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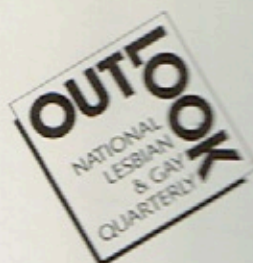
LESBIAN STYLE WARS

ARE GAY MALE
NOVELISTS SELLING OUT?

ELECTING GAY CANDIDATES:
LESSONS FROM A CAMPAIGN

NEW PLAYS BY
CHERRIE MORAGA AND
SARAH SCHULMAN

PASIVOS AND ACTIVOS
IN NICARAGUA



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THEY'RE CALLED "PAIRS," NOT "TOOLS OF THE PATRIARCHY"
AND HOW MANY OF US HAD TO DIE FOR YOUR OUTFIT?

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Volume 1, Number 4 Winter 1989

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AS THE REAGAN eighties draw to a close and the Bush nineties begin, it's imperative that those of us situated at the social margins act to open up the discursive space around politics, culture, and society. The questions of style—how we do what we do—and representation—how we appear to ourselves and to the world—resound with political implications; that's why the closet is such a powerful symbol and fact in our lives.

We sought to address these questions in the critical essay we published in our last issue (Fall 1988) on gay pornographer Tom of Finland. This essay provoked strong objections from a small, but vocal, set of readers, some of whom are (now) former subscribers [see "Letters"]. Equally disturbing to us was the news that managers of a local grocery store in Seattle pulled *all three* issues of *OUT/LOOK* from their racks once they'd glimpsed the Tom of Finland drawings. Last we heard, the managers were locked in a heated dispute with the store's predominately gay/lesbian staff and clientele over the arbitrary action.

The *OUT/LOOK* editorial board itself debated long and hard about printing the sexually explicit material. None of us believed that the article shouldn't have been printed because pornography is a formative influence on many gay men's sexuality, and because gay men and lesbians need a space to discuss sexuality amongst ourselves without fear of what others think. As a forum for both gay men and lesbians, *OUT/LOOK*'s aim is to articulate the spectrum of experience in both communities, whether or not they are "acceptable" to us or to other sectors of our readership.

Nevertheless, we wrestled with the question of limits: did the illustrations go "too far?" Some of us weren't wild about looking at gigantic penises, others objected that the illustrations overpowered the written analysis. Some had a hard time imagining how to explain the images to our children or our parents. And we all knew that we wouldn't be able to use that issue to promote *OUT/LOOK* to libraries, lest we be pigeonholed as a sex tabloid.

If we had it to do over again, the Tom of Finland essay might appear differently (as is the case with most of our articles) and then again it might not. Our editorial meetings are quite lively—we're a bunch of opinionated people. But we're also committed to working together to publish a magazine that speaks across the gender/race/class gaps that exist within the gay and lesbian communities.

The strong feelings on all sides of the Tom of Finland article didn't fall conveniently along gender lines. But, because we choose to be intimate with our own sex, there often is a mysteriousness about the other. Perhaps by working together we can learn what motivates (wo)men. Do those huge penises in Tom of Finland's art really turn gay men on? Why are lesbians so preoccupied with whether or not to use an anonymous sperm donor? Is it possible to incorporate some of each other's experience within ourselves?

STYLE HAS BECOME an issue in the image-conscious eighties because, as our spread on style wars in this issue argues, it's an emphatic way to make a political statement. We think it's important that *OUT/LOOK* has a distinctive look because what you read visually is as important as the written text itself. In this spirit, we welcome Brynn Breuner's contribution to *OUT/LOOK* in her capacity of design director for this issue.

We encourage debates like the one about the Tom of Finland graphics not only because they confirm our role as a journal of opinion, but, more importantly, because such conflicts have the power to clarify what's at stake for the various segments within the gay and lesbian community.

Frankly, we hope that one or more of the articles in this issue stirs up a similar response. We want our "Letters" section to be as exciting an arena for exchange as any given essay or piece of artwork. So do write and tell us what you think!



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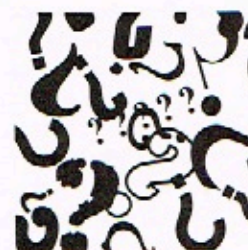
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The Anonymous Donor Debate Goes On

■ Petra Liljestrand's article, "Children Without Fathers: Handling the Anonymous Donor Question" (Fall 88) emphasized the differences between past adoption practices and donor insemination by lesbians today. She said it is merely opinion that donor insemination (DI) conceived children will ever have a need to know their genetic background, and implied that people conceived by DI should not have a right to know the donor's identity.

Adopted people such as myself have suggested that DI conceived people (remember, children grow up) may want to know that information, as many adoptees do. Our parents thought we wouldn't and shouldn't need or want to know our birth parents, and society agrees by keeping adoption records closed in most states and countries. But this doesn't stop us from searching.

I fear the article may encourage some lesbians to choose anonymous donors. This is unfortunate, because the lessons from adoption can be helpful, even reassuring, to lesbian families. For example, the concern of non-biological co-parents that their role will be threatened if the donor's identity is known is very much like the insecurity of many adoptive parents, who fear that blood is thicker than water and believe they will be replaced by the birth parents if they are found. The reality is that children have no trouble distinguishing between the people who raise them and the people who don't.

My birth mother is very much a stranger who has an uncanny physical resemblance (including health history) to me. Yet it was very important to me as a young adult to find her and my birth father. It didn't matter what scientific research said, I just wanted to know what most people take for granted. The question arose every time I looked in the mirror. My search also led me to a gay "half"-brother who has become a long-distance friend.

It would have been a shame if we never met.

By the time "scientific" research proves anything about DI conceived people it will be too late to undo donors' anonymity—unless an unlikely series of events leads to the opening of any records of donors' names that may exist. Most likely, it will be too late for children of anonymous donors to trace them.

With gay donors, the problem of contact in 18 or more years is heightened by AIDS. Waiting until a child gains interest in his or her genealogy will be too late for some donors unless a cure is found.

A known donor simply gives children a choice. Just as most birth mothers who want to find their adopted children do not wish to take custody from the adoptive parents, I'd bet that most donors would not want to have custody even if they could. In this situation also, lesbian families can learn from adoption reunions about negotiating contact.

Social conditions *always* change. By the time any social scientific studies of today's DI children are completed, new social contexts will have been created by the next generation, who can then claim that the findings cannot be applied to them. That way, we fail to learn from each other and can rationalize our choices.

Janine Baer
El Cerrito, CA

The "Meaning" of AIDS

■ Thank you for printing the enlightening and silence-breaking "Caught in the Storm: AIDS and the Meaning of Natural Disaster" by Allan Bérubé (Fall 1988). Not only has it helped me and my friends with the challenge of facing the enormity of the losses AIDS has brought to our lives and community, but it rang so true to my personal experiences with illness and disability.

As I have struggled with several auto-immune diseases and their debilitating effects, few things have

contributed more to the emotional pain of illness than other people assigning their meaning to my illness. A doctor asked me, "Why did you choose to be born into this body?" and handed me a copy of Louise Hay's book—I believe out of frustration that there is no cure for my illness or even much symptomatic relief of pain. Much more insidious are the supportive people who assure me that my illness is a "gift," a "challenge to become a deeper, more compassionate person." As if without it, I would have been an uncaring brute for all my life.

I have rarely seen the consequences of this so-called positive thinking addressed publicly. Yet I find myself, my friends with AIDS-related illness, and other disabled friends frequently discussing and too often agonizing or crying over whether someone else's meaning for our illness or disability is accurate. It's very emotionally time consuming.

We need to look at the deeper implications of how and why we define illness and death as individuals, as a community. Allan Bérubé's honest, courageous gift gives us all an opportunity to begin.

(Ms.) Marty Bridges

■ I was very moved by the clarity and compassion of Allan Bérubé's article in your Fall issue. It's especially welcome at a time when I am struggling with the "meaning" of AIDS in my own life.

Yet his basic premise bothers me. I don't think we can have it both ways: if AIDS is a natural disaster, then those who suffer from it are victims. Someone who has lost everything in a tornado is not a PWA. While the devastation may be random, our presence in the town this tornado has touched down in is not. And some of us still, for whatever reason, sometimes use a different mailing address. The storm lets everyone know where we live. This cannot fail to have a meaning.

My lover did not approach his death with the peace or stoicism

Bérubé's lover seems to have shown. He fought it hard, sometimes bravely and sometimes not, moving through stages of anger, denial, self-blame, spiritualism, atheism, reaching out and pulling back, until he found the strength to seek out his own way, his own explanation for what was happening.

For some people, AIDS really is a punishment, for others a golden opportunity. Perhaps we need less of the sweeping generalizations and these equally sweeping critiques. Perhaps more attention should be paid to the individual components of "the rough patchwork of all our responses" which Bérubé speaks of as being the only source of meaning in this epidemic. There is not just one and certainly no best way to deal with AIDS, either personally or in print.

RJ Florence
San Francisco, CA

Tom: the Controversy

■ As a lesbian/feminist, I am disgusted with what you call "art" in your Fall, 1988 issue. As I read the "Welcome," I am struck negatively by its position—"We struggle with deciding when sexually explicit images or words should be published in the name of art or intellectual discourse," and might I add, trash?

If gay men want "Tom of Finland" in their magazines, then put it in men's magazines. Calling *OUT/LOOK* a lesbian and gay quarterly and feeding the stereotype of gay men's massive penises as their only vital organ is offensive. How do articles on lesbian softball and lesbian aging offer any balance to that?

After my 17-year-old daughter looked through this issue of *OUT/LOOK*, she asked me why a gay magazine would demean gay life. She thought there was enough of that done by the straight world.

