *The Art of Wayne Quinn* was published in 1977 (A David Charlesen/New Glide Book).



when I lay with a man
joyously
I sometimes think of
my sons
the ones
that are lost down
his throat
all eaten
those
that abide for awhile
in his recesses
like wax lilies
bouyant as corks
in a flume
and those
that enter a cell
on the mouth
to swing
on the essential clutter
and to sing songs
each song is a word
at work
or a moment tight
like a bead of water
caught up into
a bead of ice
and kept
each with a specific
thing to inform him of
each new aspect
of the news:
oh uncle
we live
we die
in song

Richard Ronan

NG THE SECOND WICK

for Boccacio's Lover

me to light the way of swollen feet
the soft-haired skin
with fever

here is nothing written

aked birds
their multiple tunes

beasts for the last time came
ed him

we loved in him you sat and watched by

new Boccacio
you knew him

ght you were strong his ears turned in
yes a form of fire on all things

r let him down
a red cushion

it was a moth before the flame

re are words enough
e thousand tales

this consolation

an egg
in your dreams
u the reins

n J. Herman

PUSHKIN'S GAY POEM

The greatest Russian poet was, and is, and will always remain, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837). Doubtlessly, he was "straight": his biography is full of women and a lot of debauchery. Married rather late in life, he fathered several children. His beautiful wife, Natalie Nikolayevna, neé Goncharova, played a tragic role and brought an early death to Pushkin. Owing to her remarkable appearance, she was made a lady of the Imperial court. There, she became a target of a French adventurer, Baron G. Dantis. Although Natalie did not reciprocate his attentions, she might have met him secretly.

Very soon the Pushkins became the subject of intense gossip. The intrigue in which Dantis's adoptive father, the Ambassador of the Netherlands Baron de Heckern, was helped by all the personal, literary and political enemies of the poet, culminated in a duel in which Pushkin lost his life. By then, Dantis had married Natalie's sister—probably to prove that he was not after Mrs. Pushkin; yet, the poet's death provoked such a storm throughout the Empire that Dantis was expelled from Russia forever. Natalie soon remarried. Her new husband was a certain Lanskoy by whom she had more children. She probably never read Pushkin's verse during his lifetime, and the poet did not expect women to judge poetry; it would suffice for him if they could inspire it.

Most of Pushkin's poems were dedicated—often playfully—to women. Yet he wrote some strange lines which the "Pushkinists" have since tried to neutralize: "An enchanting youth / Began to visit me frequently.../ Sad were our encounters,/ (as) his smile, his languid glances,/ His mysterious talk,/ Poured a sweet prison into my soul" (in another variant—"cold prison"). Puritanical historians of literature have since tried to explain away these dangerous lines. They might have been written for Pushkin's friend Rayevsky; yet, in the twentieth century the famous biographer Modzalewsky decided they referred to Pushkin's "Daemon"! A brilliant verdict, indeed.

Pushkin was "straight," but he admitted the possibility of any "deviation." Gay people were among his friends; the most conspicuous perhaps was a known chronicler, Wigel (of Finnish origin). The poet-statesman Ivan Dmitriev was another gay gentleman well known in Pushkin's time. The great poet never once condemned the so-called "abominable acts against nature."

More than this! In 1835, a mature Pushkin wrote a frankly homosexual poem which the puritanical Soviet editors of *Selected Pushkin* (three volumes, 1949) chose not to include in the collection (meant primarily for children). The poem runs (my translation):

Sweet boy, gentle boy,
Don't be ashamed, you are mine forever:
The same rebellious fire is in both of us,
We are living one life.

I am not afraid of mockery:
Between us, the two have become one,
We are precisely like a double nut
Under a single shell.

Other allusions apart, this poem by the "straightest" possible poet is a proof of his remarkable insight, understanding and tolerance. Unfortunately, one hundred and forty years after the poet's death, the government of what once was Russia prefers to shut their eyes and to condemn "criminals against nature" to five years of hard labor in Mordovia or Siberia.

—Valery Pereleshin

The author is a Russian emigre poet (born 1913), who has lived in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, since 1953. He has published several volumes of poetry, the most recent of which is Ariel *(1976)*

THE ELEMENTS OF GAY THEATRE

by Richard Hall

Can we have gay theater? Eric Bentley considers the question of narrow semantic interest, asserting that plays cannot be assigned "gender"—they deal only with human beings. Playwright Robert Patrick has dismissed the matter by declaring that a gay play is one that sleeps with another play of the same sex. Critics in general prefer not to classify plays by subject-matter, but by form or style or function. They will often lump gay plays under "political/protest theater" or "problem" or "social-issue" theater.

In addition, there is always the danger that homosexual prejudice—our demand for literary territory to match our other conquests—will create a genre that does not need to exist. Or else that we will overcompensate for the distortions and omissions of the past by laying claim to works of art that should not be narrowly defined, which are broadly imaginative and symbolic, and which lose power and suggestiveness by being forced to wear a particular label.

At the same time it cannot be denied that something is going on in the profession—a theatrical ferment coast-to-coast that is quite remarkable. Companies dedicated to producing plays on gay themes are springing up. Some, like The Glines in New York, have their own homes. At the moment I know of groups in Minneapolis, San Francisco, Houston and Los Angeles, as well as New York, that are involved in reading scripts and staging plays. In Britain, the Gay Sweatshop was formed in 1975 with the avowed purpose of relating gay activism to the theater—it has since toured the British Isles and the Netherlands and most recently participated in a Gay Times Festival in London by staging its play *As Time Goes By*, which deals with homophobia since Victorian times. In addition to all this, experimental and regional theaters like La Mama Etc. and the Mark Taper are showcasing gay plays more frequently.

And it appears that the publishers are catching up. In Britain, *Homosexual Acts: A Volume of Gay Plays* appeared in 1975. It contains five plays by three writers—Lawrence Collinson, Alan Wakeman and Robert Patrick.(1) Scheduled for fall 1978 publication here is *Gay Plays, The First Collection*, edited by William M. Hoffman (Avon Books). The Arno Series on Homosexuality reprinted *Coming Out!*, the documentary by Jonathan Katz. The usual professional scripts of plays with some commercial success are being issued by Samuel French.

Besides production and publication, there is a third ingredient available for gay theater—audiences. Playgoers straight and gay are turning out in droves for plays on gay themes, whether out of a salacious voyeurism or in quest of models and material relevant to their own lives. Spotting this trend Broadway producers are scouting the early productions for signs of commercial appeal, no doubt hoping for another *Is That You, Norman?* or *The Ritz*.

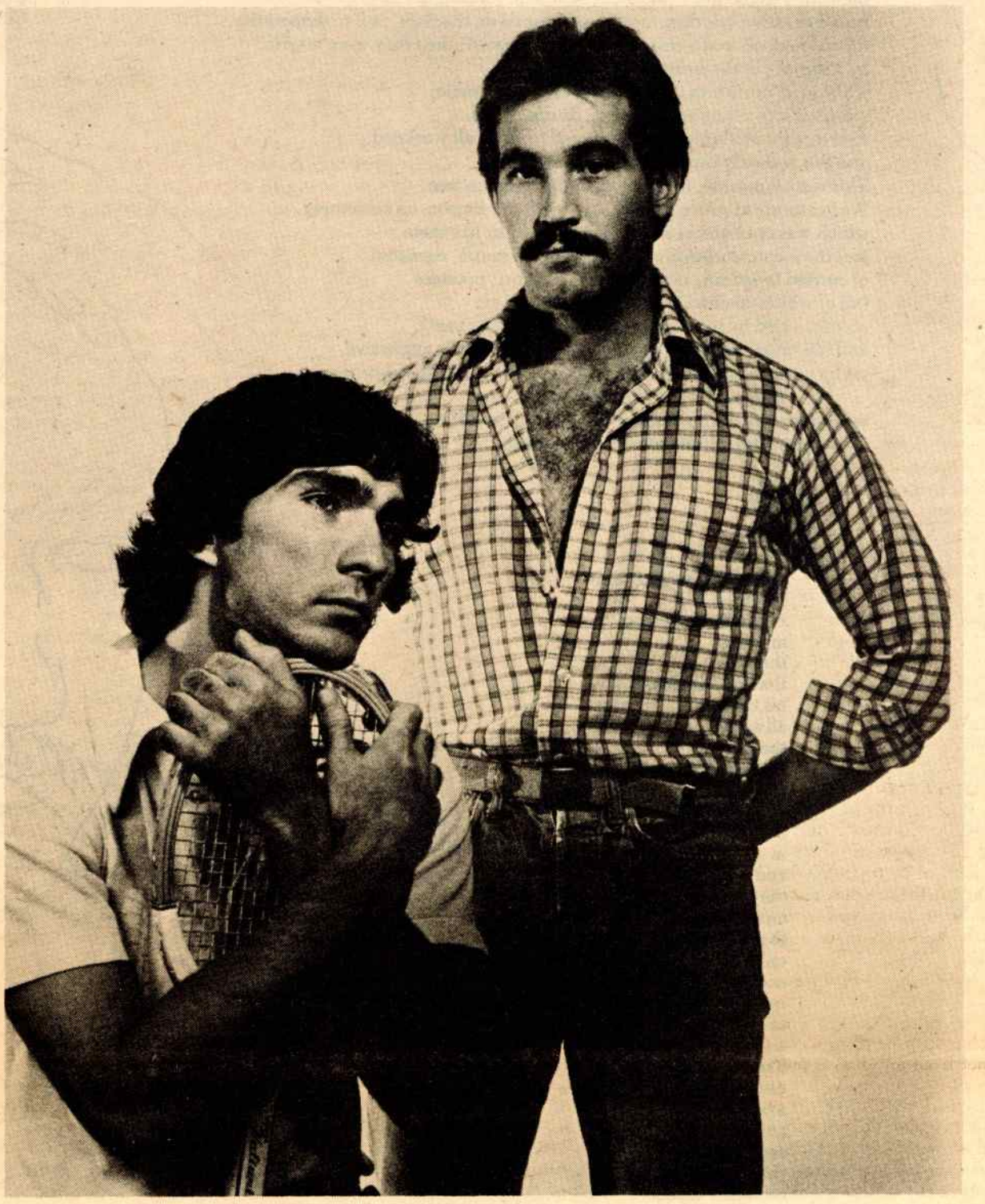
For those and other reasons it is harder to avoid asking more questions about the concept of "gay theater," and trying to determine, from our own point of view, whether such a creature exists and if so, in what forms.

THE MOST PUBLIC OF THE ARTS

The mass appeal of theater—de Tocqueville called it the most democratic part of literature—probably explains why theater has been the last of the literary arts to reflect the gay revolution of the last few years. Added to this is the deep distrust of theater itself in the west. The Puritans loathed all amusements but most especially the stage, which they considered a devilish pastime. In 19th century America, theatrical performances could only take place with the permission of municipal authorities. In Britain until recently, a license from an office of censorship managed by the Lord Chamberlain was required for performance—a license withheld from most productions dealing with homosexuality.

Because of the enormous appeal of the mimetic arts, and their potential for civil arousal—as well as the deep official distrust for all events theatrical—it isn't surprising that censorship has been a constant problem. Nor is it surprising that theater dealing with illicit sexuality should be considered doubly dangerous. After all, acting out a taboo subject, actually *showing* faggots and dykes in all their "perversity," renders them in explicit and powerful images. This imitation onstage may inspire others offstage. One plausible public impersonation may lead to other acts in private.

And there is the social, public nature of a theatrical event. We attend in the company of like-minded men and women. We share what we see. Eric Bentley describes this process as follows: "...a group of people in close physical proximity, with their faces all pointing one way...ceasing to be merely an *I* and becoming, under such circumstances, in this place, a part of a *we*."(2) Even if the message of the drama is moralistic and negative, like Lillian Hellman's *Children's Hour*, the fact that lesbianism is discussed in public, before a cohesive group, changes the audience's relation to it. Lesbianism has been removed from limbo; the terrible silence—literally, homosexuality as the unspeakable crime—has been broken. Reaction, discussion, examination are provoked. Air is let into a chamber that has been sealed for centuries. There is always the chance that once this process starts, the playwright's moralizing will lose its power to sway and will ultimately be ignored.



Heikko Kerin (standing) & Jim Krestalude
in *Love Match* by Richard Hall

That the civil authorities recognized this possibility at an early stage is well illustrated by the fate of a play on lesbianism that opened on Broadway in 1926—*The Captive* by Edouard Bourdet.(3) The play is entirely negative toward a heroine who is a "captive" of her lesbian impulses. Brooks Atkinson, reflecting the tone of the play in his review in the *New York Times*, uses terms like "a twisted relationship with another woman...a prescience of impending doom." There is no question but that the play's moralism satisfied him. An unofficial "play jury" set up by the theatrical profession to clear material (rather like the Hayes Office in Hollywood later) found the play acceptable. But in spite of all this, the police raided the show and a State Supreme Court judge ruled it obscene. Not surprisingly, he deplored the effect of the play *not* on "intelligent and mature minds" but on "the ordinary and average gatherings of human beings in a cosmopolitan city." It was the exposure of the untutored masses to homosexuality that he feared—presumably they would be moved to imitations which the more highly educated would not, despite the playwright's warnings about "twisted relationships" and "doom." Thus, the accessibility of the play's images proved to be its downfall.

It is this instinctive understanding of the power of drama as the most accessible of the arts that has informed the gay movement from the beginning, and has led to the use of demonstrations, zaps and street theater to achieve our ends. The liberation day parades each June may be regarded as the culminating dramatic event of our year. They are dynamic expressions in space of the mimetic impulse, rich in costume,spectacle and signs, with a magical relation to reality and an absence of prepared texts. They are, in fact, the "precipitates of dreams" which Artaud describes as the true idea of a theater in his two manifestoes, employing—as the parades do—ritual, masque, hieroglyphs and anarchy to reach the viewers. The parades are the homophobe's nightmare come true—which probably explains the necessity of the police, whose function it is to neutralize the signs and symbols, to "frame" the street stage in order to keep it from bursting through to the onlookers. Our enemies understand the power and theatricality of these occasions, and frequently use film clips of the parades to convince legislators that civil rights for gay people should be defeated.

Given all this, we can see why the state and the theatrical establishment have been opposed to or disinterested in showing gay life onstage. Their fear and timidity has been matched by that of audiences, who could only occasionally be seduced into watching a play on a gay theme, and only provided the taboo was upheld or stereotypes reinforced—no doubt afraid of a challenge to their primal lusts and longings.