I support the first amendment as much as anyone does, but I do not wish to have my privacy invaded,

unexpectedly. Most lesbians I know regard pornography as oppressive. It is insensitive to include it in a magazine that uses "lesbian" as a part of its title. If I want pornography, I will subscribe to it. I don't want my cultural magazine to perpetuate myths that I spend much energy dispelling.

(Name withheld)
Grand Forks, ND

■ I was happy to see that *OUT/LOOK* has turned out to be the kind of publication willing to publish controversial articles like Nayland Blake's piece on Tom of Finland. Explorations of sexuality are where lesbians and gays most deeply challenge the straight world, and I think it is vital for our publications to be open to this kind of work.

Camille Roy
San Francisco, CA

■ *OUT/LOOK* would likely have been a choice for holiday giving, but for "Tom of Finland's" inclusion in your last issue. His work includes depiction of non-life-enhancing sexuality, which I consider pornography, and evil.

I resent that my latest issue is not suitable for the waiting room in my office. I hope that I will not feel obliged to hide future issues, from either my clients or my children.

I had been proud to be a subscriber. You've got a year to restore trust before the next major giving season.

Cynthia Payson
Hartdegen, MSW
Westfield, MA

■ Is it merely Tom of Finland's exuberant celebration of male homosexuality that suffices to raise his art (well drawn!) from its

reactionary relatives and into our esteem? Who is he drawing? What sort of homosexual is he celebrating?

All these repulsive creatures, these over-muscled, thick-necked, jut-jawed, small-brained idols of male domination—oh phallus imperator—at play, and playing with each other instead of with women. Big deal! This art does not worship power? Who is Blake kidding? Sex and eroticism are not alien to power, they are its allies, indeed even its spark plugs.

Male and female, the gentle people pick up the pieces so that life can continue, and the pixies, elves, and witches nurture the souls bruised or crushed by the braggadocio and arrogance of Power. Heil Tom and all male-chauvinist despots, with their muscle power, their money power, their gun power, from street corner to corporate board room and all the corri-



Bérubé's lover seems to have shown. He fought it hard, sometimes bravely and sometimes not, moving through stages of anger, denial, self-blame, spiritualism, atheism, reaching out and pulling back, until he found the strength to seek out his own way, his own explanation for what was happening.

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dors of power. I'll take one We'wha (OUT/LOOK Summer 1988) over all of them any day.

Larry Wolf
Cincinnati, OH

■ Nayland Blake pleads [that] Tom [of Finland is politically neutral] by testifying to Tom's abstinence from "Nazi" art and image. We the viewer are in turn to believe that this makes Tom "one of us." This, of course, is overly simplistic. Fascism is not just Nazis in Germany in 1935.

Tom of Finland focuses on masculinity as the ultimate value—which is in and of itself fascist. Honestly, how many of us had an adolescence that would parallel those of Tom's characters? Most of us took drama, choir, dance, art, and got beat up in locker rooms. When we got older we tried to change and become like Tom's cartoon characters.

We turned our collective backs on what was good about our gayness and embraced what is the worst about the heterosexual white male society that battered us. By becoming like and going beyond the male images of our oppressors, we lost.

We value big dicks and hot pecks. Politics, poetry, and gentle differences were smashed by marching leather work boots. We spend our time in gyms instead of volunteering at political organizations. We buy Tom mags instead of donating dollars for gay rights. We search for a Tom, who does not exist, and become all the more alienated from who we really are.

Tom's characters don't exist, and if they do, or ever do, I hope I never meet them, not in my movement, anyway.

Jacob Smit
Seattle, WA

■ Nayland Blake's article, "Tom of Finland, An Appreciation," contains many deprecating remarks about the painter Paul Cadmus which I consider 1) inaccurate, 2) irrelevant, and 3) insulting.

Blake imputes to Cadmus a string of motivations which are not anywhere on record as Cadmus', and which are contradicted by the works in existence. The "coy" allusions to other paintings must refer to such early satirical compositions as the "Venus and Adonis," blatantly mocking rich matrons and their athlete playboys in Rubens' style, and such late ones as "David and Goliath," a whimsical picture of Cadmus as Goliath conquered by his lover Jon Andersson as Caravaggio's Cupid; there are small copies of the works referred to in the painting itself, which hardly strikes one as "coy."

The "slavish devotion to antique craftsmanship" is surely a matter of any artist's choice; that it is used only to "show that the painting took a long time to make" is the sort of remark that ought not to be printed in a serious critical article; does Blake know of a way to make egg tempera paintings that is easier and faster? Is egg tempera counter-revolutionary?

Most progressive political moves have characteristically espoused conservative representational art styles, because the best way to get new ideas across is through using old forms with new content. Cadmus used the heroic composition of the past to depict the tawdry world he saw around him in the thirties for the precise purpose of showing how unheroic he found the present. He was not alone: Grosz, Shahn, the Soyars, Levine, and many others used the same means for the same purpose, as did the Soviet and Nazi movements; the Chinese Communists' art is heartily classic and representational.

Tom of Finland draws good horny porn and it is good that Blake can admit he likes it. I like it, too. If Tom is attacked, it is good that he is defended, but it is unnecessary to defend him by demeaning another, far more complex artist. It would be far better to use OUT/LOOK's precious space to print more work by both Tom of Finland and Paul Cadmus, who, I am willing to bet, have

no quarrel with one another at all.
Robert Patrick
New York, NY

More than One Road to Serenity

■ Bravo to Ellen Herman for her article "Getting to Serenity" (Summer 1988). I am glad to see someone challenging (finally!) the "institution that addiction groups seem to have become within our communities."

I do not attend 12-step programs. I have chosen to seek support from friends and relatives willing to process issues with me. Yet I have been pressured by others who feel I should be in a program. These are the same people who judge me an alcoholic because I like to drink beer on Friday nights, the same people who have labelled my family "dysfunctional" while knowing very little about my family or my relationships within it.

Do [12-step] programs veer us away from addressing the pressures that cause us pain and contribute to the growing numbers of gay men and lesbians who suffer from addictions? Herman challenges us to think about the roots of these programs and the role they play in our culture. We can't forget that we live in a society that is intent on taking away everything that feels good to us, whether those things are alcohol, sex, or our own self-esteem.

Wendall Waters
Jamaica Plain, MA

Gaffe of the Quarter: We regret misspelling the name of the author of "Children Without Fathers: Handling the Anonymous Donor Question" in the Fall 1988 issue. It's Petra Liljestrand, not Liljesfraund.

Tell us what you think of what you read and see in OUT/LOOK. Send your typed, double-spaced remarks to Letters, OUT/LOOK, PO Box 460430, San Francisco, CA 94146.

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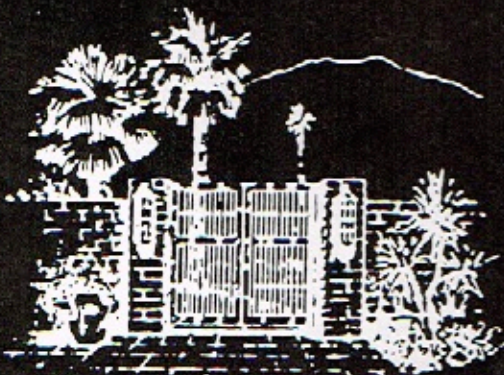
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SOUTHERN REFLECTIONS

by Mab Segrest

This article is excerpted from Segrest's keynote speech at the 12th annual Southeastern Lesbian and Gay Conference, held in Atlanta, Georgia, last year.

Nothing Can Stop Us Now! But From What?

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Illustration by Nicole Ferentz

THE THEME OF this conference is "Nothing can stop us now!" As a woman who both believes in her better moments that we can get what we desire, but who is also reluctant to sign too blank a check, I want to start by adding an important qualifier: "Stop us from what?"

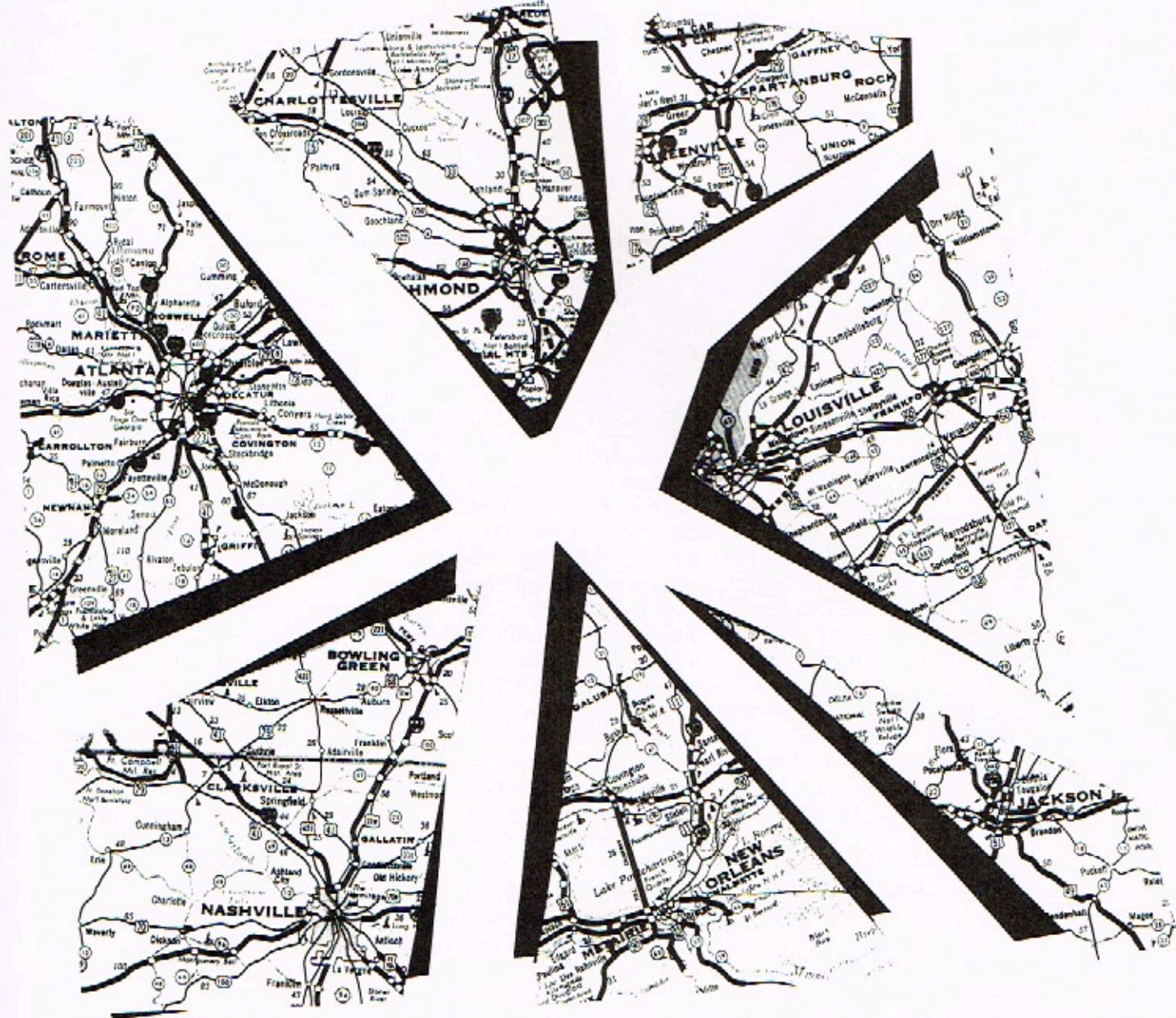
I want to talk about the values, goals, and visions towards which we lesbians and gay men, we dykes and faggots, should be unstoppably progressing in these closing years of the 20th century. I also want to talk about how we can go about getting there—about strategy. I want to start by plumbing my own life, to measure its currents and deepest points to see, "Where is it going?" "Where has it come?" since our political strategies mean nothing if they do not arise from the realities of our lives.

Nothing can stop us now, huh? From? Having two, or three, or seven trusting and passionate simultaneous sexual relationships? From having large families of turkey baster babies? From reversing sodomy laws in 24 states? Or can nothing stop us from keeping people of color and women out of gay bars? Or voting for George Bush?

CAN NOTHING really stop us? I ask myself that when I think of my friend Carl, who died of AIDS in 1986, and I could not stop that disease from killing him. My guess is that there are few people here who have not known and loved someone who died of AIDS—and you could not stop them from dying.

Carl, my friend Barbara, and I had lived together for a good part of a year in one of two big houses that Carl and his friend Allan wanted to turn into a community. Carl's aunt, Elizabeth, had followed the two from Oregon and also became our friend. Elizabeth had helped raise Carl; he had helped bring her out as a lesbian, and they had marched together in San Francisco Pride parades under a banner that read, "Faggot Nephew, Dyke Aunt."

Carl was diagnosed with AIDS in December of 1985 after coming down with meningitis, and we made plans for the 18 months the doctors figured he had to live. Carl and Allan decided to do as much care as possible at home. He went into the hospital and had a tube implanted in one of the veins near his heart so that friends could administer the medicine. That operation was hard for Carl, and he realized how much he hated having his body at the disposal of hospitals and tubes and machines.



Carl had built up a community—through teaching country dance and working against chemical dumps with his neighbors on the poorer side of town, by working in the food co-op, and on gay and lesbian politics. He had more people wanting to spend time with him than he had time. From Christmas on, we began to take turns, bringing over his favorite dishes, reading to him, making tapes of his favorite music, helping with his medications. He wanted to finish work on a book he was writing about English country dance; and a team of the dancers was helping to type, proof, and make notes on final revisions.

His case progressed quickly. He realized he would not get to see spring again. He went into the hospital on a Thursday in mid-January with a diagnosis of pneumocystis pneumonia. He began having allergic reactions to his medication. Elizabeth called me grief-stricken on Friday to say that Carl had decided to leave the hospital and refused any more medication. He had had enough.

I was caught by surprise. As I drove to Elizabeth's, I was very afraid and angry at Carl's decision. I soon began to realize, though, with Elizabeth's help, that the man knew how he wanted to die. Allan met with 30 of Carl's friends from Durham

on Saturday night to explain Carl's decision and to tell us gently that the collective part of Carl's life was over—we would not see him again. He figured he'd have only a couple of days off the medication and was saving that time to spend with his own parents, Allan's family, Elizabeth, and Allan.

By Monday, Carl had said all his goodbyes, except for Elizabeth and Allan, and he was still feeling pretty well. Allan and I laughed about the protocol, the manners of this unexpected time. "At what point do you allow the second string back in?" I joked, wanting to dart past Allan up the stairs. I wanted Carl to tell me what dying was



like. But the respite did not last for long, and by Tuesday, Carl's breathing was very labored. On Wednesday morning, Allan told us that Carl had decided to take carefully measured, lethal doses of medication that evening—to finish taking death into his own hands. My friend Barb worked with the guys at Vale Street to lash a stretcher to carry Carl down the stairs. That night, ten of us gathered for a pot luck, to keep watch in the other of the big white frame houses that were by now a gay men's community.

Up in Carl's room, Allan came to the last chapter of *Barchester Towers*, and they decided to stop reading. These two men, who had spent the last 15 years of their lives as closest friends, listened for the last time together to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

WORD CAME TO US that Carl had taken his first sleeping pills. We moved outside, walking and talking quietly below his window in a soft January night that did feel like spring. In ones and twos, we stepped in and out of the light from Carl's window that spilled on the grass and cobblestones, the window

framing the spring flowers Allan put there, translucent now before the light. Word finally came that Carl had taken a fatal dose of Seconal and Percodan.

Elizabeth and her partner, Elana, went into Carl's house to wait downstairs. Allan sat with Carl as he died, with some jerks and snorts, but peacefully. I was standing outside, and through the window I saw Allan enter the room and speak to Elizabeth and Elana, holding them one in each arm as they wept together. Seeing this grief from a distance, a pantomime framed by the window sill, in their immediate loss—"Charlie's gone! Charlie's gone!"—this triptych of faggot lover, dyke aunt, and her friend were an image not of some "holy family," but of our gay and lesbian family in our love and grief.

It is this image that I carry with me when I hear politicians and bigots and fearful people rant about "God's scourge" and the "gay plague." I also carry with me the memory of the exquisite tenderness on Allan's face when we went back up to Carl's room to carry his body down. We put him into a black body bag from the hospital; but first, Allan wrapped Carl in his scarlet sheets and quilt and, in an act so intimate I should have turned my face, tucked his quilted pillow under Carl's head, his last act of physical love.

Neither Carl nor we could stop AIDS from killing him. But nothing stopped Carl from dying on his own terms. In dying this way, he left me with two great gifts: he lessened my fear of my own death and taught me I could trust men to be my teachers. It was a faith I

had lost a decade before in the initial anger and exhilaration of lesbian-feminism.

Later I was struck by the incredible wrong-headedness of Sonia Johnson's pronouncements that working against AIDS "sidetracks" lesbians; she says, "lesbians can work to fight AIDS and have no time left to change themselves and society in ways that will advance their own lives," and warns us not to "rush in" and "infantilize" gay men by helping.

I did not infantilize Carl—he helped me to mature. Many of the people who "helped" him in his last days took more of his energy than they gave. He was doing it for us by then. Anyone who has walked the acres of The Names Quilt knows that there is something going on in gay men's response to AIDS that belies both patriarchal machismo and feminist theories of biologically determined male aggression and female nurturance.

I know now that nothing has to stop gay men and lesbians, faggots and dykes, from being each other's family, if that is what we choose.

THOSE ARE SOME of the details of Carl's death from AIDS. Now, let me share the story of my daughter Annie's birth that same year.

Until Annie was conceived, the thing that stopped me most was the question of children. My friend, Barbara, and I have been together for ten years, and for five of those years, we knew clearly that we wanted a child. We both had been very involved

in the families of our siblings and had a clear sense of the challenges involved in raising healthy people. But every time we tried to think about it or move toward it, we would run smack into a brick wall that said, "NO." Finding sperm, figuring out money, dealing with families—it all came back, "No, no, no!" Neither Barbara nor I ever got married, heterosexually, and we both felt the taboos around queers and children from all the myths about child molesting, governmental reluctance to let gay men and lesbians adopt or become foster parents, stories of homophobic judges taking custody away. The Big No.

We wanted the child to know who its father is and to have a relationship with him, but we were each pretty nervous at the thought of the other "having some man's baby." We approached several gay male friends, and some of them got so as they would not answer the phone when we called. Their idea of a good time did not include being pursued by women for their sperm. I began to have fantasies of accosting men on the street at night, throwing them down, and milking them.

Barb is the one who would not let anyone stop her. She began by advertising for "warm, fast-swimming" sperm in a local alternative publication. The search ended when David, one of the gay men who lived with Carl and Allan on Vale Street and with whom we had been consulting on AIDS and sperm, proposed to us: he would befriend a child we might conceive with an anonymous donor, or (gulp!) be the donor himself.