It appears that only gradually, since Stonewall, has gay theater begun its long climb into visibility, respectability and, one presumes, profitability. Political events had to occur first. The general climate of repressiveness had to end. Only then could aesthetic and artistic opportunities arise. (The novel, always freer than the stage, could deal with the subject honestly several decades earlier). But now that we have gay theater—or at least gay plays—what is it exactly that we have? How shall we define it? Can it be described more precisely than as theater "by, for and about" gay people?

HOMOSEXUAL CHARACTERS

Donald L. Loeffler, in his dissertation on homosexuality in drama from 1950 to 1968 (4) made a study of 75 plays, using gay characters, both major and minor, as a means of definition. He broke this down further into these seven sub-types of character: "the presentation of the homosexual for local color...as a sexual invert...resolving his problems by means of suicide...attempting to become heterosexual...as a third party in a love affair...as establishing a vanguard for his sexual rights and minority status...and for broad comic effect." He finds a discernible progression in social and ideological acceptance over this 18-year period, stating that the homosexual character moves from "offstage motivational force...to the presentation on the stage of a labeled homosexual who is seemingly an accepted member of society. [He] has progressed from a satirical exaggerated caricature to the presentation of an individual who is warm, human and compassionate."(5)

Loeffler's use of character as the chief common denominator in male gay plays is probably the best he could do at the time. His list starts with Wolcott Gibbs' *Season in the Sun* (1950), which was set on Fire Island and introduced a gay man visiting from nearby Cherry Grove, with all the appropriate and demeaning jokes. His list ends with *Boys in the Band* (1968). In between are all kinds of plays, twelve of them adapted from

novels, and representing the work of Albee, Pinter, Inge, Shaffer, Anderson, Vidal, Rattigan, Orton, et al. The list is notable chiefly for its diversity. It includes comedies, thrillers, satires, tragedies. Some are dark, others playful, absurdist, philosophical, musical, historical. At least one—*Ross*, by Terence Rattigan,—is biographical. There is no way to relate the plays to each other in terms of shared consciousness, common point of view or ideology. Obviously, there was no such thing as an ideologized gay minority in those days—there were only the denizens of a suppressed and disenfranchised world. The occasional gay character in a play signalled the playwright's interest in—or exploitation of—this world, which had not yet emerged to defend itself. It would seem that gay plays existed then, or at least plays in which gay men and gay activities were portrayed, but gay theater did not.

Which brings us back to the earlier question—What is gay theater? I would like to identify four elements that may comprise it, discussing each briefly. These are Community, Identity, Subject-Matter and Audience. In avoiding the standard categories, the categories we know so well—social realism, agit/prop, epic, etc.—I hope to cut across the usual grids and traditions and find a way to isolate what is uniquely gay in certain kinds of drama. While the standard categories may describe the form or treatment employed by a dramatist, or the conventions he subscribes to, they are not helpful here because they already have a lengthy critical tradition behind them. They cast the discussion on other than sexual/political grounds—on formalist and historical grounds, in fact. But what we are after is something new, not something old and borrowed. No doubt I am loading the dice by removing the discussion from traditional aesthetics and framing it in terms that will yield social, political or even therapeutic definitions. But in doing this, I hope not to make a case merely for theater as propaganda, or theater that is narrowly didactic. On the contrary, I believe theater has the broadest aims. It may amuse, cathartize, convert, thrill, heal or convert. It may aim, as Shelley put it, at "teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself." It may also do none of these things—or, indeed, have any "function" at all. In Wilde's terms, a play may express nothing but itself. Polemical theater, theater that is explicitly propagandistic, may be gay—but gay theater is not exclusively polemical or propagandistic. In fact, I hope to show that gay theater may employ all kinds of form, style and character, may have—or not have—a "function" as such, and still share some over-arching and general vision.

Avoiding the formalist tradition, I would also like to side-step the issue of "style" or "sensibility" as a means of documenting gay theater. As Susan Sontag has pointed out in her essay on Camp, "A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about,"—although that doesn't seem to keep people (including Sontag) from making the attempt. The gay predilection for a sensibility of camp/irony/parody, based on our outcaste status and our recognition of certain contradictions in our position vis-a-vis straight society has been much-discussed. Certainly there is a special affinity between the gay situation and these tonalities. Irony, with its maniacal cousins camp and parody, can ease our pain, relieve us with laughter, distance us from the harsh realities of our predicament. They are the tribute the oppressed pay to the oppressor, the witticisms hurled by the prisoner as he shakes the bars of his cell. Still, I do not believe these means are exclusively the property of one minority. Irony has been available to all powerless people—from Sholem Aleichem to Eve Merriam, whose female-drag show, *The Club*, employs a delicious irony in the service of feminism. We cannot claim it as exclusively our own, nor declare those works of art where it is paramount prototypically gay. It is a means of reducing or de-fusing many menaces, not merely that of the heterosexual dictatorship, and has always been used by emergent groups. Gay theater, in fact, will use as many tones as do non-gay plays. There is no reason to believe that a uniform style or monolithic logic of taste underlies all our work.

My purpose, then, is not to set new rules or legislate new unities, but rather to find some commonality, some unifying vision uniting the plays that form gay theater. To this end, a new, non-exclusionary terminology seems most helpful.

1. *Community.* Awareness of ourselves as a particular people with a shared history of oppression has been one of the spin-off benefits of the movement. A sense of solidarity is available. However, it is only available if we reach out for it. Most of us can "pass" if we wish—remain invisible, or nearly so, in the larger culture. In this we are both fortunate and unfortunate. Fortunate in that we have invisibility as an option, a strategy for survival, denied to other minorities who must, with certain exceptions, wear the badge of their particular status all their lives. Unfortunate in that this option can serve to undercut our unity, our cohesiveness. Our "nation" depends on the decision of many to become a citizen of it. Thus the refusal to pass, to become visible, is a voluntary act requiring moral courage and the assumption of certain burdens. It marks a new relationship, "us" and "them"—and requires loyalties that may be quite different from those that mattered prior to coming out. It is revolutionary in that it moves us from one status to another, and undermines some of the roles we have learned so far. This isn't easy. Yet thousands of gay people, female and male, young and old, are taking this risk and reaching out for a new sense of belonging every day.

It seems to me that this remarkable transaction must be reflected in some way in a theater labeled "gay." Gay theater will bear witness to some sense of community, to a shared experience of choosing sides, that is a central fact of gay life. Events onstage will be joined somehow to our choices offstage. "Us" under the spotlight will be different from "them."

This is not to say that at some point in a play a character has to start spouting movement rhetoric. It does mean that the playwright should make us aware that the gay ethos exists, whether his characters will be able to participate in it or not.

There are countless ways of doing this. Community may be designated with one word, "we,"—the "we" of brotherhood and belonging. By using "we" instead of "I" only once, the playwright may signal a choice between integration and alienation.

Reference to any one of a dozen historical events can do the same thing—Stonewall, gay legislation, parades, Anita Bryant.

Community can be suggested by introducing an outsider, a non-member. The dinner guests in *Boys in the Band* cohered into an in-group when the straight interloper appear. It was a community quite different from today's prideful one, but it was still "us" against them." The same division, comically, was apparent in *Boy Meets Boy* when the straight character, the only one in the play, gets entangled in the plot. His presence establishes an outside "norm" which reinforces in-group cohesiveness and apartheid.

The use of social settings unique to the gay world—cruising grounds, baths, leather bars, etc.—can be used to establish community, whether the playwrights views them as positive or negative.

In terms of character, someone's perception of the gay world may be fragmentary, fleeting or vague. He may be entirely negative toward it. It may exist as an offstage presence or possibility which he rejects. It may be a subject of parody. Yet, by any of these attitudes, a character can acknowledge the fact that community does exist.

Even plays that are pessimistic about gay life can affirm the existence of community, like *The International Stud* by Harvey Fierstein (1978), which has a few good things to say about our chances for happiness.

The play is a two-character drama about a blighted love affair that begins in a back-room bar, runs for a few months, then dissolves as Ed, becoming involved with a woman, rejects Arnold. But Arnold's first romantic expectations of what will happen to him when he goes to a bar to find a lover, and when he finds one, establish the gay world "out there." Ed's attitudes toward the gay world are quite different—he sees it as existing chiefly to serve his immediate sexual needs. Nevertheless, he too uses it before turning away from it and toward a hetero love affair. Arnold, when his love-affair fails, puts together a drag act and launches a career as a female impersonator. It is clear that he has given up on Ed and on all human relationships, but not on the gay community, which he now entertains. They are still his people and they will provide him with the nourishment and applause he needs. In this way, implicitly rather than explicitly, does the play underline a sense of gay nationhood while documenting the old dilemmas about love and happiness.

The International Stud, like many other recent plays, does something that works like *The Collection, Five Finger Exercise, The Immoralist, Tea and Sympathy* do not. It affirms and documents the gay social network. It relates the characters to this network, either positively or negatively, or in some ambivalent way. It offers an alternative to isolation and privatism.

Dennis Altman has written "the essential quality of gay liberation...lies in its assertion of gayness, its refusal to feel shame or guilt at being homosexual. Out of this affirmation of being gay comes an affirmation of solidarity with other gays, and the transformation of the pseudo-community of the old gayworld into a sense of real community." (6) This is an optimistic—even idealistic—statement. It is doubtful that the difference between past and present can be so neatly divided into "pseudo-community" and "real community." In fact, there are many communities within the gay world, each offering some kind of solidarity—just as there were many communities within the pre-Stonewall world. What is important for a sense of gay theater is not ideological "correctness," not some pure and idealistic notion of gay togetherness, but the simple recognition that gays *do* band together, *do* share some perceptions about their common predicaments, and *do* mobilize into groups of various sorts for sharing, defense and assertion.

2.*Identity.* Gay community and gay identity exist in a dialectical relationship with each other. Each reinforces, builds on, the other. Many lesbians and gay men find strength and sustenance in the fact that there is a community—with its political actions, campus groups, lectures, publications, dances, etc. These events make it easier to don a gay identity. If we are a people, with our own institutions and culture, then there is a safe and pre-ordained place in it for the individual, who can belong and profit psychologically from others who belong. On the other hand, the community profits and grows from an increasing number of members. Whether gay identity, culture and community exist only in response to a threat from outside and will self-destruct when and if true acceptance of homosexuality arrives, is beside the point at the moment. The fact is, there is a vast support system in America designed to receive gay people today.

In spite of the inter-action between identity and community, I would like to argue that gay theater can also be described as a place where gay identity is worked out separately. It is a place where the individual experience of what it means to be gay is shown. It is a place where liberation is lived.

What chiefly marks the pre-1960 plays described by Loeffler is the absence of this identity. The characters may engage in same-sex love, or come close to it—as in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, The Best Man, The Garden District, Ballad of the Sad Cafe, Children's Hour*—but there is little or no acceptance of gayness and its consequences. Homosexuality refers to an act imagined or performed in the dark and discussed only guardedly later, with little exploration of its non-sexual ramifications. Self-acceptance is almost always out of the question. It is only toward the end of the 1960's, with *Fortune and Men's Eyes, Staircase* and *Boys in the Band* that the matter is confronted more broadly, with attention to the assumption of identity.

However, there are some exceptions to this worth mentioning. One is Lanford Wilson's *Madness of Lady Bright* (1962), the other is Robert Patrick's *Haunted Host* (1964). It isn't coincidence that both plays premiered at New York's Caffé Cino, one of the few spaces available in those days to playwrights who wished to extend the treatment of homosexuality beyond its fuck-in-the-dark aspect.

The Wilson play is a monologue and a memory play. A lonely queen, caught in the city on a long weekend, attempts to reach friends by phone and fails. A long reminiscence about former tricks ensues—a reminiscence fraught with longing and loneliness. Lady Bright is on the edge. He may or may not make it through the next few days. It is also clear that his strong and inalienable identity as a gay male, a person feared, despised and persecuted by his society, is the basic cause of his despair. His tragic predicament stems from this identification, which he may not shake off. The play still commands respect, despite its negativism and self-pity, because of this strong sense of identity. Lady Bright, for all his woes, is triumphant in an age when there were few triumphs for gay people. As an open, irreducible gay, he still speaks to us across the years.

The first stage direction of *The Haunted Host* describes the apartment set as "situated just above the main homosexual cruising crossroads, Christopher and Greenwich in Manhattan." The action revolves around the attempt by a young man, Jay, to install a visitor, Frank, as his new lover. Frank, who bears an astonishing resemblance to Jay's former lover, resists the idea through most, but not all, of the play, mainly because he is resisting the idea that he is gay. Jay, however, has no such identity problems. In the first scene, asking for a description of Frank from a woman friend, we hear this half of a phone conversation: "Sure he can stay here! I mean, if I can stay here, he can stay here. Just point him at my side of the Village and tell him to COME ACROSS! What's he like...No, you sex maniac, not what DOES he like; what IS he like? I don't care WHO he is, but WHAT is he?...Straight. Does he need a chaser? No—no, I don't mind if he don't mind."

Later, after Frank arrives, the following dialogue takes place:

FRANK: Are you homosexual?

JAY (casually): Don't mention it.

FRANK: No, are you?

JAY(grabbing an ostrich fan): Do I LOOK like a homosexual?

FRANK: Please don't be offended—there's just so much of it around.