Barb left it up to me, since it was a decision that potentially could make my relationship with her and with the child vulnerable. But I heard in David's voice the same pain and frustration over wanting a child and being stopped from having one as I had felt, and I said yes. Three HIV tests and considerable negotiating later, we started inseminating. We began, in fact, the week that Carl died.

Four tries later, Barbara was pregnant. I am convinced that what really made Barb conceive is a little ceremony we did with six dyke friends that February on a trip to the mountains. We set lots of open, vaginal-looking jars around a room in which Barb and I sat in the center (she was the mother, I was the uterus). Then the rest of the dykes "swam" into the darkened room; they were the sperm. They cavorted awhile like tadpoles, until I latched onto one of them who looked like she had good genes for fertilization. Then all three of us were transported to the bed, where the sperms turned to the priestesses beating on drums and cymbals and doing fertility dances around the mattress. The three of us on the bed were laughing so hard, we nearly peed. I thought, "Here I am about to turn 38 years old, laying on this mattress pretending to be a uterus!" But I also felt a strange tingle, like it might work.

It did.

Nine months later our "birth team" of laboring Barbara, two dykes, two faggots, and a friendly doctor ended up in Durham County General Hospital at five centimeters. This was after a grueling 12 hours of labor, dur-

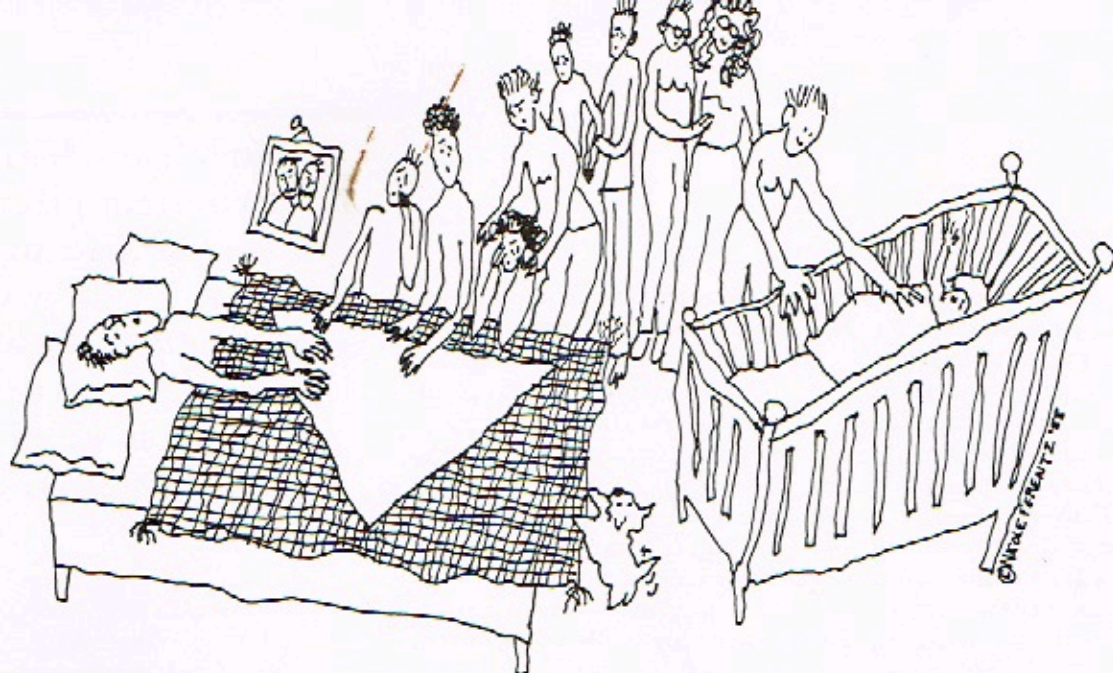
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ing which Barbara and I had decided this was not such a good idea after all. Between contractions, I leaned over and told her, "If we ever get out of this, I'll never knock you up again."

At seven centimeters and fourteen hours, Barb was stuck again, and the doctor offered a choice: a drip that would artificially speed up contractions or the more natural alternative—nipple stimulation. We had thought this through in our birth plan, and Barb said she'd take the nipples. Our doctor said, "You choose who does it," and the nurses in the room were quite surprised when I began—rather than David—gently at first, with a manual breast massage. After 20 minutes of the most vigorous nipple massaging I ever did, Barb was fully dilated, and her body was doubled over in the pushing that brought the baby down the birth canal.

The atmosphere in the room shifted toward exhilaration, as Barbara breathed, and pushed, breathed, and pushed, and the baby's head showed first like a ruby, then crowned, and pushed through—a tiny shocked face into a cheering room. Then the little body tumbled out and I looked down and shouted to Barbara, "She's a girl!"

The next several days were a jumble of shock and exhaustion,



of pain for Barb, since she tore badly when Annie was born, but also of wonder at being in the presence of this tiny and clearly wise new creature. Many friends sent cards, but the one that fit the best carried a quotation from Gertrude Stein: "This joy you feel is life."

It was joy at new life, but it was in a strange way not so different from the grief I had felt at Carl's death. In both cases—with the six-foot Carl and the twenty-one-inch Annie—we had been privileged to touch some deep pulse and know that we, too, were in its flow. What we had done for Annie as her "birth team" was not so different from what Allan had done for Carl at his death—negotiate the narrow passages between worlds. That year we had joined life at both its ends, the coming hence, and the going forward.

ANNIE'S BIRTH would not have happened without the lesbian and gay liberation movement of the last 20 years, nor would the integrity of Carl's death. Most of us, for some part of that time, have worked to overcome mistrust, fear, isolation, and rejection—those forces

that stop us cold in our tracks and hold us back from assuming our full and honored places in the world.

The first part of this process has often involved separation of many kinds—from the straight world, from men, or women, or our families. But as I approach 40, what I am most interested in is not separation but engagement, reentry, putting the focus of our collective power as lesbians and gay men on the demand for systemic change.

Collectively, what I most want us to be unstoppable in is a lesbian and gay freedom movement in the South. I'm not just talking about civil rights, or just about eliminating anti-gay violence and sodomy law repeal. I'm talking about *freedom*, in our hearts and intellects and imaginations, in our beds and beaches and kitchens, and all the other places we choose to make and steal love; freedom on the streets and in the courts and legislative buildings; freedom with our families and our neighbors; freedom to be who we are and love each other.

The thing about freedom, though, is that you can't just want it for yourself, or only for your own kind. Freedom means everybody. I want a movement

of lesbian and gay people who know that nothing will stop any of us until all of us are free: not just the men, or the people with money, not just the white people or the Christians or the people without AIDS, not just the hets, or queers, not just any part of us that might be better off than the rest. Freedom means everybody. It means justice.

Justice in this country takes some work. The Hardwick decision spelled it out for us and the Supreme Court "Justices" give us our entry point. The sodomy laws, because they hold many of our other oppressions more firmly in place and because they affect us in every single southern state, are the place to begin—just as the civil rights movement targeted legalized segregation and voting rights in the years after World War II.

Changing sodomy laws in the South will be a heroic endeavor. But if we have to contend with a solid anti-sodomy South, we also have the example of the black freedom movement to help us. We Southerners grew up, and now live, in a region that was partially transformed in our lifetimes by the courage and grace of black people, and we have a legacy from them about what the move toward

freedom can achieve.

We also have an obligation with that legacy. Not only in the South, but all across this country, the gay and lesbian movement and the communities that have grown out of it are too constrained by racism (along with the rest of North American culture). No freedom movement that treads some of the same ground as Harriet Tubman or Rosa Parks or Frederick Douglass or Martin Luther King can afford racism.

Gay and lesbian communities in the South are concentrated in the main urban areas that are under at least some control of people of color. In those places, we have to learn to build and earn alliances—a process that will both increasingly challenge us to change the racism within our own movement and perhaps make more space for lesbians and gay men of color within their communities of color. In the freedom movement I am speaking of, we will honor the leadership of gay and lesbian people of color, and will realize that our strength lies in our diversity; it lies in the way our 10 percent pops up across all kinds of cultural boundaries. We will make sure that diversity is honored and reflected in our growing numbers.

This alliance building proceeds best not from bargains struck from behind barricades: "I will do this for you, and then you owe this to me." It proceeds best, for instance, when white lesbians and gay men decide, "I will oppose racism because it is wrong," and begin to do that, no strings attached.

We have a freedom legacy as Southerners. We also have the

challenge of creating our own indigenous movement as southern dykes and faggots. Everybody can't move to San Francisco from Durham or Atlanta or Richmond or New Orleans. Everybody can't move to Durham from Pittsboro, Atlanta from Brunswick, Richmond from Lynchburg, or New Orleans from Shreveport or Monroe. When we started organizing for a Pride Parade in 1986, fundamentalists yelled we were trying to make Durham the "San Francisco of the South." While this has a certain appeal, I also know what I want from a southern freedom movement is not to create more refugee centers, but to keep us from being run out of our homes—wherever they are.

Any attempt, then, to organize in the Southeast will need to take into account not only the cities, but the town and countryside that many of us grew up in and left. We must learn to mine the deep and secretive veins of queers who still live in these places.

We will bring to our movement our own strengths and style, not the least of which is a humor and whimsy informed by camp. One of my favorite memories from the 1987 March on Washington was a moment in the circle before the civil disobedience at the Supreme Court began. One of the affinity groups led us in a chorus of the "Hokey Pokey" as we all sang loudly, "You put your BUTT IN, you take your BUTT OUT, you put your BUTT IN, and you shake it all about." It seemed an essentially gay moment, and I wasn't sure some of my straight friends in the anti-Klan move-

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ment would have understood.

Our southern freedom movement will make clear that what straight people have often misunderstood as a pathetic imitation of them is more often than not subversive satire. Our movement will be totally grounded in what we have had to learn as feminists and homosexuals about our bodies and everybody's body in this culture—not the least of which is how to be loose and whimsical in the face of forces of destruction. We will do the Hokey Pokey.

We will learn increasingly to celebrate and grieve at the same moment.

AIDS has brought our gay and lesbian communities fully to the face of death. If we can look there calmly and not avert our eyes or flee; if we can keep celebrating, keep loving, keep moving in humor and joy as well as grief, then truly nothing can stop us, as we carry in our hearts a familiar refrain:

Oh, freedom, Oh, freedom

Oh, freedom over me.

Before I'll be a slave,

I'll be buried in my grave.

Freedom, freedom, freedom
over me. And over us all. ▼

About the artist: Nicole Ferentz recently published the Working Girl's Datebook 1989, a calendar of lesbian erotica.

THE PRODUCTION OF any writing necessarily takes place within a cultural and social context. This guarantees that the act of writing, the decision to publish and disseminate writing, and its evaluation by the critics and ultimate reception by the public (often divergent responses, at least initially) will be permeated and shaped, facilitated or distorted, by the specific social situation and the cultural politics of the moment.

It is unwise to ignore these issues of cultural politics, for their influence is utterly pervasive. It is the nature of such issues that they cannot be "solved" once and for all; rather they are like fault lines that articulate the underlying stresses of a given situation and trace the hidden geography of the cultural moment.

But, if they cannot be solved, they *can* be thought about; one can strive to reach not an answer but perhaps greater clarity about the

issue, and in the process better locate oneself in the contemporary world.

The issue I would like to begin discussing is that current obsession of gay writers—and, to a lesser extent, gay editors—the fabled crossover book.* Having been an editor of *Christopher Street Magazine*, working today as a book editor involved in the publication of gay writing, and as a gay writer myself, I have had the opportunity of watching a virtual parade of gay writers through the last decade and have followed with interest the changing fortunes of gay writing in the marketplace, as well as the changing attitudes and intentions of the writers themselves. With the recent breakthrough to national visibility in the mainstream media (both *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* have within the last year published several articles about gay writing "reaching the mainstream") and the critical and commercial success of a (small) number of gay books over the last few years, has come a new and startling ambition by many gay writers to achieve success with a wider audience.

Increasingly I hear about "the crossover audience" and "the crossover book," the book that will appeal to gay *and* straight audiences alike. Indeed, many of the younger writers resist being categorized as "merely" gay writers, that territory being a "literary ghetto" which they feel unfairly limits both their audience and their income. Considering that only a few years ago it was a struggle just to get a gay book published or to sell enough copies to break even, this is a notable development, undoubtedly a sign of the enormous and underappreciated distance we have come in a very short time. Still it raises some new and troublesome issues that can be seen more clearly in the context of our recent history.

In the beginning, that is in the mid-seventies, when gay authors as we know them began to be published, there was not much, if any, talk about crossover books or crossover audience. When Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, Larry Kramer, Felice Picano and others decided to write and publish gay fiction they were taking what was at the time a huge risk that their literary careers would be

Chasing the Crossover Audience

& Other Self-Defeating Strategies

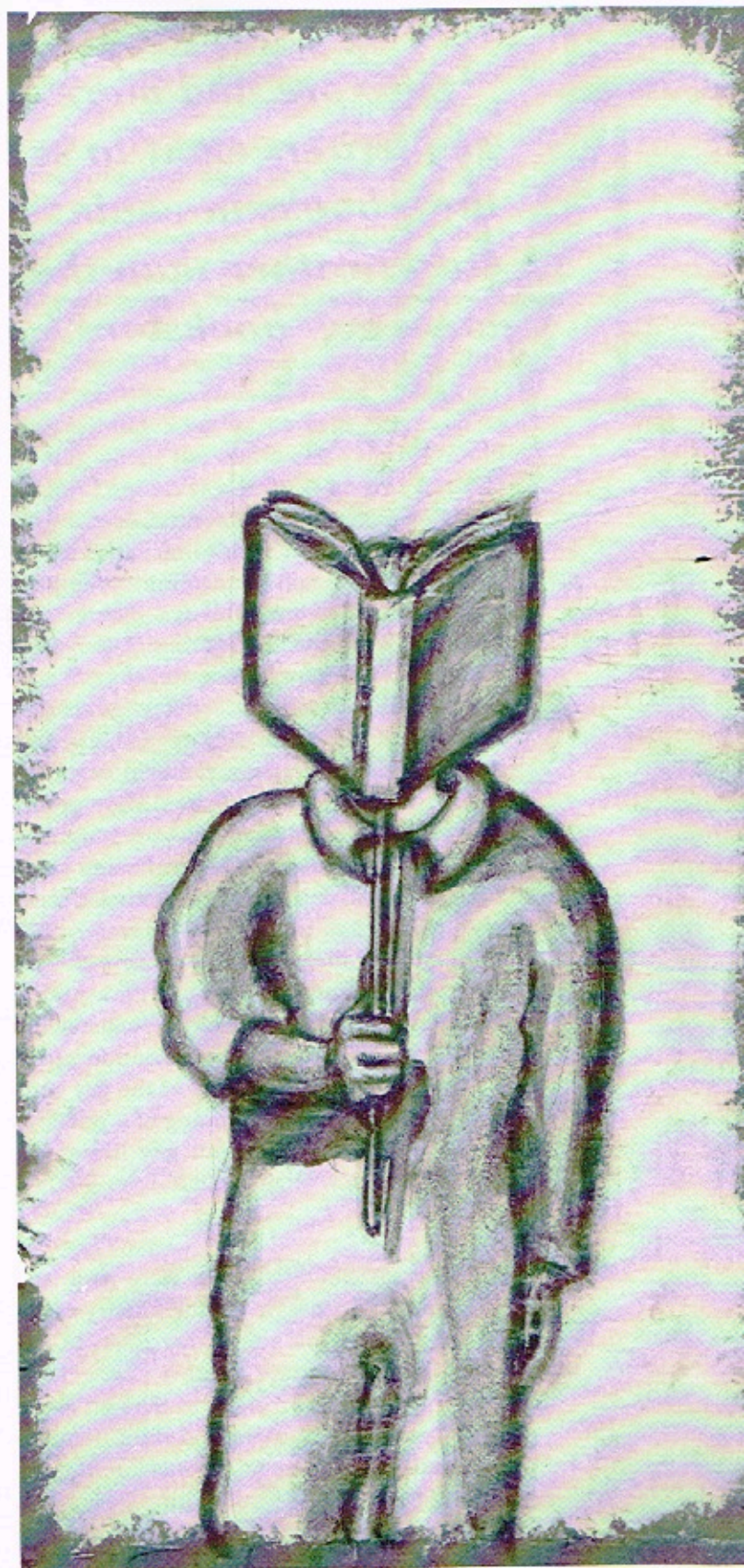
by Michael Denny

Illustrations by Scott Lifshutz

distorted or derailed, marginalized or altogether aborted by that decision. These people were not under the illusion that the straight world was eager to read about our lives. At the time it was quite clear that the straight world would rather not know we even existed, and when they were forced into that awareness their general response was hostility. And this was only to be expected. After all, the mechanism by which this society implemented the oppression of gay people was to extend a blanket of invisibility over most gay life while simultaneously promoting lurid images of marginal figures—the doomed drag queen, the sick child molester, the pathetic sissy. This cultural manifestation of the dominant social and political power was buttressed by laws that made sodomy illegal, harassment by organs of the government (such as the Post Office and the House Un-American Activities Committee), and the occasional prosecution and jailing of deviants.

However, since it is clear that all these police measures and punishments did *not* in fact stop homosexual activity but only inhibited the assertion of a public gay identity, I think it's equally clear that the major and most effective weapon used against us by this society was the cultural war of enforced silence mixed with false images and derogatory definitions. Since this war was carried out by the cultural—and especially the literary—organs of society, it was unlikely that those same organs would suddenly welcome a new literature that attempted to free gay people from the false consciousness fostered by the dominant society, a consciousness consisting of society's hatred of homosexuals internalized into self-hatred. Gays were oppressed by society, but more important, society through use of its cultural power *got gays to oppress themselves*—not only a neat trick but perhaps the most efficient means of oppression.

What motivated White, Holleran, and the others was not a naive hope for a straight readership nor the expectation that the literary establishment would or could give them a fair hearing. What impelled them to jump into the arena of gay writing was the enor-



More and more gay writers want to see their books in chain stores rather than their local gay bookstore.

mous energy that had been released by the Stonewall riots and that, to our amazement, seemed only to gain momentum in the years that followed. Stonewall was the critical point, the unpremeditated and still somewhat inexplicable event that unleashed a vast reconstitution of gay society: gay bars, baths, bookstores, and restaurants opened, gay softball teams, newspapers, political organizations, and choruses proliferated. Gay groups of all sorts popped up while gay neighborhoods emerged in our larger, and many of our smaller cities. This was and is a vast social revolution that to my mind has received nowhere near the attention it deserves: a new community came into being in an astonishingly short period of time. The excitement of those days captured the imagination of the writers, while the emergence of the gay community provided the beginning of a public as interested in reading about gay life as the writers were in writing about it.

TIME PASSED, struggles were won, and gradually, grudgingly, the literary establishment ceded some marginal room to gay books. More important *by far*, a new generation of gay writers emerged in the mid-eighties whose talent, diversity, and sheer numbers exceeded our wildest hopes—we are now in the midst of a burst of gay writing such as has never been seen before. And, of course, the social and political situation has changed. The

mayor of New York now walks in the Gay Pride parade, the Gay Men's Chorus performs at Carnegie Hall, Harvey Fierstein charms everybody's mother on television talk shows, and AIDS has made us relentlessly visible to mid-America. As the situation of gay people in this country has changed, so the situation of the gay writer has changed, and almost entirely for the better.