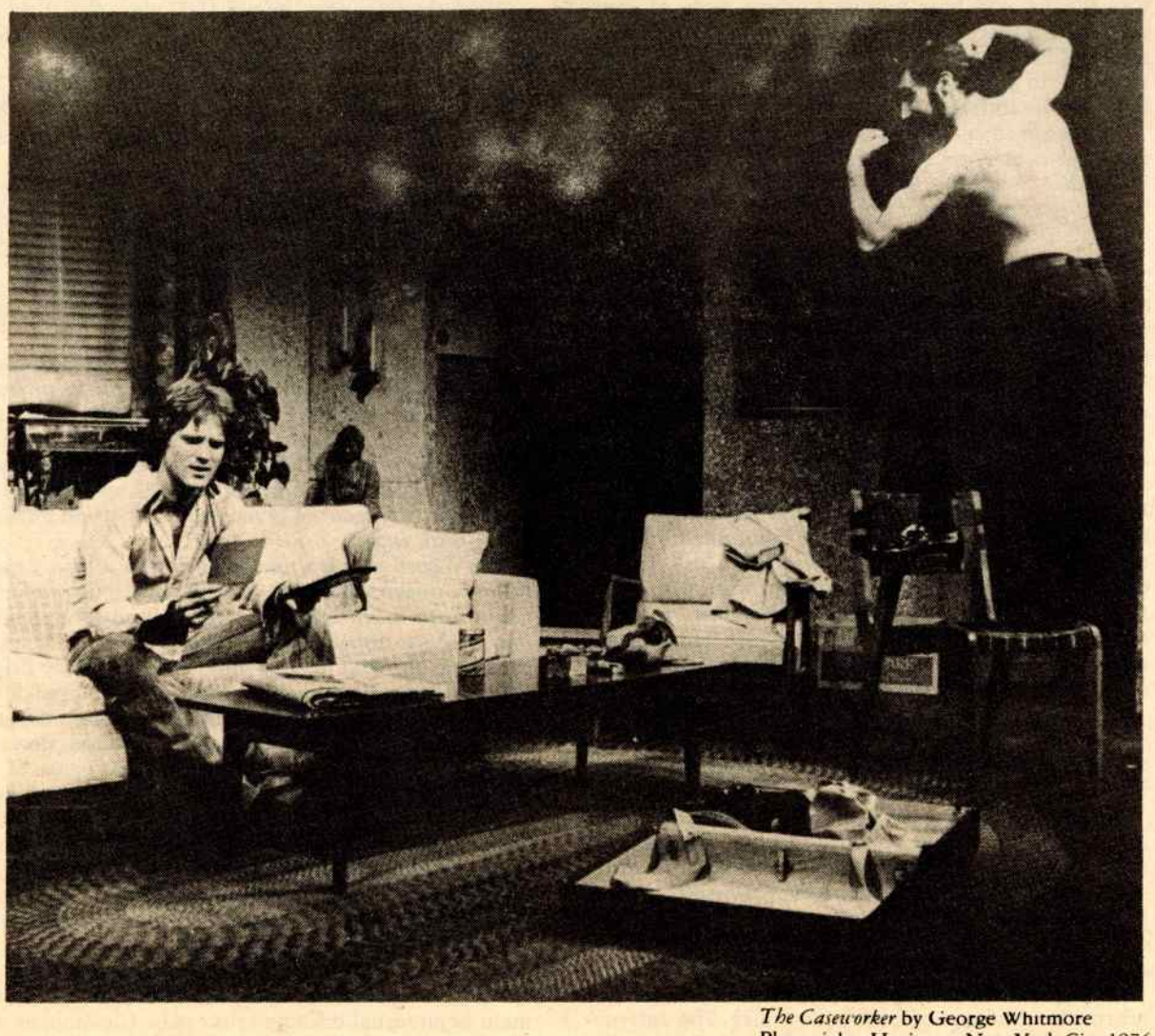
JAY: Well, it ain't contagious—relax.

Although this may all seem tame by present standards, the play was frank and open enough to earn the abuse of critics when it was given a full off-Broadway production in 1969, five years after its premiere at the Cino. The production lasted all of eight performances. It was the play's acceptance of homosexual identity and its upbeat ending that earned the critics' disapproval.

Plays about people who fight for, accept and then propagandize for themselves as gay people are common today. Identity and its assumption may be either a given, or the basic conflict around which the play revolves. Self-image and self-perception are at the core of plays as different as *Payments, Crimes Against Nature, Pink Satin Bombers: An Evening of Faggot Theater, P.S. Your Cat Is Dead, A Song at Twilight, A Meeting by the River, West Street Gang* and *Boy Meets Boy.*

There are parallels to this process of self-identification in the various theaters that sprang up in Europe around the time of World War I, with the aim of fostering self-awareness among various national and ethnic groups. Yeats, writing to Lady Gregory in 1919, describes his years supervising the Abbey Theater as a time when a "people's theater" was created. By this he meant plays that offered characters with whom the artisan or small shopkeeper in the audience could identify. These are, in fact, people the shopkeeper himself would write about "if he had the gift of expression." In this way Yeats wrested the stage away from the educated and propertied classes and used it to provide models for the unheroic, the economically downtrodden, the wounded. He gave it to members of the proletariat—not to radicalize them but to give a heightened sense of themselves, the first step to any greater change. He claims that he (and his colleagues) were the first to create broadly popular theater, because it was "the first doing of something for which the world is ripe...the making articulate of all the dumb classes each with its own knowledge of the world...".(7)

In somewhat the same way, openly gay persons onstage make articulate the aspirations of gay persons in the audience, who would write the same plays if they had the "gift of expression." These plays change the audience's perception of itself. Gayness is modeled, gay identity is established, experience is filtered through a special consciousness. These plays give us back to ourselves—braver, freer, more whole—not because they show gay people as ideal, uncorruptible creatures but because they affirm the basic facts of gay identity.



The Caseworker by George Whitmore
Playwrights Horizons, New York City 1976

There may be other loyalties besides—to ancestry, family, region, profession, religion. There may be irony, pain, loss, comedy, tragedy. But there will be no final equivocation about the central fact of gay identity as an option in life.

3.*Subject-matter.* Homosexuality is a word that may be applied to a whole cluster of behaviors—cultural, psychological, social, political. It may be used to describe taste, dress, mannerism, humor, etc. But the central experience, from which these behaviors and expressions derive, is our choice of sex partner. This is the basic text of our lives. I would like to suggest that one element in gay theater is this sexual choice. Theater which shows us in all lights and relationships except this one cannot be called gay.

There are many ways to make clear onstage that the characters are involved in an alternate mode of affection. There will be as many attitudes toward this mode as there are characters, situations and playwrights. But complete avoidance of the subject, the pretense that we are neutered creatures inhabiting a world that is gay socially, culturally or emotionally, *but not sexually*, is no longer possible.

Eroticizing our stage image has obvious therapeutic value. We are denied the simplest affectional privileges in public—holding hands, hugging, kissing—which takes a heavy psychological toll. Frankness on stage is bound to compensate for this somewhat.

But the therapeutic value of showing tenderness and desire onstage is not the only reason for promoting it. It is useful as a means of overcoming the long history of distortion and evasiveness of the past. Over the past centuries, playwrights have been forced to denature and de-sex the characters that are gay in their dramas. They might do this by turning them into fops, dandies, courtiers or even—by some kind of perverse logic—rakes and Don Juans. They might code their nature by making the characters affected in dress or speech, outlandish in mannerism, or "feminine" in tastes and interests. The one aspect of their nature that could not be shown or even mentioned was their sexuality. Since they were not heterosexual, and dared not be gay, they were left with only one choice—to be asexual.

One example of dozens is Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* (1921). During the course of the first act, it becomes clear that Arnold Champion-Cheney is unsatisfactory as a husband and lover. But how do we know? At first sight, all seems well. Arnold is young, handsome, a member of Parliament. He seems to love his wife. But then Arnold, alone onstage, falls to musing about an armchair he has just bought. He lets us know that he has a weakness for French furniture. In fact, interior decoration is one of his passions—he has "done" the drawing room and plans to redo other rooms of the house. Maugham need show no more than this—and Arnold is instantly coded as a feminized male, incapable of giving hetero joy and satisfaction to his wife. When another man appears with no interest in decorating, he is instantly established as sexier and more desirable. He scoops up poor Arnold's wife and runs away with her before the final curtain.

The logic of this triangle is clear to any theatergoer. Arnold is a neuter. He isn't qualified for hetero love. Therefore he must be stripped of his wife. A third possibility—neither heterosexual nor neuter but homosexual—could not be discussed. In this way were hetero mores satisfied at the price—alas—of a character who might have been human, believable and sympathetic.

Although it would seem that we are past the days when it was necessary to render faggots lustless and joyless in dramatic works, this is not the case. Films have taken up the taboo eagerly, at least those films intended for mass release. *A Taste of Honey, A Special Day, Dog Day Afternoon* all contained characters who, though admittedly gay (an improvement over Arnold Champion-Cheney), had to stay out of any explicit erotic situations. In the case of the first two films, the gay man's relationship was with a straight woman. The pair are shown as urban castaways, huddling for warmth. In *Dog Day Afternoon*, the bank robber and his love get no closer than a phone conversation. In none of these films are we shown flashbacks that might document their lives as lovers, even though these relationships are basic to understanding what we see. The cultural taboo against showing intermale eroticism did not permit it.

(It is this same taboo that explains why Paul Newman chose not to play the part of Harlan Brown, the coach in *The Front Runner*, despite promises to do so. The trouble with Harlan Brown is not that he is gay but that he is *sexually active.* Faced with the fact that homogenitality—not neuterism or vague homo-eroticism—would have to be shown onscreen, Newman backed out.)

The fear of gay bedrooms has many causes, and analyzing them is outside the scope of this article. But at least one party to the game deserves mention—the mainstream critics who have been unable to handle homosexuality onstage. Perhaps the subject is too new—i.e., lacks a critical tradition which will enable critics to borrow ready-made attitudes and make intelligent remarks in print. Or it may derive from a homophobia too ingrained to be noticed. Yet the need to find a place for frank and explicit gay plays, the need to assess them as political and aesthetic events without resorting to the kind of bigotry that enfeebles judgment, is more urgent than ever. Critics wield enormous power in the theater; integrity would seem to require that they confront their own sexual hostilities and ambiguities honestly before passing judgment on a work with a gay theme. This is often not the case. To take just one example—Mel Gussow, the *New York Times'* second-stringer, demolished both *Boy Meets Boy* and *Visions of Kerouac* by Martin Duberman, because he was opposed to their subject-matter as such. His beheading of *Kerouac* was especially vicious. He called it a work of homosexual pologetics and an attempt to get Kerouac out of the closet posthumously—which was not only a silly reduction of a complex theme but, even if true, not a good reason for dismissing the play out of hand. His review did more to close the play in New York than any other. Establishing "gay theater" as a legitimate category, as territory well-marked and well-defended, might make it harder for critics like Gussow to do their destructive work in the future. Let's hope so, anyway.

Of course, it isn't enough for the critics to be accepting; producers, directors and actors must not be allowed to draw back at the threshold of the gay bedroom. If homosexuality is to be treated accurately onstage, affection and desire must be depicted exactly as they are in life. The prudishness, Victorianism and fear of losing a macho image that keeps many professionals from taking on gay material has done much to delay the creation of our theater.

4.*Audiences.* At first glance, it would seem that the audience is the beneficiary, not the instigator, of gay theater. But if we probe more deeply we find that audiences can also, within limits, be the cause of it.

Certainly this theater could not come about until a gay audience began to be aware of its basic identity. In a certain sense, the theater becomes an extension of outside events. In Brecht's words, the auditorium becomes a "public meeting" where the individual can see reenacted the major issues of the day. (Interestingly, some plays turn into public meetings quite literally—audiences were invited to stay on for a discussion at some productions of *Fortune and Men's Eyes, Crimes Against Nature* and *P.S. Your Cat Is Dead*, usually with the playwrights or creators themselves.) The ideological interaction of audience and play, then, is one factor in the production itself.

But what about the composition of the audience, the expectations and assumptions it brings to the theater? These will certainly affect the performance. A warm audience helps the play happen. The better the actor, the more he relies on audience support. (George C. Scott, in a recent interview, spoke about going on a drinking rampage because of an unresponsive audience for *Sly Fox.*) Above all, a gay audience will bring a gay play to life, through its laughter and silence, through the unheard but deeply felt vibrations in the theater. To a certain extent, a gay audience "invents" a gay play.

George Whitmore, discussing his own play, *The Caseworker*, given at Playwrights' Horizons several years ago, has remarked, "Generally, on the nights when there was a good proportion of gay people in the audience, the play came alive. When there wasn't, it was dead." He goes on to discuss the problems of a straight audience: "...a play with gay characters is automatically removed a certain distance from a straight audience and...without a clear point of view, or message to guide them, straights are puzzled with gay theater. If your characters aren't stereotypes, they can't be laughed at. Maybe they can be sympathized with, but that rather limits a playwright's emotional range."(8)

I had much the same experience with my own play, *Love Match* (1977). When a workshop performance was given at The Glines to a gay audience, the play came alive, laughs usually occurred where they were intended, and the anger expressed in certain scenes clearly moved the audience. When the play moved to the 13th Street Theater and a mostly straight audience, much of the comedy went dead, the affection displayed onstage made the audience squirm and only the most outrageous behavior was met with approval. To varying degrees, members of the audience were most comfortable with characters and situations that matched their pre-conceptions about gay life.

Not only does a gay audience help the play "work," but—going back a few steps—the knowledge that such an audience exists helps the playwright in conceiving and writing the work. For example, he knows that the rich slang of gay life can be cranked in without stopping for explanation. A common fund of history and experience can be drawn on. Reserve and inhibitions about nudity, mimed sex, the whole erotic scale, can be dropped. (It isn't surprising that gay plays intended for Broadway and mostly straight audiences, like *Staircase* and *Find Your Way Home*, were much more inhibited than plays intended for a gay audience, like *Lovers, Night Fever, Crimes Against Nature*). To a certain extent, a gay audience liberates a gay playwright, and thereby becomes a factor in the creative process.

A gay audience can also re-invent or modify the classic texts. Reactions to a play about Oscar Wilde, for instance, would be different depending on the audience. For gay people today, it might be taken as parable or hagiography. For straight audiences it might be only melodrama. The expectations of today's audience might also affect the dramatist's treatment of historical mlaterial. Eric Bentley's revisionist play about Wilde, *Lord Alfred's Lover*, stresses the fact that Wilde failed, until near the end of his life, to come to terms with his homosexuality. The emphasis in the Bentley work has shifted from trial and suitable punishment to punishment and *final redemption through self acceptance*, a very modern theme and one close to our hearts. It seems unlikely that a playwright writing about Wilde for audiences of 1900 or even 1950 would have chosen this aspect of his life to stress. The composition of the audience will also determine what plays are revived. It is unlikely that *The Children's Hour* could be given a production outside a university theater today, simply because lesbian suicide is so abhorent ideologically. Thus do audience expectations determine not only how a play will be received, but what plays will be written and produced.

But gay people do not comprise the only audience for gay plays. Straight audiences are becoming more and more interested. This is partly the legacy of modernism—the bourgeois loves being outraged and will not stand for anything less—and partly fatigue with the old themes. Faggots and dykes have taken their place alongside drunks and junkies, blacks and Jews, tramps and madmen, as rich subjects for theater.

To a certain extent, this new popularity is a trap. Broadway producers, ever eager for a buck, are looking for gay plays that will be acceptable to mainstream audiences—that is, be bawdy and exotic enough to titillate but not revolutionary enough to make them feel uncomfortable. These plays will help straights feel virtuous and tolerant, will reinforce their liberalism without disturbing their view of homosexuality as an amusing but unappetizing deviance. It is these plays, superficially appealing but profoundly patronizing and reductionist, that we must watch out for. They will constitute the difference between pseudo-gay theater and the real thing. If we want a theater of our own, we must write, produce and support it rather than the ersatz products of the commercial world. We must define ourselves by what we are rather than allow others to define us by what we are not.

If enough plays are written and produced which embody some of the elements I have outlined above, I believe we will have a body of work that is not only gay but "national" in scope. By this I mean theater that will reflect our lives, depict us honestly and retrieve those parts of our history and experience that are important—

all without being ideologically crude or "correct." If such a national gay theater comes to pass, actors and directors working in it will share its assumptions, without themselves being necessarily gay. Playwrights, encouraged to new boldness by the legitimacy of their subject, will experime with new forms, new styles. Their purpose will not be to edify and instruct (although it may be), but to extend their own sensibilities and those of their audiences. The closeted gay person will use such a theater as part of his education, a source of a freer self-image and greater self-development. The power of the theater to provide models will be enlisted on our side. And, hopefully, critics will find it easier to accept homosexuality as a subject that deserves equal time and space on the stages of the world.

At the same time, using some or all of the criteria above, we can separate plays in gay theater from those that are merely "of interest" to gay people. Certainly *Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* don't qualify, since the gay activities discussed took place long before the start of the action. Other plays with mostly hidden gay agendas are *Zoo Story, Equus, Becket, A View from the Bridge, Bad Habits, Hot L Baltimore.* Likewise, Duberman's *Visions of Kerouac,* which touches on Kerouac's erotic friendship for the Pomeray/Cassady figure but doesn't go beyond it into explicit sexuality. By the same token, works that might have to be unmasked and de-sublimated to lay bare a gay content, do not qualify—plays like *Design for Living, Sweet Bird of Youth, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, The Balcony.*

No doubt trying to fit plays into a category of "gay" and "non-gay" represents a narrowing, a ghettoizing, that some people will find objectionable. It stresses what sets us apart rather than what keeps us together. Community, identity, sexuality, gay audiences—these are matters more of ideology than of humanism, of protest and outrage more than art.

Perhaps such non-aesthetic categorizing will become unnecessary when the oppression of gay people ends. A separationist theater, defensive by nature, will give way to plays that handle gay people easily, naturally, and acceptingly.

Until that day comes, a gay theater will probably be more useful to us than not. Our ghettoizing by the larger culture may be offset or ameliorated by a ghetto theater which we control. Social ends, as well as artistic ones, will be served. As long as we are deprived of certain rights, our theater will be a means of fighting for them, whether the purists and esthetes admit it or not. This is perhaps another way of saying that politics must, for the time being, be part of our theater—in the way we write it, produce it, perform it or evaluate it.

NOTES

1. Ambiance/Almost Free Playscripts 1, *Five short plays from the gay season at the Almost Free Theater,* (Inter-Action Imprint, London 1975). The three Robert Patrick plays were previously published in *Robert Patrick's Cheep Theatricks* (Samuel French, 1972).
2. Eric Bentley, *The Theater of Commitment* (Atheneum, 1967), pp. 56-57.
3. For a full discussion of "The Captive," see Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), pp. 82-91.
4. Donald L. Loeffler, *An Analysis of the Treatment of the Homosexual Character in Dramas Produced in the New York Theater from 1950 to 1968* (Arno Press, 1975).
5. Ibid., p. 179.
6. Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (Avon, 1971), p. 128.
7. "A People's Theater" by W.B. Yeats, in *The Theory of the Modern Stage,* Eric Bentley, Ed. (Penguin, 1968), p. 331.
8. "Toward A Gay Theater," by George Whitmore, in "Arts and Letters," monthly literary supplement to *Gaysweek* (New York), November 7, 1977, p. 9.

THE NEW CENSORSHIP AND REPRESSION

by John Rechy

We may be entering the worst era of threatened human rights since the McCarthy 50's. The portents are everywhere in the country. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, no one concerned with freedom can afford the impact of Anita Bryant and the nurturing of a climate of censorship, repression and fear.

Inevitably this repression affects publishing, and I have had personal experience with such repression in the form of a de facto banning of my latest book, *The Sexual Outlaw.*

A week before its official publication, *The Sexual Outlaw* appeared on several local bestseller lists, and it was *Publisher's Weekly's* leading contender for its national chart. On B. Dalton's national list, which includes both nonfiction and fiction, it reached number 12.

The Sexual Outlaw is a nonfiction documentary which defines public sex as revolutionary. Its locale is the late-night sexhaunts of Los Angeles. It documents three days and nights in that underground by a sometime male hustler. Interspersed throughout are essay-type voice-overs defining the political context of these many sexual encounters. As the book's real content became known, a ban occurred among the media—and not in small "backward" communities but in the major, reputedly liberal cities.

The Berkeley Gazette canceled an interview when its publisher found my book offensive. *The Washington Star* killed as "too controversial" a story based on a two-hour interview. Not a word appeared out of a three-hour interview with *Newsweek.* Their offer to me to write for that magazine's "My Turn" column was made contingent on my writing on a subject not related to my book. *Oui* magazine commissioned, accepted, paid for, and its editors lauded, an interview in which I discussed my book, addressing my remarks carefully to their readership; that interview was turned down by the publisher as "too overt." Radio interviews with even liberal syndicates—Earth News, Planet News— were cut from 40 to five innocuous minutes, held up for months, and then broadcast only in the dead morning hours, supposedly because a recent interview with a gay football player had caused a furor. Other interviews were never aired.

Even some bookstores joined the ban. I heard that a book manager refused to report my book as one of the top sellers it was, choosing not to give it the type of major promotion that bestseller lists provide. Brentano's, a large book chain in the East, canceled newspaper advertising because its president was offended by the book. The same ad was rejected by the *New York Times* because the ad correctly implied that that newspaper had treated my book shoddily. Although the *Times* lauded it as "intelligent, persuasive...heartbreaking," its review was lumped with that of a book about sharks, equating sharks and homosexuals. Literally dozens of magazines and newspapers that requested additional review copies and/or further information about the book, subsequently refused to review it. No television station in New York, and only one radio station there, would carry paid advertisements; the objection was never to the ad copy, always to the book itself. In San Francisco, KRON, the NBC-TV affiliate, refused ads; finally they agreed to air them but only after 11 p.m.

This media attitude was summarized by the general manager of WCBS in New York. "There's nothing wrong with your [ad] copy," he told Grove Press, my publisher. "It's Pretty well done. But I've read the book. We can't promote this sort of thing...If it was Henry Miller, okay, but this [book] is worse than dirty." Translated, "worse than dirty" would seem to indicate that it was not so much its abundant sexual passages as the political context that was objected to.

Word of mouth and my publisher's excellent support has kept readership high, nevertheless, as has wide and uncensored coverage by the gay press, even when negative. But the treatment of my book confirms that among much of the media there is in effect a new kind of "gentlemen's agreement" concerning controversial subjects, especially sexual politics, whether gay or straight, male or female.

The era of "banned in Boston" and the time when the *New York Times* refused ads for Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* is not as remote as we want to think: well into the 70's a new and dangerous reaction has been shaping. Out of that miasma of repression Anita Bryant has emerged. Although her attacks are now aimed overtly at homosexuals in teaching jobs—and increasingly at liberal women—by implication she is attacking an open education. It is with sex that general repression starts. What happens on the sexual front provides a barometer for general repression.

If the Pennsylvania Senate can pass, as it has, a bill making in a crime punishable by up to 90 days in jail for a state official knowingly to hire homosexuals in certain professions, including nursing, then it is easier for women or blacks or others to be barred from specified jobs. If Arkansas and Idaho are able to reinstate, as they have, laws against private consensual behavior among adults, and if the Supreme Court lets stand, as it has, a Virginia court's ruling that a state has the right to interfere in private adult homosexuals' acts, then it is much easier for police to enter one's home on any pretext.

Once acts are regulated, ideas may be censored.

Can one say that the current of repression merely personifed by Anita Bryant did not in part encourage a judge to say that a young woman in what he considered provocative attire got what she deserved when she was raped? Did Bryant not contribute to the California Supreme Court justice's claim that women who hitchhike are inviting sexual assault? Indeed, Bryant would agree.

Repression occurs first among the most vulnerable of the so-called "undesirables"—and we hear that term increasingly now. The definition fans out quickly. From queers to niggers, to broads, kikes, spiks.

For repression to thrive, the climate has to be right, and this climate is created by first evoking sexual fear, a suspicion that unconventional behavior is "threatening." In Los Angeles we are daily seeing examples of the thickening repression. The *Los Angeles Times* recently banned its advertising columns to "pornographic films.' How defined? And doesn't just the *a priori* censorship threaten with economic blackout the producers of serious films dealing with sex? Does that ban include *Last Tango in Paris?* Already, Russ Meyer, an exploitive but occasionally imaginative director enjoying a cult-following among certain film students, has seen his films barred from *Times* advertising. Is Bertolucci next? Fellini? Altman? If films are vulnerable, so are books. Will the *Times'* book section be similarly screened?

The vulnerable go first. Harry Reems is prosecuted for playing in "Deep Throat." Will Marlon Brando in "Last Tango in Paris"? Larry Flynt is arrested for selling *Hustler.* Will the editor of *The Nation* be similarly hounded for publishing a political article? Adult bookstores are legislated against. Are the general bookstores next?

The slide from sexual repression to political repression is easy. Not only has the *L.A. Times* barred advertisements of films it finds offensive, it has created its own "family guide." Frowning on sexual content, the guide also interjects a clear and dangerous political note in its evaluations. Recently this section of the *L.A. Times* criticized three films for their "disrespect of police" or "the law." Now this country sprang into independence when patriots challenged unjust laws, and the Civil War attempted to correct inhuman but legalized injustices. How would the *L.A. Times* rate a film on the Boston Tea Party? At a time when Los Angeles police are under increasing scrutiny for the shredding of court evidence possibly implicating them in beatings and for the mounting killings involving them—including the shooting six times of a naked man—would a film that explores this problem be criticized by the *Times?* Is criticism of the police, per se, negative? What about the film "Z"? or "The Battle of Algiers"? Or "State of Siege"? All are "Disrespectful" of a police state. Under this rating how will "All the President's Men" fare? Disrespectful of authority?

That newspaper continues, however, to advertise guns and rifles, and although there are no ready statistics, it seems relatively safe to state that more people have been killed by guns than by pornographic films or books.

California, and particularly Los Angeles, have become a symbolic battlefield in the war of repression. In Hollywood, a campaign euphemistically designated as one to "Revitalize Hollywood" was launched by a series of *L.A. Times* articles. Badly written, laughably inaccurate, reckless in their indictments, the articles depicted Hollywood as a casbah of second-to-second crime; men and women exposing genitals at horrified tourists gaping out of buses; even a purported menage-a-trois witnessed under his marquee at high noon by a theatre manager, a scene which so upset the poor thing he vomited, or so the reporters claimed breathlessly, and he had to go home sick, blotting from his mind, one assumes, the many images of violence that had flashed on his movie screen throughout the years.

Now who doesn't want a clean Hollywood? Clean buildings. More palm trees. Shinier gold stars. And who doesn't want a safe Hollywood? Or for that matter a clean and safe Encino. Or—but you don't hear about this too often—a clean and safe Watts. Oh, yes, preserve old buildings. Oh, yes, protect us from violence—all of us, including the ethnic and sexual minorities. Revitalize Hollywood, but not with the blood of those whe do not agree with, whether because of their actions or because of what they say or because of what they write or because of what they film or because of what they publish. Typically, behind this campaign for immediate moral "purity" in Hollywood lurks pure greed to drive away the old and the ethnic who keep rents down and thereby to convert Hollywood into another expensive graveyard of plastic tombstone malls.

Now I know and love Hollywood and have experienced many of its vicissitudes, I have written about it in most of my books, *City of Night, Numbers, This Day's Death. The Sexual Outlaw* is set largely in Hollywood. The reality is that Hollywood is what it has been for the last 20 years—a free ethnic and sexual mixture of good and bad. Some terrific bookstores there, and great shops full of old movie-star glamor photographs. One of the great restaurants, Musso-Frank's, thrives nightly. The classic tacky store of all time, Frederick's of Hollywood, daily turns tastelessness into a gorgeous art form renowned the world over. Two of the great theaters—with alcoves and statues and hidden lights, the Egyptian and the Pantages, thrive, long lines of fans waiting patiently to enter. Yes, it's a free mixture of unorthodox souls—some are good and some are bad; and the good must be protected from the violent but not by mistaking morality for crime.

"He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; ...if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself." An American radical, Thomas Paine, said that. And Pastor Martin Niemoeller, who was imprisoned for speaking out against Hitler and who survived a concentration camp where 76,000 Jews, including 15,000 children, were slaughtered, described how it happened:

"...the Nazis...came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist, then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak for me."

What Pastor Niemoeller omitted is that first they came for the homosexuals and other "undesirables." But before that, they created a climate in which the escalating persecutions would be possible, indeed viewed as imperative—the rounding up of the "undesirables"—while steadily widening the devouring definition of that word.

This is a dangerous time, and those of you, who by reading this indicate your respect for books, and by extension your respect for the freedom to read them, and by further extension for the many other freedoms that flow from that right, have cause to be concerned. We do not need to ban movies or burn books in order to destroy them.

All we really need, in a carefully created climate of repression, is to render them invisible.

POEMS FOR F

BY EDOUARD RODITI

Originally written between 1931 and 1933, the twenty-two *Poems for F.* were first published privately in Paris, France, by Editions du Sagittaire in 1934, without any distribution in England or America. In 1949, they were reprinted in my *Poems 1928-1948*, published in New York by New Directions. Both editions have long been out of print.