The "second generation" of younger gay writers appearing as the eighties got under way did not share with their predecessors the initial experience of confronting a homophobic literary culture head on, when it was a victory simply to get a gay novel published or reviewed (no matter how condescendingly) in the mainstream national media. This work had been done, the situation was improved. The issue now was the age-old plaint of any writer: how to make a decent living.

And here arose a problem. A gay book is defined in the publishing industry as a book directed toward a gay readership—the gay public. And while this gay public *is* expanding (a decade ago there were some nine gay bookstores in this country; there are today thirty-two), this market is still limited. For the gay writer trying to earn a decent income, there were two possibilities: the continued growth of the gay public which would provide more readers, or the chance to sell their books to the more numerous straight audience.

So it is not surprising that more and more one hears of gay writers who bridle at being labelled gay writers, who wish their book to be marketed to the so-called general public, whose ambition is to see their books in chain stores rather than their local gay bookstore.

What could possibly be wrong with this, you might wonder—every writer, after all, wants to make as much money from his or her book as possible. This is only reasonable. They do not want to be labelled gay writers or have their books categorized as gay fiction because of commercial considerations. Like all writers, they want to reach a larger public and sell more books. Which seems fair enough at first glance, but this position has some implications worth noticing. The

premise is that a book will be more successful, a writer will make more money, if the work is not identified as gay. Now, why is this? Because, evidently, the so-called general public and the literary establishment prefer not to buy books by explicitly gay authors, books "only" about gay life, books that, in some sense, *are* gay. And, by and large, I think this is probably true. They don't. It has been true for a good long time now, in fact; there is nothing new in this analysis of the situation. What is new—and to me discouraging—is the idea that instead of facing this fact head on, and *changing* it, some members of this second generation believe the best strategy is to avoid the outright identification, the specific and glaring label: "gay."

Now I ask you: what is this except a literary version of the old strategy of "passing," or not calling undue attention to the fact that one is gay. Because to call undue attention to the fact that one is gay is to open oneself to homophobic attack, to insist that one's book is a gay novel is to risk...having the public label it a gay novel. And gay novels they don't rush to read. Once again the old blanket of silence.

The basic flaw with this strategy is that it would leave the homophobic response intact. It would not change the basic situation. But the basic situation is what must be changed if there is to be anything like a gay literature or a gay culture. These writers believe they can sidestep the issue, that they can ask that their books be judged from an exclusively literary point of view, as if the literary establishment had not in fact been a constituent and active part of the homophobic culture of this society.

To me this seems shortsighted and self-destructive, for homophobia still courses through the structures of this literary establishment, as it does through the culture at large. To believe that the homophobia which reached demented proportions in this country in the fifties and sixties could be eradicated in the last twenty years is simply silly. Like racism, homophobia has been endemic in the West for many centuries and like black people we must face the fact that it will not disappear soon—face the fact, live with the fact,

and produce our work and structure our ways of life in the teeth of that fact.

Black authors do not get joy from the fact that they have to do their writing in what remains, both subtly and blatantly, a racist society. But they do it, and often with more grace than anybody has the right to expect. A couple of weeks ago, I watched an almost classic liberal, Bill Moyers, on his television show ask August Wilson, "Don't you ever get tired of writing about the black experience?" A question of such breathtaking stupidity that even Wilson paused. Would Moyers ask John Updike whether he ever gets tired of writing about the white experience? Would he ask Dostoevsky if he ever gets tired of writing about the Russian experience? Would he ask Sophocles whether he ever gets tired of writing about the Greek experience?

Just think for a moment about what is really being said here. The implication is that "the black experience" is somehow limited, is something one could get tired of, is not inexhaustible the way life is. After all, one can't quite imagine even Moyers asking, "Don't you ever get tired of writing about the human experience?" I mean, what else is there to write about? And unfortunately the reason one cannot imagine Moyers asking Updike, "Don't you ever get tired of writing about the white experience?" is that he probably equates "the white experience" with life itself. And this is the crux of the matter, in this case

Gay writers are in no way diminished because they write about life as it presents itself to gay people.

the crux of cultural racism. The idea that somebody's life is of less extent, of smaller consequence, carries less weight is at the heart of racism, or in our case, of homophobia.

Black writers have much practice dealing with this type of idiocy. Listen, for instance, to Toni Morrison in an article last year in the *New York Times*:

Ms. Morrison said that unlike some authors who despise being labeled, she does not mind being called a black writer, or a black woman writer. 'I've decided to define that, rather than having it be defined for me,' she said. 'In the beginning, people would say, 'Do you regard yourself as a black writer, or a black woman writer?' So at first I was glib, and said I'm a black woman writer, because I understood that they were trying to suggest that I was 'bigger' than that, or 'better' than that. I simply refused to accept their view of bigger and better. I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither. I really do. So it seems to me that my world did not shrink because I was a black female writer. It just got bigger.'

Ethan Mordden makes the same point in the introduction to *Buddies*.

Despite straights' lack of comprehension and outright intolerance, gays inevitably comprehend straights, because, whatever our sexuality, we all grow up within the straight culture as participants....Gays understand straights; but straights don't understand gays any more than whites understand

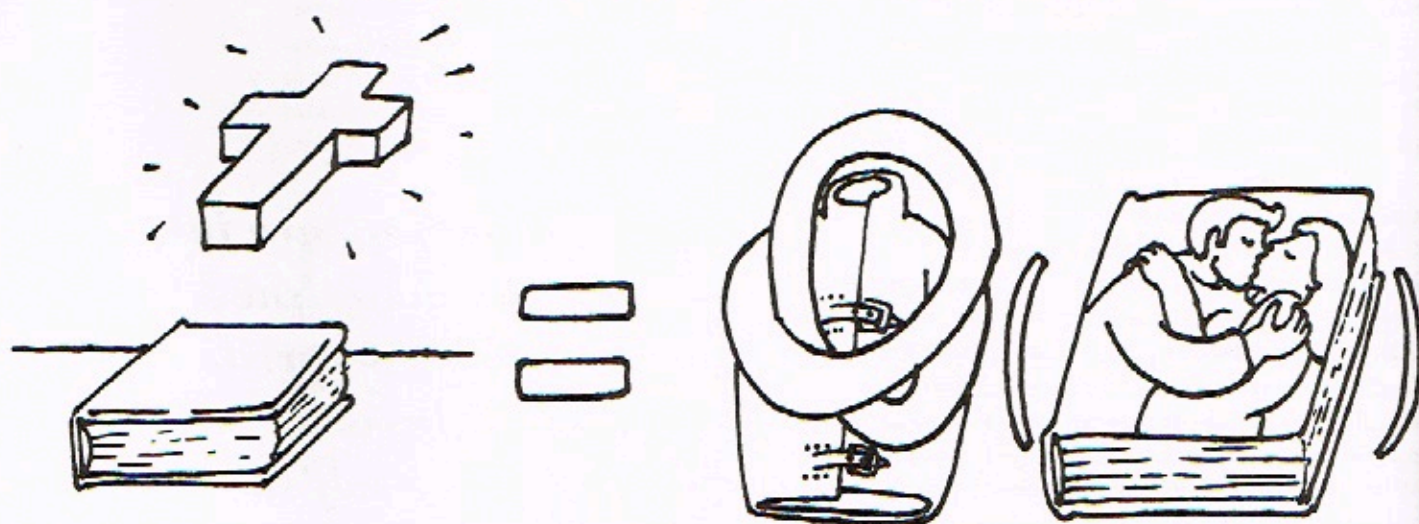
blacks or Christians understand Jews, however good their intentions.

There is much confusion about this topic of minority writers, or regional writers. This confusion stems from the insistence of those straight middle-class white men who control the organs of cultural definition in this society that the only valid, universal image of the contemporary human condition is...the straight middle-class white man. This is pure cultural politics—the use of culture to reinforce the politically dominant position of one group within the society.

But as well as being a power struggle, this attitude has a much deeper, more insidious effect, one that would be especially deplorable if it confused the writers themselves. To demote our literature to a peripheral status, to try to make our writers "merely" gay writers is not only a classic power play, it also entails a basic and total misunderstanding of the nature of writing. As Jean Strouse pointed out recently (in the *New York Times Book Review*):

Louise Erdrich's novels, regional in the best sense, are 'about' the experience of Native Americans the way Toni Morrison's are about black people, William Faulkner's and Eudora Welty's about the South, Philip Roth's and Bernard Malamud's about Jews: *the specificity implies nothing provincial or small* [emphasis added].

(One might note parenthetically that we don't see the words: "Edmund White's and



A: CROSSOVER BOOK = STRAIGHTJACKET (STRAIGHT - JACKET)

Andrew Holleran's are about gay people" in this otherwise lucid and sane declaration.)

Specific does not mean provincial. My god, think of what Jane Austen was able to do within the narrow confines of courtship rituals in early nineteenth century England. Or, to take an example from our own day, consider how the most successful musical in all of Broadway history is described by Charlie Willard, a dance captain for that show:

A Chorus Line managed to find an uncanny kind of universality in the specificity of that white line on the stage. Dealing with the very specific milieu and ambience of chorus dancers, it somehow spoke to everyone, and from the very beginning, it cut across the gypsy story. Because of that, it's often forgotten that it was intended to be a show that celebrated a subculture.