When I was writing *Poems for F.*, I was twenty-one, twenty-two and twenty-three. I had no available models of contemporary homosexual love-poetry that I knew of, except a few poems by Stephen Spender and some of those that Auden was then writing, so it seems, about the loves of Christopher Isherwood, as the latter has now revealed in his autobiographical *Christopher and His Kind*. I had associated somewhat superficially with Spender at Oxford in 1928, then later again with him, Isherwood and Auden in Berlin. I even translated some of Spender's poems into French and published them in *Cahiers du Sud*, then also Auden's "When this loved one", about Isherwood's German friend, into French and published it in Brussels in *Le Journal des Poétes*.

Poems for F. now represent my first attempt, under the influence of T.S. Eliot as critic and perhaps of Spender as model, to break away from the apocalyptic or surrealist manner of the earlier poetry of the kind that I had already published in *transition* when I was eighteen. I now wished to express emotions, thoughts and experiences of a kind that might seem less alien to readers and, to me, closer to my own daily life. At the same time, under the influence of socio-economic developments and political events that I was witnessing mainly in England and Germany, I also wrote some poems of a more socio-political nature. Eliot then encouraged me in this new vein by publishing a small selection of both kinds, love-poems and socio-political poems, in *The Criterion*. Soon after this, I also began writing, under the impact of the mounting antisemitism that I experienced in Germany, the first of the numerous poems on Jewish themes which I continued to write for many years.

In the Spring 1975 issue of *Gay Sunshine*, Ian Young published an extensive study of "The poetry of male love." He refers there to "the very few gay English poets who refused to 'equivocate or conceal'" between 1930 and 1950, a period in which, he claims, "it was the novelists rather than the poets who pioneered in their treatment of homosexual themes." After naming Ralph Chubb and Frank Oliver Call as rare "pioneers" in this area of poetry, Ian Young neglects to mention Auden, Spender or me, though he then goes on to mention Allen Ginsberg, John Wieners and Paul Goodman.

His omission of Auden, Spender and me may well be due to the fact that the poems on homosexual themes that we wrote between 1930 and 1940 generally refrain from identifying the sex of the loved one, or indeed of the lover. But this very peculiarity of our love-poetry of those years should distinguish it clearly from the love-poetry of most heterosexual poets, who rarely leave the reader in doubt about the sex of their Celia, Clelia, Delia, Dark Rosaleen or Lalage. Had we been more explicit in those years of what Rabelais might still have called "la nuit gothique", we would moreover have had little chance of publication. As it is, I was able to publish only a few of my *Poems for F.* in periodicals and then had to print the whole series privately and at my own expense.

I cannot vouch now for the reasons that may have led Auden or Spender to maintain, in their poems about homosexual love, a deliberate ambiguity concerning the sex of the loved one. I can only explain here why I personally, in my *Poems for F.*, preferred to leave the sex of the loved one, as far as possible, in doubt.

In those years, I was still writing and publishing some poetry in French and reading a great deal of German poetry too. French and German are languages in which articles, nouns and adjectives have clearly distinguished genders, masculine or feminine or, in German, neutral too. I was fascinated by the greater ambiguity of English, which allows one to write "unisex" love-poetry so as to leave it to the reader to imagine according to his or her own tastes or inclinations, the sex of the poet's loved one or indeed of the poet. This alone offers the poet a wider scope for emotional communication: his loved one can more easily be identified as the loved one of any one of his readers who, in turn, can identify themselves more readily with the poet. In French or German, only those readers who share the poet's sexual orientation can identify to this extent with the poet himself, and nearly all French or German love-poetry remains very unequivocally heterosexual. Conversely, a male heterosexual reader may sometimes be able to identify himself with a French Lesbian poetess such as Louise Labbé or Renée Vivien, but it would be difficult for heterosexual women-readers to identify with Paul Verlaine while reading some of his homosexual love-poems.

Poems for F. were thus written not only as love-poems but also as an experiment in ambiguity, in an era when William Empson's scholarly analysis of the different types of ambiguity was a great critical novelty.

I

To love is not only to touch the loved hands
lips limbs warm loins or the loved one's breast
but to enter and to enter where the loved one stands
to stand with loved feet for loved feet are best

to live and to move within the loved skin
to love the loved one till one loves oneself
to eat the loved one to be the loved one in
the depths of one's own loved self

but it's all too difficult and never can be done
because time and place have fixed each face
and the earth cannot be stars moon or sun
and I cannot live in the loved one's place.

II

Because to love cannot be more
than touching hands, no more than touch,
because the lover never stands
where loved one stands, love being such

that time and space are barriers
beyond which no beyond,
lover, say No to love and stay
unloved, unloving, free from love's wound.

Learn this sad No, No not so sad
as sadness and despair
that clutch you, lover, after mad
belief that you stood there

where loved one stood, stood with loved feet,
in that moment of hope and of swift heart-beat,
between illusion and disillusion,
in the torn senses' fierce confusion.

Therefore say No to love and say:
I have cast time and place away.

III

Because this I is only I
to me but not to you;
because each I is only I
to one but not to two;

each face, My face set in its place:
each mind, My mind which tries to find
Eureka, locked, with Me as key—
why say this I why to say We?

For We is you and I and he
and all the rest beyond these three;
and I is only I and one
small planet moving round the sun.

The systems were we all revolve
around the central sun of love,
are I and I, I loving Me
till I and I and I make We.

Except to F., a married portrait-painter, now deceased, who abandoned his wife and children to live with me for over a year, I have never felt much inclined to express my love in the form of poems. Hence the paucity of poetry on homosexual themes in my later published volumes of poetry, although symbols of homosexual love may occasionally abound in the imagery of my more surrealist poems, especially in *The fall of man* and in *Four allegories of love*, both published by Black Sparrow Press in 1974 in my *Emperor of Midnight*.

Nor is this reticence due to shame or mere prudence. Most of my lovers have not been English-speaking, so that love-poetry has rarely tempted me as a means of communication with them. Unfortunately, I have not felt the urge to write much poetry in French and, even more unfortunately, I remain quite incapable of writing any poetry, let alone convincing love-poetry, in German, modern Greek or Arabic.

—*Edouard Roditi*

See the interview with Edouard Roditi in the new anthology *Gay Sunshine Interviews* Vol. 1 (review elsewhere in this issue). Poetry by Roditi is included in *Orgasms of Light: The Gay Sunshine Anthology* (1977).

IV

Behind the movements of your lips,
the twitching face,
I see
the even-breathing beast of Space.

Behind the shifting eye,
the flickering lid,
the slow crawl of Time
lies hid.

Beneath your body's surfaces,
within the skin,
all Matter lives.

V

When hard words prove the loved unloving
all love's tall edifice must fall;
there is a feeling of inmost bowels
torn from their roots up choking throats.

After first hate there is no forgetting
that this one, hated, once was loved:
the old flame returns and burns, returning
secret and scarcely understood.

There is no forgetting that some gestures,
a nerve's twitching, bitten lip or finger's curve,
held a new meaning, now fading and unfounded,
lingering while the old one never returns.

VI

All that you touch is turned to good
to a world that knows no sin, no sorrow:
joy like sunlight flows in your blood
burning the sad flesh your finger-tips touch.

Out of strange systems you have swerved
into my dark world, bringing me news
of sunlight on rippling waves like muscles,
of joy like a sun-tan spread over your body.

Into your bright world you have snatched
me from winter-evenings of reading books
that describe your life. Now at last I learn
all that I felt and never found.

VIII

Your face outspread like a plain
where the world's storms cast shadows, features
ravaged by warring forces of matter,
hands whose shape changes daily, moulded
by what they mould, all these like a mirror

where I can see myself traveling along
my path from birth to death, say, must these fade
ere they be made mine, barriers broken
between me and you, interchangeable names?

Must each glistening eye that sees this glistening
world grow dim, in a dim world, before
I have yet seen it all as you
see it from the windows behind which you sit?

When you gaze across the plain from your different
angle, are the trees that you see of the same
green as these I see, does the wind stir their leaves
for you with the same gentle gesture and note?

And the world's shifting pattern, with its ever-changing
meaning, does this move as swiftly for you,
like bright agile animals leaping out of
dark into light, then vanishing before
vigilant eyes can note their shape and color?

VIII

My arms are never strong enough to force
you within the circle of my self;
my words, once they have strayed beyond
my lips, change ere they reach your ears.

Love, is there no place where we can meet
both in the same place and at the same time?
Must we ever wander with such vast
distances between our seeking selves?

You live in your own individual time,
walled-in by timelessness: two stars
ever seeking to meet, ever straying
further from each other in an endless sky.

IX

In sun-gilded fields of your body I reap
such a harvest of love that the hoarding barns
of memory must burst. No longer need I
seek a sign elsewhere, seek a clue that unravels
the riddle of living and living alone.

You are my birth and my death where I find
cause and effect, source and sea
for the troubled stream of thoughts that fade
like mist in blue skies when we meet
and kiss and seal our lives with this kiss.

Need I live? No other love can ever
give me new life, nor our sleeping together
beget more worlds than this our first
kiss that bravely breasts the crested wave
of time with a Yes that no years can drown or deny.

X

You are the hero, ever striving
to vanquish all that is base in yourself;
refusing to smoke, to rise late
and waste spring mornings in a wintry bed.

Their blandishments and laughter
rouse you to fine anger till you tear
me from their midst, who was content
with their wit and lechery.

Now, vanquished perhaps in your own
strife with yourself, you have reclaimed
vast lands in me from a slavery
I never felt until you came.

XI

Not victim of the times but of your own
contemporaries, fellow-men who never saw
the light for which you feverishly fought
in their surrounding gloom that slowly encroached
on your jealously guarded peak of ideals;

Not victim of these men but of yourself
who never saw their human light that hid
beneath the bushel of habit and tradition
imprisoned, never dying, still burning for
the liberator that you might have been;

Not victim of yourself but of some fate
that spitefully blinds the prophet, ambushes
paladins, stifles warnings, soils the soul and with
one kiss transmutes brave young flesh to hideous
old impotent dry bones, betrays us all to death.

XII

Sunlike you rise from a sea of sheets
raising desires like mists from my body,
too distant and too bright to feel
my dark unrest and deathly cold.

Your love, like tongues of fire, leaps
about me, leaving a taste
of ash in your kisses and pain
in my noontide joy.

Though you may leave me to my night
of memories more scorched and scarred
than the widowed West, I must return
to this fire that refines.

XIII

You are my A and my Zed,
being both wound and balm,
giving me life, leave me dead,
are my hope and my harm.

Never escaping the thought of you,
I no longer know where to turn;
you have parched me with this thirst for you,
are the one spring that can cool its burn.

XIV

I am so jealous of those years
before we met, and other loves
that I now revive when you hear
me say the words they once spoke to you.

For you shall doubt, in after-years,
when other lovers speak these words,
who will be jealous that we met
though now you may not know them yet.

XV

Kisses, more countless and more bright
than stars, yet light my nights; you lie
beside me still, more close, more real,
though you are gone and I left lone.

You cannot cheat me, dear, nor death:
entombed within my heart, await
what trumpet-calls to liberate
you from my love, me from your loss?

XVI

Godlike I have shaped your features out of earth,
landscape, trees, water, or out of my own
flesh, dreaming Adam's. The fragmentary memory
of our meetings and common contexts of time and place
are your features and limbs, till there is much
of the room where we met, with its music and lights,
in your eyes, a sunset lurking in your hair
and hills and valleys hidden in the folds of your smooth
body beneath whose skin so many trees and plants
yet lie like ferns in coal. Who can tell? This magic
image may survive you or, like your photograph,
be torn, in yours tead, when you no longer love me.

XVII

Whether in exile my home-sick eyes
turn inward towards remembered scapes,
or, in despair, compare, or recognize,
in wild-foreign features your friendly shapes,

You are my fatherland: familiar hills,
mimicked by clouds in every sky,
your shoulders that shut my world where, folded
in your arms and rounded by their streams, I lie.

XVIII

Seeing you disappear round a corner
is no new pain, is seeing another
drown while we were swimming together
or a third leave with a new lover.

Knowing that I must have been a new lover
and that an end must come to our love
makes my love an argument against
Time whose stroke of judgement must cut short

all quibbling of love's laws and precedents.
While we are yet walking here together
between the street-corner where I first
met you and that other where we part,

while our brief love yet lasts, let us
forget all other streets and other lovers,
each one forgetting that he has been another
lover in another love and in another street.

XIX

Autumn daily makes this land more foreign.
The wind sighs its psalms of exile among
the rushes by the water, and the last birds swerve
over the horizon towards the warmer south.

Shivering in this mimicry of death,
daily more truthful as the world grows colder,
stiller, I know no exile more complete
than this in time and climate, winter-season

and zones of the dead. The life within me
stumbles painfully with numbed feet on its arduous
path of thought, till I almost wish
I were more dead, more suited to this season.

XX

Now that I know that I can no longer
love another as I loved
you, nor forget you, nor give
to others all I gave to you,

I sometimes wonder whether it is yet
worth living if only to remember
you, never able to repeat nor forget
words I once spoke or you spoke to me.

Which words can never mean the same
on strangers' lips, nor on mine if I say
them to new lovers and can but serve
to rouse my sleeping pain.

I no longer know you. You have been
away too often and so long
that I have learned to seek love within
myself, more frequent and unchanging.

XXI

The train of living cleaves the years
that break and fade on either side,
and leave the traveler ever
anxious to keep some fleeting joy.

You whom I guessed looming ahead
like hills that close horizons, passed
so swiftly! How can I forget
our meeting that was parting too?

Time, tantalizing in its flight,
dangled your mouth so close to mine
like fruit upon a passing tree
just long enough to make me thirst.

We live so fast that all our joys
swerve past us, out of reach;
we die so slowly that our past
is pain that we cannot forget.

XXII

Writing letters in spring-time and expecting
answers in autumn, with half the year,
half the world to cross, all days and ways
to unravel, lest we meet.

Forgetting my questions before your answers
reach me from where you sit and wonder
what my words now mean, that miles and whiles
leave meaningless, lest they hurt.

All words we write ever lose their meaning.
So many walls must steal the echoes
of my reproaches! Whose speech can reach
those who have fled, lest they love?

Distance and days are stronger than death
and never yield their prisoners.
All time and place are foes. Who knows?
We may meet, both strangers.

MICHAEL

"it's all done with mirrors," i told him,
and he laughed.
he smiles a lot when i act crazy enough.
i threaten him with dire absurdities
and he retreats in giggles.

we have become a pattern.
Tuesday nights we go to a film in Westwood
(he has no car, so i drive),
and afterwards we look through a bookstore
until it closes.
when it does, we go to the health food store
(i've had no dinner)
and bemoan the fates of our figures
to the C-major chords of frozen yogurt.
we walk slowly down to the car
against the friction of a cold sea breeze
in silence.
we drive down Wilshire to Santa Monica,
discussing the film,
inserting punctuations about the hustlers.
when we pull into his driveway
i feel awkward momentarily,
but we end the evening always
on the light air of some meaningless humor.

i turn the radio on
to fill the car on the way home.

—Mark Moody

GAY ACADEMIC

The Gay Academic. Edited by Louie Crew. Etc. Publications, P.O. Drawer 1627 A, Palm Springs, CA 92262. Hardcover. $15.

Reviewed by Robert K. Martin

What is a gay academic? In the definition adopted by this volume, a gay academic is one who is "self-affirming", for whom his or her sexual orientation is a significant factor in the determination of the larger identity. The introduction to these essays, by Louie Crew, goes so far as to propose that "one is gay or nongay when drinking coffee or grading examinations." Insofar as no part of one's self is ever totally lost, no matter what activity one is engaged in, that statement is true, but trivial. But the statement seems also to suggest that one will actually drink one's coffee or grade one's examinations in a gay manner. What that manner is, I have no idea—although I am sure Anita Bryant would have several suggestions.

The problem posed by this anthology is precisely the relevance of one's gayness to one's other activities, particularly one's function as an academic. It is not a question which is easily resolved. But it is one on which I had hoped to be enlightened—and was disappointed. I admit I was skeptical—is a gay engineer any different from a straight engineer *as an engineer*? I asked myself. There are no essays in the volume by engineers—or chemists or botanists, for that matter. The only contribution in the area of science (by a zoologist) does not really address the questions treated by his own discipline, but the politics of scientific research and can only ask for "research methodology and goals as well as teaching techniques consistent with a gay analysis".

That doesn't really get us very far. What, after all, is a "gay analysis"? In the interpretation of the zoologist, Stephen Risch, it is, by his own concession, almost identical with what he terms a "radical political analysis". The end for Risch is "human liberation", and this requires rethinking scientific goals and methodology. But his position has been taken many times before by others, most of whom are not gay, and it is not at all clear from his essay what a "gay analysis" can add to a "radical analysis". All he really asks, I suspect, is that gays use the recognition of their social position of oppression as a means toward joining in the larger struggle against capitalism.

As one might suspect, the bulk of the book is devoted to literary criticism. This may be due in part to the fact that the editor is himself a professor of English. But it is also due to the fact that literary criticism has been the academic discipline most influenced by gay liberation. This influence comes, I think, from two sources, in the two functions of literature: literature records life, and so literary texts can act as a mirror of homosexuality, whether the author's or merely a character's; and literature is the product of the mind's search for forms in which to play out its own mysteries and desires, and so the text becomes a sexual playground, housing both the artist and the reader. Literary criticism, as popularly conceived, is concerned almost exclusively with the first of these functions, with literature's role as a record of life. Proper literary criticism, although it cannot lose sight of the "object" (of narrative or representational literature, at least), is essentially concerned with the second function, with the dynamic interplay between writer, text, and reader.

Several of the essays in this volume illustrate "popular" literary criticism, the kind which informs such naive (and pernicious) but standard examination questions as "Discuss the author's attitude toward..." or "Discuss the author's portrayal of..." It is inevitable that we should have a series of dissertations on "Attitudes toward Homosexuality in the Later Works of..." or "The Portrayal of the Homosexual in the Drama from...to..." One such essay here discusses Mailer, Merrick, and Vidal in "the Crucial Decade" (i.e., 1945-1955). Another compares Isherwood, Ackerley, and Nicolson, in their portraits of their parents. This essay begins, in its conclusion, to touch on some important issues, by suggesting that the stories are of "a quest not only for parents and lovers, but for the stability of the artist acting freely and deliberately within the homosexual self". But the relationship of the search for parents to the selfhood of the homosexual artist is never explored, even though that would seem to be the crux of such an article. (Fortunately the matter is treated with considerable perception in another essay, by Michael Lynch.)

The worst example of pseudo-criticism is Karla Jay's piece, "Male Homosexuality and Lesbianism in the Works of Proust and Gide". It reads like a not very good undergraduate term paper. Jay has apparently not the slightest understanding of any of the works she discusses, and proceeds to discuss the characters of the novels without any indication of the manner in which they are presented. She seems to think that a homosexual novelist should only present "positive" gay characters, and that criticism amounts to noting all the references to a given subject. She comments at the beginning of her essay that "All the major characters in the *Recherche* except Swann, and possibly the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes are homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual." Apparently she does not consider Marcel's mother, or grandmother, a major character, although the grandmother is, as Howard Moss has noted, "the moral centre of his social vision". Later on she writes, noting that there are no lesbians in Gide "Perhaps Gide is either against lesbianism or is one of those people under the delusion that *homo* comes from the latin 'man', when in reality it comes from the Greek meaning 'same'." It's nice that she straightened out his classical knowledge for him; it's too bad it never occurred to her that one is not necessarily 'against' every subject one does not happen to depict.

Fortunately there are several very important pieces of literary criticism included. There is Michael Lynch's essay on Richard Howard and Jacob Stockinger's essay on Homotextuality. The two come from quite different traditions: Lynch draws with ease upon literary history, new-critical exegesis, and political commitment in the best sort of American literary criticism, wise, learned, relaxed, while Stockinger works within Continental models, proposing structures, analysing methods, at his best when constructing a metacriticism. If we cannot know what a "gay academic" is, Stockinger and Lynch at least show us what a gay literary critic can be.

Michael Lynch is one of the best young critics now writing about poetry, as well as one of the most articulate and committed. His essay on Howard is a model of what literary criticism can do. Lynch addresses the question, through Howard's work, of what it means to be a gay poet, and suggests this double answer: "it is to be historical, recognizing one's place in a tradition of gay poetry, and it is to be non-historical, here in the everlasting and mysterious present of sexuality and speech". He is an excellent guide to Howard's multiple paternities, showing Howard's development through and finally away from Auden, and he accurately notes the erotic bases of Howard's (and all) art. Lynch's essay is an important one, both for what it says about Richard Howard's work, and for what it implies about the nature of an informed gay criticism.

If one needs a single reason to purchase this anthology, let it be Jacob Stockinger's "Homotextuality: A Proposal", one of the most significant pieces of criticism I have read in several years. Stockinger is informed, intelligent, and thoughtful. He knows his texts and he knows his critical theory. He masters the best of the newest critics, the structuralists, the semioticians, and all the manifestations of the formalists (European cousins to the New Critics), and he recognizes that one cannot fail to take their claims into account in any new theory of criticism. At the same time he is aware of the dangers that formalism may pose for politically committed "minority" criticism. Stockinger's approach is important, since it seeks the sexuality through the textuality, since it recognizes the intellectual inadequacy of a criticism which concerns itself only with what is portrayed, without recognizing that *what* is portrayed cannot be distinguished from *how* it is portrayed. Meaning is contained in language, not separate from it.

Stockinger then proceeds to make several important suggestions which merit further investigation. He proposes that certain textual structures may be characteristic of homosexual literature (hence homotextuality), namely what he terms "transformational identity", the play between self and other which he finds represented in the mirrors which he identifies in such authors as Genet, Sartre, Cocteau, Gide, Proust, Wilde, and others; what he terms "homotextual space" and identifies as "the closed and withdrawn place that is transformed from stigmatizing into redeeming space" or "travel itself, an external itinerary that corresponds to an internal journey of self-discovery"; and intertextuality, the relationships between texts and the ways in which allusion can function as part of an ongoing historical relationship between the homotexts of the present and those of the past (as in many of Richard Howard's poems, discussed above). Stockinger rightly aruges for a re-reading of the homotext in a way that may rescue significance from the fabrication of insignificance by unseeing and unreading critics. Stockinger's essay, the best thing yet published on gay criticism, makes one look forward immensely to his forthcoming work, including his participation in the major anthology of French criticism edited by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks forthcoming from Cornell and in the Gay Sunshine anthology of gay literary criticism, scheduled for 1979 publication.

The brilliance of Stockinger's analysis makes one regret that there are so few other essays of that calibre. There is nothing at all in the field of aesthetics or art history (although interesting essays have been published, for instance, on Pater and Santayana) and nothing really in linguistics, an extremely important field, since so much of whatever gay "community" there is clearly derives from a shared use of language. (There is a significant essay by Julia Stanley included under the heading of linguistics, but that is only incidentally its subject.) There is nothing on medicine, very little on history (a broad overview of "gay genocide from Leviticus to Hitler" which contains some interesting new material, and a few footnotes to Burton), nothing on anthropology. The essays in other fields such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology, are humdrum.

An extraordinary amount of space in this book is devoted to the discussion of Anglican theology, a prejudice that I find unacceptable. The editor is active in Integrity, the group of gay Episcopalians in the US, and so has undoubtedly drawn upon his contacts there for the four essays included. Only one of them seems to me interesting—the piece by Ellen Barrett, recently ordained as an Episcopal priest. Her essay reflects her uncertainty about her position in what remains an essentially male movement—gays in the church. As she puts it, "There is still doubt in my mind as to whether some of us who are members of the Body of Christ can remain much longer as members of the institutional Church. I mean to stay as long as I can, but unless my gay brothers are an actively helpful leaven in the ecclesiastical lump, women, to survive as Christians at all, will have to find a less claustrophobic environment." Although the Episcopal Church has been a traditionally "gay church", its gays have generally been closeted men, and many of them are among the most vocal opponents of the ordination of women. In fact it is the two issues—the ordination of gays and the ordination of women—which have brought about the present schism in the church, with some Anglo-Catholic "gay" parishes leaving, rather than accept women as priests. I wonder how long Ellen Barrett can survive as a gay woman priest.

One would have liked to have seen some representation of other religious perspectives. And one would particularly have liked to see at least one essay calling into question the role of the Christian church in the oppression of gays. Is there no academic willing to demonstrate the ways in which the very notion of the church and its *patristic* authority must inevitably work against gay men, as against all women? Is no one willing to investigate the role of a possibly homosexual cult in the development of such Christian themes as the beautiful androgynous Christ and the relationship between Christ and his beloved disciple, John? In the selection of texts in this area it seems that the editor let his personal religious views stand in the way of the presentation of a balanced perspective.

Women are also underrepresented in this anthology, although it is difficult to know to what extent this reflects the material available and to what extent it represents an unconscious bias. Dolores Noll has already suggested some of the biases present (in her review for the NGTF)—in addition to neglect, they amount to an unspoken assumption that what gay men think is what gay people think, even if "person" or "people" is carefully used. (Even Michael Lynch, I think, falls into this trap, when he speaks of Richard Howard's being of interest or importance "to gay people"—he really means "gay men", even though he conscientiously changes the noun.) Julia Stanley deals with these problems in her essay on "Lesbian Separatism". It is the most reasoned and sensitive treatment of the subject I have seen. Stanley aruges the "political necessity" for lesbian separatism, although it is clear that she hopes that gay men understand the reasons for that separatism, as "an act necessary for our survival". She bases her argument on two kinds of evidence—the linguistic assumptions which reflect social assumptions (i.e., human and male are identical, while female is a subordinate clause) and personal experiences at the hands of gay men which have made her feel that gay men too often remain men, with all the political implications attendant upon that.

I have read Stanley's article with a certain sadness, since I believe that gay men need to be allied with gay women (and with straight women, for that matter). But I recognize that the decision must be made by lesbians themselves, and it may be that their struggle "toward self-confidence, self-assertion, independence and the need to express...anger outwardly" (Stanley's terms) may best be accomplished separately from our need to move toward greater tenderness, compassion, and the relinquishing of biologically based political power. Stanley argues that we all (gay men and lesbians) need to develop "wholeness", but that out paths toward that must be different. I hope that we can manage to be both separate, as we deal with our past, and together, as we deal with our future, and I hope that lesbian activists will continue to join with gay male activists in areas of common concern (as Stanley herself does, by the way, both by appearing here, and by her role in the Gay Caucus of the MLA). But I confess that reading Stanley's essay, and reading the majority of (male-written) essays in this collection led me to wonder if we can really speak of any community that we share. Perhaps we do need to take different roads and can only hope that in the end, like Proust's, they will have led the same place.

If we recognize that gay men have too often simply assumed that gay women share their ideas and goals, is it also possible that gay men, in the enthusiasm of their newfound commitment to liberation, have forgotten that the goal of any liberation was to be an increase in personal freedom? This is the question raised, and very persuasively, I think, by Edgar Friedenberg on his essay "Gaiety and the Laity: Avoiding the Excesses of Professionalism". Friedenberg's warning is that we are in danger of becoming professional gays, imposing our own definitions and our own needs on others. The point is acute for Friedenberg, who has been severely attacked for his personal "chastity", by those who find this the last sexual taboo. He maintains that only the individual can judge for him- or herself the extent to which any group or tribal identity is important in any larger self-definition. He warns of the inauthenticity that must follow upon devotion to "a common national or tribal purpose that cannot coincide exactly with our own". Friedenberg's essay will certainly not be a popular one. It is not fashionable nowadays to wonder about the authenticity of group identity (as long as the group is not an already established nation or a dominant racial or ethnic or sexual group). So Friendenberg's position will be dismissed as a combination of political reaction and naive libertarianism. However, the significance of the points he raises cannot be wished away so easily, just because they are unpopular. Friendenberg dares to praise affection more than sex; he dares to suggest that victory may bring with it defeat, if in order to win we have become that which we have fought against. He maintains that to devote oneself fully to a *political* battle against sexual oppression may eventually make one a creature of one's oppression, a product of a definition deriving not from self but from other. If gay liberation does not bring freedom, but new tyrannies, it hardly seems worth having.

Louie Crew has brought together an interesting and valuable collection of materials, one that by its diversity

reflects the present divided state of the gay academic community. We do not agree on the goals to be sought or the means to use toward them. We do not share a political philosophy. We do not know what we are doing together. And yet here we are, recognizing each other as we pass in the halls. Do we have anything to say to one another?