Specific and concrete reality is indeed the origin of all great works of literature. And if Dostoevsky is not diminished because he wrote "only" about the Russians, or Synge the Irish, or Sophocles the Greeks, then gay writers are in no way diminished because they write about life as it presents itself to and is experienced by gay people. The idea that this is somehow a failing, a limitation, is simply absurd and would never have gotten into circulation if it were not a disguise for a political agenda.

Those gay authors who are so anxious to cultivate the crossover audience should realize that the task before us is rather to help bring into existence and further develop a new audience, the gay audience. And the reasoning behind this assertion is very simple. Given the fact that at the moment we live in what continues to be a homophobic society, the idea that gay writers could achieve success with the general public implies either that the general public cease being so homophobic or that the gay writer cease being...so gay. The first—that the general public become less homophobic—is unlikely unless we do something about it; for instance, publish and buy gay books, do our bit to strengthen and enrich the gay community, while making our lives and our art a more public and therefore more accepted fact. The second—that gay writers become less gay—unfortunately is

always a possibility; when I was in college it was classically known as selling out, a cliché admittedly, but a cliché that might fit the situation of someone who doesn't want to be known as a gay writer because he will sell more books, or gain a greater literary reputation that way.

THE TASK BEFORE us is to create a gay literature and a gay culture in the midst of a situation that is hostile to that literature and that culture, and to bend every effort to face up to and eradicate homophobia in this society. The way to do this is to encourage the further emergence of a literate gay public which supports and involves itself with the quite remarkable gay writing that is now being created. Once there is a sizable and substantial gay reading public, the books they buy and read and value will attract the interest and the curiosity of the so-called "general public." The way to the general audience is through the specific audience, the way to the general public is through the gay public.

The present generation of gay writers, both those who emerged in the seventies and those who appeared in the eighties, were called into existence by a remarkable social revolution, this unexpected and mighty upsurge of collective energy that started with Stonewall, *whether they know it or not*. Of course, it's better to know it. Not to know it, to ignore or forget it, means not to know where one is, means to cut yourself off from the historical roots, the cultural energy that sustains the creative act and sets it within a social and political context, that gives it not only meaning but value. ▼

This paper was originally delivered in a slightly different form at the Second Annual Conference of the Lesbian and Gay Studies Center at Yale, "Pedagogy and Politics/1988" in October, 1988.

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About the artist: Scott Lifshutz does odd jobs in New York.

*In this discussion, I am referring only to gay male writers. Because of the historical connection of gay women to the (non-gay) women's movement, the crossover situation for lesbian writers is completely different, and perhaps more promising. My own impression is that gay women writers—like the remarkable surge of black women writers—can more easily find an audience for their work among non-gay women influenced by the feminist movement (though, of course, I could be mistaken). There is nothing analogous to this in the situation of gay men.

Ms. Achtenberg (Almost) Goes to Sacramento

Campaigning for the California State Assembly



by Debra Chasnoff



Photography by Barbara J. Maggiani

ELECTORAL POLITICS has never been a game I wanted to play. Campaign victories always seemed too limited, too removed—too much giving our power over to somebody else to do for us rather than doing it for ourselves. But a year ago I decided to cross the line from heckling politicians to trying to elect one of them when Roberta Achtenberg, a 37-year-old civil rights attorney and open lesbian, ran for one of San Francisco's seats in the California State Assembly.

Several factors motivated me to say yes when Roberta asked if I'd join her campaign as its press secretary and issues coordinator: the opportunity to add to the pitifully few number of open lesbians in public and powerful positions; a chance to push a specific political vision of coalition building between the lesbian and gay community and other communities shutout from the power structure; and a time to just say no to incumbent straight politicians who think they're the ones who should pick our elected representatives and gay leaders.

Some of what I saw during the three months of the campaign dismayed me: the hypocrisy of many liberal politicians when it comes to fighting homophobia, the manipulative power of the press, and the way personal ambitions can often interfere with the larger political needs of the lesbian and gay, and wider progressive community. To my surprise, though, helping a progressive lesbian run a tough, smart campaign for a highly visible public office turned out to be exhilarating for me personally, and collectively empowering for the larger community.

I didn't know Roberta Achtenberg well, but I always had been impressed with the work she did heading up the Lesbian Rights Project, one of the only civil rights organizations in the country that consistently protects lesbian and gay families. I quickly learned more about her: she had been a dean at New College School of Law, served on the board of the Bay Area United Way, and edited *Sexual*

Orientation and the Law, the litigator's bible on gay issues. She led a lawyer's delegation to Nicaragua and did welfare rights advocacy for years. Roberta also struck me as having the right kind of personality for electoral politics: she's energetic, articulate, funny, and has that rare ability to communicate well with all kinds of people.

But I didn't decide to spend 70-hours-a-week courting reporters and writing position papers just to build a fan club for one person. In 1976 Harvey Milk ran for the same assembly seat. No other openly gay person had run for the California State Assembly since then and few lesbians have run for public office—ever. It was time to try again. I was inspired by the way Jesse Jackson was climbing in the presidential primaries, perhaps permanently changing national assumptions about who has a right to run for office, who is fit to govern, and what the terms of the debate should be.

After living in San Francisco for a couple of years, it had started to bug me that there were so few openly gay or lesbian public officials in a city where our community supposedly has so much clout. And, for such a relatively progressive city, the agenda of most of its liberal politicians is limited to simply voting the right way. There's a vacuum when it comes to leaders who go a step further—who challenge deeper beliefs about who is allowed to hold power and the way that power should be wielded. This would be a campaign in which the candidate repeatedly would call for the majority of minorities in our district to unite, a vision I rarely hear from white straight liberals.

There also was a more personal reason that motivated me to work on this campaign. My lover was four months pregnant and I was preparing to join the ranks of the small, but growing numbers of non-biological les-

bian mothers. Roberta also had become a mother since she came out and I liked the idea that as people got to know her, they would get to know about another lesbian who had had a kid. Perhaps my family would enjoy some of the benefits that more public familiarity with lesbian mothers could bring.

A very liberal assemblyman, Art Agnos, just had been elected mayor; Roberta would be running in a special election to fill the vacancy caused by his victory. Our opponent was John Burton, a former US congressman and member of the state assembly whose family has dominated San Francisco Democratic politics for more than 25 years. Burton left Congress in 1982 when his cocaine and alcohol addictions became public knowledge, and had spent the last six years working as a lawyer-lobbyist for some of the more pro-development, bad-for-the-environment corporations in town. In the 1960s and 1970s, John Burton and his late brother, former US Congressman Phil Burton, were among the best of the Democrats when it came to promoting grassroots activism. But in recent years, John and his buddies have paid less attention to bottom-up political activism, preferring instead to control access to power from their places at the top.

Despite Burton's activities after he abandoned public service, most political pundits handed him victory the moment his candidacy surfaced because of his family name and liberal good deeds of the past. Many politically savvy folks predicted that Roberta wouldn't get more than ten percent of the vote. But other progressives saw Agnos' mayoral victory as a sign the electorate in San Francisco was shifting back to the left. And our district was probably the most liberal in the state, with some pollsters estimating that 30 percent of those likely to vote in this race would be lesbians or gay men. Perhaps the



The race demonstrated just how far most traditional liberals are willing to go on behalf of the lesbian and gay community's re-empowerment. Not far.

city was ready for a new type of leadership after all.

A Good Liberal Isn't Good Enough

For years gay politicians have cultivated the support of many of San Francisco's straight liberal politicians. In return for lesbians and gay men walking precincts and turning out the gay vote for them, these elected officials have helped nurture three lesbian and gay Democratic clubs, usually voted the right way on human rights legislation, appointed openly gay individuals to their staffs, and helped a few gay men and lesbians inch their way up the Democratic party ladder of power and respectability.

The race between Roberta and Burton, though, demonstrated just how far most of those traditional liberals are willing to go on behalf of the lesbian and gay community's real empowerment. Not far.

For example, San Francisco's other representative in the state assembly, Willie Brown, has an excellent record on gay rights and AIDS legislation and, as Speaker of the Assembly, deserves credit for staving off right-wing attempts to dominate the California legislature. But when it came to filling the vacancy in the eastern half of the city, helping the gay community make history was not on his to-do list.

When Roberta first decided to run, she paid a courtesy call to Brown, who also was Jesse Jackson's national campaign co-chair. She explained that if she were elected, Brown would be able to count on her support 99 percent of the time. But he was not interested in a candidate he didn't hand-pick, one whose primary agenda wouldn't be to help him keep his speakership intact. Brown's rhetoric about giving more power to minority communities proved to be just that. "You people aren't ready to represent yourselves," he told her.

This special election was called in the same year in which several Democratic seats throughout the state were in danger of being lost to Republicans. But apparently the specter of the queers having one of their own in the state capitol was so disturbing that Brown felt compelled to use his resources

in this race to make sure his liberal Democrat won out over ours. He made it clear he would do whatever it took to prevent Roberta from beating his old buddy John Burton. In fact, much of the \$750,000 war chest Burton amassed for this race came from political action committees that Brown controlled.

But much to Brown's and other observers' surprise, Roberta started picking up endorsements from activist organizations all over town, and blocking Burton from receiving those of groups that in the past probably would have gone for him (like the Democratic Party, for one). So in addition to funneling money to Burton, who started off with immeasurably greater resources than we did, Brown had to spend a good deal of his time trying to undo the damage Roberta was doing to Burton's image.

Other politicians who, over the years, have given lip service to the needs of lesbians and gays, but owe their careers to Brown or the Burton family, also mysteriously lost interest in our empowerment during this election. Left-of-center Nancy Walker, for instance, then president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, sent voters a letter on behalf of Burton warning them against making a choice "simply about symbols."