At the moment, I think we must begin by being separate. The informed person will always want to learn from what is being done in other disciplines. But one must make one's own contribution as oneself. The danger in the potpourri approach is that all the individual odours may get lost in the general impression, however pleasant that may be. I want to know what is being written in history, or French literature, or art, but I want the best. And only people who have committed themselves to work within a discipline (without of course losing any other sense of political or philosophical engagement they may have) can really make that discrimination. Otherwise, with the best of intentions, one simply gets a lot of second-rate material which does no one any good. If gay academics are to be credible, they must be academics in the best sense as well as gay. If we are to claim Socrates as one of us, as this anthology does, we must be worthy of him. I am grateful to Louie Crew for the wheat scattered throughout the chaff. Our task now is to begin the new harvest, each in his or her own field.

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FARINELLA

Thieves to Flesh, Poems by Salvatore Farinella. Manifest Destiny (Box 57, Dorchester Center Station, Dorchester, Massachusetts 02124), 34 pp., paper, $2.50.

Reviewed by Rudy Kikel

The ecstasies and agonies of Sal Farinella's poetic *personae* seem to come at times out of paintings by Francis Bacon—or to remind one of figures imprisoned within them. All the world of this poetry is a stage, or all the best poetry in this world seems to take place *on* a stage, a stage on which "privates" are "public property" and on which a "sensual stranger" may be asked to "strangle desperation" in someone's eyes. As he took us, in his previous book (*The Orange Telephone*, Good Gay Poets, 1975), through San Francisco's Ritch Street Baths, where "under a faceted motorized moon/ spitting diamonds in your eyes ... you on the floor are the show," so, in *Thieves to Flesh*, his latest book, with its strikingly appropriate cover design by the poet's brother Joseph, Farinella exposes himself and us, in "deep night," to a San Juan bar, where go go boys and "fuck flicks" rivet all attention and wherein a nude dancer, for the poet and for the exquisite moment, seems actually to *become* Puerto Rico:

volcanic juices squiggle underground;
streams follow the hills and valleys
so lush in muscle.

The favored locations for Farinella's claustrophobic, out-of-the-closet dramas are furtive gay male *playgrounds* everywhere (he dreams of himself pursuing and being pursued on Boston's Esplanade, Lands End in San Francisco, and the parks of Los Angeles); his favorite lumination, his *inspirational* luminosity, is electric—usually orange or red lights. In what is still, probably, his most profoundly affecting poem ("Isolate and Understanding," from *The Orange Telephone*), the poet presents himself to us as a searchlight "in the labyrinth/ belly to belly lighting up brief moments/ of understanding..." In the poetry of Sal Farinella, as in that of John Wieners, the experience of erotic transcendence is sought out for its residue, its burden, of erotic despair.

Of course, then, the poet will prefer his "black" or "darkened rooms," nights "of dark tunnels and few lights," and of course his poems will have titles like "Departures" and "The Leave Taking," the latter published first in *Gay Sunshine* and reprinted in the Gay Sunshine anthology, *Orgasms of Light* (and the best poem, probably, in his *first* book, *Hunger*, from Road Runner Press, 1972). Although the book under discussion concludes somewhat half-heartedly, with the poet's winding, if only in a dream, in the company of his lover, all "The Way Home"—we wonder how long he would *stay* there!—Farinella's work bespeaks a commitment to the sexual underground in which sudden transfiguration must be its own reward, as it is often its own punishment. To be sure, there are political protests in the poetry—against the harassment by young blacks of Boston's Fort Hill faggots—

Can you believe
... used up tires raining
on faggots just out walking
their lucky charms. Karma
halos hooping over their shoulders
just a bit of comic relief for
black kids beaning faggots ...

—and against the omnipresence of police in Boston's cruising areas—

We walk beside
police cars with lights off
dark figures turn
inside ... featureless
malcontent in one spot too long
on the job chasing queers
quick as jack rabbits
with balls of brass no fear
of fuzz no fear of razor's edge ...

But there is no fury—not the analysis, outrage, or repudiation that we find, for instance, in the poetry of Stan Persky or Kenneth Pitchford. Energy is here amassed not in service to a changing self or a "better world," but in order to capture, to *re*capture, the elusive image—those "karma halos," those "jack rabbit queers."

Given the poet's implicit resolution to remain "familiar with failure," there is one poem in *Thieves to Flesh* ("Goodbye Hello") which seems to me at the least disingenuous; "your world rejected me/ I am no more of it," the poet says within it to his mother:

I wave goodbye hello
hello goodbye I will no
more of it bear so press
your frightened cheek upon
my freshened cheek wish me
well I have departed mama
through doors into black rooms
where only bodies like mine
welcome me.

While the poet asserts he is "departing," his underlying intention seems to be to maintain hold *over*, control *of*, the mother to whom it is addressed. (One is reminded of the comment made by a friend of Allen Ginsberg after she had heard him read his poem "Kaddish" to her: "You're not done with your mother yet.") In other words, whether the poet consciously intends it or not, "Goodbye Hello" is *begging* for sympathy: the poet, one feels, hasn't yet said "Goodbye" and *meant* it. Perhaps *that* is why the work bears the title it does! ... As if, today, the straight "world" or "black rooms" (back rooms?) were our only choices! Why must "departure"—which, after all, in this context, signifies "coming *out*"—mean entering "black rooms"? And why is the poet able to imagine himself welcomed within them only by "bodies like mine"—and not *people* like himself! At least, one wants to tell the poet: if you prefer "black rooms" to, courtrooms, say, or classrooms, *abide* by that decision, as others have abided—John Rechy comes to mind, as well as John Wieners—before you.

And usually he *does* so abide. Farinella at moments of intensity has always been capable of the alliterative elucidation, the starkly metaphoric aphorism: "Your hair heats/ my heart like a coat;/ you slam sleep/ in my face like a door." I wonder if it is realized how effectively he is able—by means of eliminated punctuation, erratic line breaks, and a "floating" caesura probably imported from the poetry of Allen Ginsberg or Frank O'Hara—to suggest "melting" fusion—

snug in safety's bed
we meet again new lovers
of late ten years meeting
melting males soft spoken
in their greeting together grey hairs

—to replicate poetically the unsettled experience of an amorously undermined self, the confusion of erotic need ("wanting to come quick") and intellectual perception (the repeated, stabilizing "I know") which his choice of "bowing" to the fulfillments and frustrations of compulsive fantasy have delivered over to him:

his voice I do not know but know
sexuality's random dialing beating off I know
the breathless voice restless catching wind
in some suburban high up room I know
the invite to compete the beating
I know the catch the wind pipe pulls
up short and its pretty big I know big boy
wanting to come quick my number
in the frantic zip up quick for mother's at the door
I know I bow to your faceless voice
bringing me as I bring you to my fantasies.

Dark "rooms" luridly lit, a metaphoric "underground"—even, at times, an *underwater* environment (in "The Leave Taking," his lover's pink hand seems like "an exotic fish/ marveling/ in its flesh")—are essential to the creation of the sexual *scenes* from which this poetry takes its light and which it further, sometimes glamorously, illuminates. "Romance is the view over shoulders/ of perfect youths caught turning the corner," Farinella says memorably in *The Orange Telephone*: in *Thieves to Flesh* erotic rapture of the "twilit" moment is sought, as it is, for instance, in "Dead End Orgy," for its forced introduction to universal experiences of uncertainty, change, and loss:

Floating at the end of the blow job
anonymous suck in the dark, tangled labyrinth
my fingers anchored in hair,
I sight you my white ghost lover
sail across darkness
to cascade over the body
next to me ...
... Turning
(do you know I'm here?)
you slide onto the stranger's sex
and I glide off
luminous in artificial night
looking for two strong hands.

This poet begins to emerge, to see, to *shine* where other poets would encounter only "dead" or darkened "ends": it may be Sal Farinella who will write the best *damned* gay male poetry of his generation.

Salvatore Farinella's poems are also to be found in the two anthologies published by Gay Sunshine Press (*Angels of the Lyre* and *Orgasms of Light*), available by mail—see listing elsewhere in this issue.

TO MY FATHER AT THREE A.M.

Sirens spiral on the street
The window shade is orange
color of night outside
Your sleeplessness is mine
where I lie across the room

You are wondering what you did
to bring you to this place and this bed
with its unthinkable associations
You are fathered here again in the heat
Headache and no sleep

I know as well as you
the parting kiss and the final embrace
otherness of the other face turning to the wall
taking its brain with it
We lie separate who were never
one inside the other
I here on the narrow cot
You in that singular off-centered
indentation of the bed
that signifies my chastity

Memory of child and childhood spin
in this room, large loomed fears
for the enormous past
Nothing now but this silence, sentience

—George Whitmore

JEWEL
ON COMING HOME

1.

The volcanic beginning your offering brings

This is no child
this is a bright diamond it has taken the earth
millions of years to bear

This is a gold ring you have the same
footing there is an indelible knot not even sleep
can erase

There is that magic

A marriage
of man to man

2.

You must forgive your mother my mother my father
you have none
somewhere

Their eyes droop their arms like old clothing
there is heartbreak in packing away

3.

In us there is all beginning

Not ever missing

Nothing but understanding the moods we have
no understanding for a negligible divide
to get the feet in shape for the perilous
down to the end or beyond where the darkest door
leads out to the brightest plain

This is no heard of sheep

Maybe a jaw
certainly the bone of something living

—Stephen J. Herman

POEMS BY DAVID EMERSON SMITH

David Emerson Smith: "Born 1945 / I just prevail / a poet trying to touch the earth / I remember 45 but have forgotten fine lines separating puberty from pain / experienced the zen of play while swimming under rafts of boys / at eighteen I joined the navy and was heaved out as emotionally unsuitable / after ginsberg / I owe all to my lovers / past and present / Paul / Eddy / John / Lee / Robert / Richie / Genet / Whitman / Emerson / Thoreau / Rimbaud / Apollinaire / Baudelaire / Ginsberg / Greenfield / thanking you again and again." Smith's work has appeared in the two Gay Sunshine Press anthologies: *Angels of the Lyre* and *Orgasms of Light*. He currently lives in San Francisco.

GENET IS VINDICATED
(POEMS FROM AN UNPUBLISHED BOOK-LENGTH MANUSCRIPT)

A LOVE POEM AND A GENET FART FOR (FREDERICK HAROLD GREENFIELD)

You never knew it but / I shared that Genet fart under your prison
blanket / I shared your sickness with the world hiding the fifties
in a needle / I shared your parental disgust for greatest hope
of synagogue dreams / I shared your empty search for love and money
prostituting baby shoes & boxing gloves / I shared your anxiety while
boosting suits and shooting hunger in your brain / I shared your
early addictions and blooming ambitions as poet wakes amid the
vomit and debris / a love realized / I shared your premonition of
early death at work in factories with insurance men selling equity
and family plots / posterity / I shared your love / long soured now
in rebirth and retrospect / I shared your carnie memblings and
acid asides on the giant midway / I shared your need to feed the
ego on slim pickings / and peer approval / and all that jazz / Steve Jonas
Yes / Yes it was love at first / feeling myself in your words
tuesday evenings / Joe Dunn reading / and knowing you were the
person within that I was hungry to find / Yes / Yes you are my lover
mother / sister & brother / / We shared the pain but I had no medicine
now our poetry frees us to love the person within / flowering

CLIMBING TO THE STARS BALANCED JUST ON ONE KNEE

the delicate balance / 46 faggot years light and lean
the mug shot / finger prints / identity
the arm has a name a vein and a family tree
professional confessional slugging out alibi joints
truck stops with glory holes / greasy spoons and cocks
a bag of words beside his bed / magic words and
voila / its a brand new day
the world is a carnival / as Barnum use to say
a million marks are born each day
a million marks fall
neatly on the page
but that's another story
and it's a brand new ball game
and the governor phones a reprieve
with seconds to spare and phrases to wear
thin / just in time for the last action photo
TKO canvas autograph ringside Madison square garden
and an 8 x 5 glossy of the poet Frederick Harold Greenfield

GENET IS VINDICATED I

his hand on his hip
walks so lonely hearts
walks love into the saucer
cup of coffee muddled / spills
I hold the morning / warm
the way Gil held Roger's cheeks
in both hands / lengthening shadows in Brest
hiding in the prison / to create
the illusion of freedom ending
slowly / ceremoniously

GENET IS VINDICATED II

the words cavort to Michael in Austria
or other continents of sensuality
shall I make a mad search
for Genet / his loins
his buttocks like the rocks
that bake beneath Guiana's Sun
he'd teach me how to do it in the world
adventure all in time
we'd give each other away
and praise the day
mornings drenched in sweat
love's juice and flurry

GENET IS VINDICATED III

Genet / Gnet / I must make love to
you someday /
I'd join you in your jaunts of continents
and make many love in the caves
haunts along the spanish coast
Genet / Genet / I must make love to
you someday /
I'd be accomplished / an accomplice in all crime
and murder / guiana's prison / maggot hole sublime
we'll muscle love into this blackness dream
Genet / Genet / I must make love to
you someday /
I'd be the perfect mixture / of the soft
and perishable lucien and the callous stump
blackjack hard / stilatano / king of pimps
Genet / Genet / I must make love to
you someday
I'd beg with you on the Ramblas
and make love in the sun along the
barbary coast on warmer days

GENET IS VINDICATED IV

the thief uses his powers to cleanse the world
I become omnipotent voyeur / doer
love triumphs / intimidation dismantled / again
as Querelle circling his treasure
I encircle my pain / Genet called it / love

DEVIL'S ISLAND

moving to 225 Hyde Street
skirt hem of tenderloin / hustling heartache
apartment is apart from me / separate
place neatly in four walls
exit signs face themselves
we have no milk and its my voice damnit / its my voice
as Freddie coughs up a carnival size hundred dollar bill
and brings Barnum / Goliath & Alexander The Great down
with a thud / and its my voice damn it and my hell
here in this sterile middle income cell
we're sisters / Genet begs for me on the Ramblas
he helps me ward off the warlords of the CAPITOL
I walk into the welfare office
the poor rise from their seats & cheer
they wave hands and toss roses
to viva la recipiente / viva la recipiente
the poverty oozes out of me onto paper

lying here enjoying
the sun / birds dip
and sing / I soak the rays
relax / watching lover's lithe body
move gently through the bush
he knows not the love I have
hidden beneath each gesture
he assumes full value for each
I love to watch him flare the sun
his eyes are such as jewels exposed
by the miner's pick / I break the rock apart /
and look again at love gem through the bushes

a yellow finch sits on top of a red rock
as I look at love neath sun warm arm
flies intrude / I exude / joy

CRUISIN' DOWN

Sporters is for cruising—Sporters
is for boozing
Sporters is a bulging contour
easing shadows round black labels—Sporters
is not for dancing
wiggling that ass-prancing
Sporters is not for dancing—Sporters
is for hard action—Sporters
leaves its pretentions
at the door
his muscled sculp
held strong in fading
dungarees
Sporters is not for dancing—Sporters
is a no nonsense
place to examine physique
to gain a perspective
on antiquated con-
versation be-
tween that man
and this queen.

machines all of them
equipped with surgic
al scalpel programmed
to remove what is wa
nted without dis-
turbing life—without
disturbing
Sporters is not for dancing—Sporters
is for groping
blindly
the bed of want
a place to feel a thigh
held tight against
my rocket
cock
Sporters is not for dancing—Sporters
is for voyeurs
stealthily waiting
watching Whitman's bathers
their glistening pubic beards
held wet and warm
against my eye

Note: Sporters is a popular Boston gay bar

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BOY DREAMS

you've got to be a loner,
Altair says

the bone deep wounds will heal
if you forget the pain

forget that the hand which made them
also made me,
Altair says with a grin

This silly boy-god with the flames in
his hair
that ripple and swim the length of his back

This boy-god with the altruistic streak
His body is a lie if you eat
eat
eat
eat
you'll feel the steady decline
the despondency will grow

around and within
overnight like mushrooms

Altair says,
beware the forest is too deep
too deep
a well
a prolonged sightlessness

Altair's boy-god eyes are blind
&
they eat

boy dreams

— Tommi Avicolli

29 REASONS I LUV HIM

for T. S.

1. He's 19 years old.
2. He likes to kiss, even french-kissing me,
   closing his eyes.
3. His eyes, green and cat-like.
4. Muscles, beautiful muscles
   from working in a lumberyard.
5. Skin, skin smooth and soft
   as a woman's
6. Nipples like rosebuds.
7. He likes to drink beer, even more than I do,
   chugalugging bottle after bottle.
8. He stole 34 cars. He loves to drive my car.
   I am worried he will wreck it.
9. That's another reason: I worry about him.
   I worry about him too much.
10. He will jack me off if I ask him,
    the palms of his hands rough from work.
11. He really does love me, I know that now.
    I don't know what to do about that. Except go along
    with the way things are. I feel helpless.
12. He gets upset when my come gets on him or his clothing.
    He demands it's wiped off immediately.
13. His smell lingers in the frontseat of the car.
14. He lets me unbutton his blue jeans
    and play with his cock. This gives me a hard-on.
15. I luv his cock even though it is slow to come.
16. He lets me suck his cock. It takes forever.
    Sometimes he breaks out in a sweat trying so hard to come.
17. I am afraid he's going to fuck up. And they will put
    him in jail. I am almost certain he will go back to jail.
18. He's restless. (I put my arms around him.)
19. He's a fuck off. (He wrestles free, being stronger
    than I am.)
20. He's a kid, who wants to have a good time.
    What's wrong with that? Can you blame him?
21. He doesn't like working in the rain.
22. He plays the car radio, as loud as it will go.
    Hard rock, KVAN.
23. He loves the sun, and swimming in the river
    up by Mt. Hood. Skinnydipping, plunging
    into the water.
24. Making love in the fresh air.
25. Just driving around for hours and miles
    in the country.
26. What am I going to do?
27. How can I protect him from himself? How can I protect
    him from myself? How can I protect both of us?
28. When will he ever grow up?
29. I don't know. This is why I love
    him the most. Maybe never.

— Walt Curtis

YOU CAN'T FUCK WITH MOTHER NATURE

I kneel down at Blake's feet
and dig with my fingernails
until I have a hole maybe
an inch and a half wide
and seven inches deep.
Blake rubs his crotch
casually in my face
so as not to attract attention
and I pull down my fly
and stick my cock into the earth,
and begin fucking
and fucking
and fucking
waiting for a cop to come by and
ask me what I'm doing.
I'm sorry officer,
but I was horny
and the earth looked so,
I don't know,
beautiful
today I just got this overwhelming urge
like Scarlet O'Hara.
You've seen GWTW, haven't you, officer?
where she kneels down
at the intermission
and eats dirt.
Well, I'd call that rimming
and she did it on the silver screen
for everyone to see.
She got an Academy Award.
I haven't such gigantic aspirations
to exhibit myself like she did
but I've been horny
for days now and
well,
look at it this way,
the earth was here
and so was I
and like Steve Stills says,
if you can't love the one you love,
then love the one you're with.
What are you going to arrest me for anyway,
fucking with the earth?
Maybe you ought to get some of those
fucking Industrialists
who are poisoning everyone.
Cum's biodegradable, I think.
If not, I may have some problems
shitting in a few years
since I usually take it
all the way
up my ass.
I'm not into fucking that much
and I'm probably afraid of women,
but it's a beautiful day
and I wanted to fuck Mom so bad
and I just want to have a good time
but Dad would beat the shit
like anybody else
out of me
it's coming out of me
and Mom doesn't like fucking anyhow.
The officer doesn't find anything innocent about it.
He pierces me with his fuck eyes
and I come
to the little country church in the vale
come to
consciousness again
transcend the moment
get into the badge,
and he grabs me and Blake,
whisks us down to the station
in the vale,
valley of,
massive impressive butch shadows.
I want to sing rail road songs
but Blake says, "Shut up,
shut up, fuck head,"
while they frisk us a couple of times
though I insist the only gun I own
is empty. I request that the arresting officer
frisk me again.
Check out my asshole, buddy.
I even promise
to pay child support for the child
if I've accidentally impregnated the whole fucking earth
like one of those sci-fi flicks
about devil seed and demon lust and voodoo
and flying saucers and ugliness
and big boobs.

— Jim Everhard

whitepaper
planes
zig-zagging
out of the fifth storey
window
going down
slicing left and right
then
getting lost
in the azalea thicket
below
there were also
pigeons
on the sill
I think
yes
and a mass
mumbled out
at an odd hour
before dawn
in winter
and
the classroom
was up on the roofline
like a room in a tower
the walls yellow
as thin egg-nog
the floors checkerboarded
for a game of
good and bad

I spent four years
there
in the air
in love with a red-headed
Irishman
though I didn't know it

I never stopped
to think
of his pink skin
nor of the orange head
asleep on his freckled arm
I was more overwhelmed
by the Sicilian boys
who were uncircumcized
and sweated
they say
he became
a long-hair
and a renegade
too
in the sixties
and ate a lot of drugs
and didn't turn out
to be the exact
platitude
both of us
were intended to be:
the Irish boy
who was too good
to his mother
and
was meant to
but somehow didn't
become a Jesuit
I never stopped
to study him
in the changing rooms
to look for
the rings around
his nipples
nor
for the stillborn roses
nesting
in his boxer shorts
and
I never really thought
of his hair
as anything but
a bleeding
scrub brush
then
but
I wonder
what it's like
now
a red fall
twisting into ringlets
and knots maybe
pulled back
with a leather cord
and his eyes
are they dead?
or alive?
has he ever realized
he's still and
always
an Irishman?
I wonder
what he's like
now
naked
nipples taut
at that odd hour
before dawn
in that cold
and holy space
we were intended
to inhabit.

Jan. '77

— Richard Ronan

TWO POEMS BY ROBERT GLÜCK

Robert Glück was born in 1947 in Cleveland. He has lived in San Francisco since 1971 and won the Browning and Academy of American poets awards while studying at San Francisco State Univ. Three chapbooks of poems published: *Andy, Marsha Poems,* and *Metaphysics.* His work also appears in the two Gay Sunshine anthologies, *Angels of the Lyre* and *Orgasms of Light.*

PASOLINI

1

2 crows walked down the road.
One said "Brother, when the state
is truly communist & out of
the jeweled grasp of church & capital
where even the weeds are looking for a better cemetery—
brother, then we will see—"
These birds talked good sense. Later they are eaten &
their bones deliciously picked clean.
Every haystack trembles—
under each one
January exploits May.

2

2 crows: politics: to believe and believe,
they experiment, one lies & the other believes,
one obviously lies & the other believes.
Imagination flew the coop.
What's left stands on one scaly foot
with its head under its wing
and a wink of complicity from the void.

3

2 crows, 2 crows walk down a road
that was shattered by economics.
One crow said, "Brother
I don't know how to make a living,
when I wake up in the morning
the tears already stand in my eyes
waiting to flow. Brother
to live in the world
to change the world."

4.

2 crows walked & talked on the desolate
theme of early death.
"And yet lest we not be too one sided, brother,
notice with what beauty & justice
the sun rises,
colors reflect off their objects, muscle
flexes, the breath is accepted & enjoyed."

LITTLE MYSTERY POEM

The man X changes & takes an alias Y but
is later blackmailed by X whom he loves

bouquet of synchronized watches
Y called at little eleven and big two,
watch synchronized with the watch of the ocean
& the reflection of headlights on Y's ceiling
and the great nights & flesh & cock of Y's queer flesh.

Y hangs from the cliff
turning fear into erotic poetry

Narcissus drinks & becomes the dark hair of women
the green neon dogs race
the pippin apples in the tree

X imagines life to be a naked man,
perhaps his own body, an image for one abiding love,
and the border, easier to understand,
elegantly embroidered with casual sex

his non-scientific education was carried out in the ocean

X has lots of sex & for the rest
he lays around like an oyster
waiting for someone to give him a pearl

X goes from a stitch in time to it's better late to he who hesitates.

Meanwhile Y, a genius at anger, figures the genealogy of god
& the emotions he doesn't want to keep anymore.
He votes for non-participation
& vanishes by taking his beautiful intense sleep
& spreading it long & shallow
over the active twenty-four
15 miles of open eyes
& a thousand miles of sleep

In Y's absence X constructs an entire life from which Y
is excluded. If Y were to follow his feelings
he would be so sad that
the sugar refuses to dissolve

This is a true story of some intimate affection between,
say, St. Joan & a voice, ending
'the rest is history'

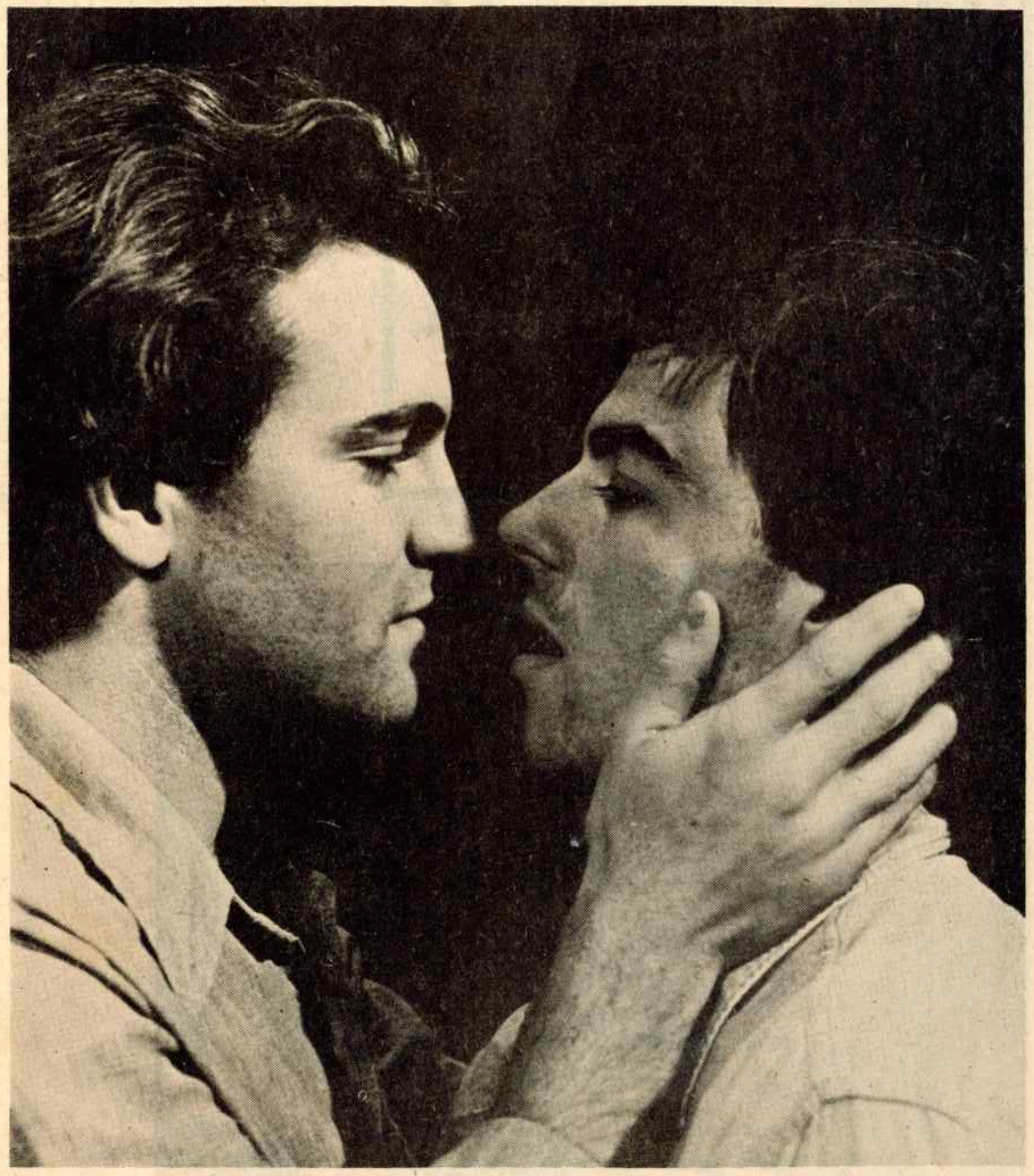
The voice says "start slow, then when you come to reality
don't get too artistic,

be natural and off-hand but touch abiding themes"

X says "What do you want"
Y says "I want to fall asleep on you"
X says "What can I do meanwhile"
Y says "Make sure I fall asleep"

GAY SUNSHINE

A JOURNAL OF GAY LIBERATION



Larry Pelligrini (left) & George Muckle
in the play *Pogey Bait* by George Birimisa

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