The debts she and a few other prominent women lawmakers owed to Burton *et al.* overrode women's solidarity. Roberta is a leader in the women's movement, as attested to by the vigorous support she received from feminist organizations and PACS. But the gals at the top of the city's power structure didn't deal with their conflicting allegiances by simply remaining neutral; instead they assisted Burton in efforts to portray him as more pro-gay and feminist than Roberta.

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi showed up at an Ellie Smeal Feminization of Power rally packed with our supporters, to extoll the virtues of women running for office—while sporting a red and yellow Burton button on her lapel. Then she sent out a district-wide mailer—on behalf of a man who missed or voted the wrong way on key abortion votes—that swooned, "John has achieved so much more for women [than Roberta. He]...is

singularly responsible for electing three women to Congress." Funny how easy it is to forget that lesbians are women too.

Political muscle also interfered with some other people's abilities to stick to their political priorities. Despite Burton's lobbying activities on behalf of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), and many big-time corporate developers, one-half of the city's housing and environmental activist groups still endorsed him (while Roberta garnered the other endorsements). The threat of what Burton would do to these groups if he were elected and they *hadn't* endorsed him prompted some organizations to back him against the desires of many of their key activists. After an endorsement interview with the Sierra Club, for instance, a high-level staffer told Roberta: "You are one of the most well-informed and articulate candidates we have ever interviewed. We are really impressed." But behind the scenes pressure prevailed and soon full color glossy pictures of whales imprinted with "Sierra Club Supports John Burton" popped up in mailboxes throughout the city.

The Selfish Agenda of Some Gay Poles

Straight liberal politicians who have been good on gay issues weren't the only ones for whom this electoral contest posed problems. Some local lesbian and gay Democratic party activists felt beholden to the Burton family—not so much to John, but to his late brother Phil—for personally giving them a leg up on the liberal machine. Roberta's candidacy, however, germinated outside of those networks; the fact that she "hadn't paid her dues" in party circles led a few gay activists—who could have lent significant support—to fade into the woodwork instead. And a tiny group of gay men and lesbians opted to use their names to help return John Burton to public office.

Voters in the heavily gay Castro neighborhood were sent a Burton campaign letter from Rick Pacurar, former president of the Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club. In this mailing, Pacurar gave Burton—who had an abysmal record of absent-



Roberta Achtenberg (r) after a campaign rally, with her partner Mary Morgan and their son, Benjie.

Roberta!

teeism his last six years in public office—more credit for the gay and lesbian liberation movement, and for fighting AIDS than he gave gay men and lesbians themselves:

I have known Roberta Achtenberg and respected her for some time. But John Burton's election to the Assembly will mean the difference between life and death for hundreds of our friends and neighbors...John Burton stood up for us before Stonewall awakened in us a sense of our own power...John Burton was among the first Members of Congress to recognize AIDS as the terrible challenge it has become. Before many of us realized it...

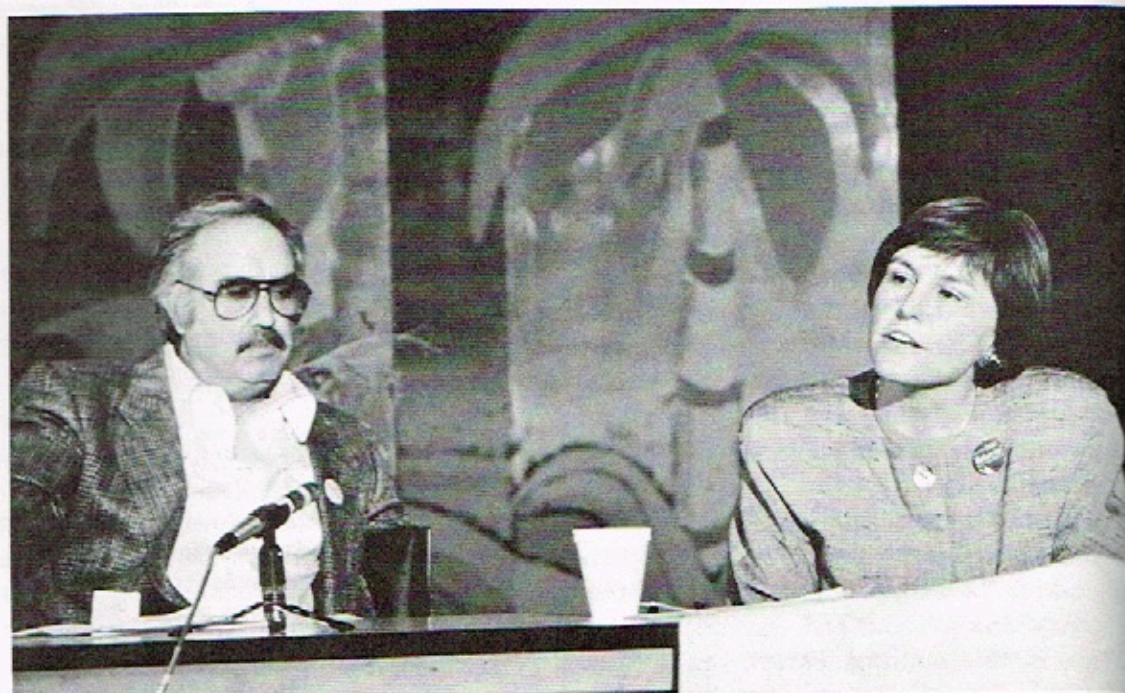
Burton's handful of gay faces showed up in gay newspaper ads for him. I don't know what kind of impression their allegiance to Burton made on the average gay voter, but I wonder how many people knew the full story about who those particular individuals were and what they personally had at stake in this election. Almost every one of them was employed by Burton or Pelosi.

There also were some prominent lesbians and gay men, who supported Roberta's candidacy on paper, but were invisible when it came to providing concrete assistance or who went so far as to provide quotable doubts to the press about how well Roberta could expect to do. Dick Pabich, for example, who had run gay Supervisor Harry Britt's Congressional campaign against Nancy Pelosi the year before, told the progressive *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, "Roberta has an enormous amount of work to do just to get to the point where Harry started...I think Roberta will get across-the-board support in the gay community, but there's a question of how much enthusiasm there will be."

While it was true that we had an enormous amount of work to do, I had a hard time understanding why someone like Pabich—whose career in politics dates back to

Harvey Milk days—didn't have the where-withal to keep his reservations to himself. And he wasn't the only one. In theory these lesbian and gay politicians wanted Roberta to do well; in practice, it appeared that other factors interfered—burnout from Britt's grueling race the year before, male discomfort with seeing a lesbian grab the headlines for once, or the simple fear that Roberta's success might somehow compete with theirs or that of the candidates *they* worked for.

I must admit that as a result of working on this campaign, I developed a similar loyalty to "my" candidate and fascination with the gossip at city hall and the statehouse. During the campaign, we always were scheming to make Roberta look good—to boost her political net worth. That drive doesn't die just because the election is over, especially when a candidate becomes a symbol of an entire political movement. There always is a potential conflict between personal loyalties and maintaining political integrity—especially in electoral politics, an arena which is inherently more competitive than other kinds of political organizing. It is a continual challenge to keep your eyes on what's best for the entire community and not just for one individual's career.



John Burton and Roberta Achtenberg at the League of Women Voters debate.

Promoting Bigotry & Eating Our Own

Not only were we, as Willie Brown said, "not ready to represent ourselves," we also couldn't possibly represent people who aren't gay. In the Britt/Pelosi race (the previous major electoral battle for the gay community) Pelosi's winning slogan was "A Voice That Will Be Heard"—a not-so-subtle warning that queers can't have clout where it counts.

Burton wound up adopting a similar strategy. Close to election day, this supposed friend of the gay community told a television news reporter that Roberta was:

probably a good attorney in custody cases involving gay and lesbian parents, but...[her]...base is so narrow she would only represent gay and lesbian causes in the assembly and not be able to represent the rest of the people who live in the district.

Despite our campaign's repeated descriptions of Roberta's legislative agenda on affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, campaign finance reform, environmental protection, reproductive rights—you name it—Burton's phonebank staff told voters that Roberta was a "single-issue candidate." Burton didn't adopt this tactic because he really thought Roberta would only show up to vote on the days the assembly was considering gay rights bills; his polls showed what ours did—the race was close and his campaign needed to rev up voters' reservations about pulling the lever for a lesbian.

Burton's platform had boiled down to one line of thought: if you come from any particular community, you are less able to represent all of us than if you come from no community at all. That same refrain was playing on the national airwaves about Jesse Jackson, so it was ironic, to say the least, that the candidate who was wholly-backed by Jackson's national campaign chairman was stooping to this kind of move.

Homophobia generated by Burton's campaign was not the only kind we had to contend with—we ran into the internalized variety as well. It made sense that Burton repeatedly would state that Roberta was not as qualified to serve in the state assembly as he was; candidates always try to one-up each

other based on the number of years they've held office or the stature of the positions they have held. It was disappointing, though, to hear members of our own community question Roberta's qualifications as well. "Roberta's a great person," they would whisper to me, "but could she really do the job?"

Art Agnos, when he first was elected to the office Roberta was seeking, had been a social worker and legislative aide. John Burton, when he first was elected to the same office, was a young lawyer who had never before held elected office.

Roberta was the head of a civil rights organization, had been a law school dean, and had 13 years of public interest law practice under her belt. How do we determine exactly what experience an individual must have in order to get the "qualified" stamp of approval?

I suspect people undervalued Roberta's accomplishments because legislators have created a mystique out of the tasks they actually perform and because women often have to be twice as good as men to get any job.

But it also seemed their doubts simply masked their own apprehension that lesbians and gay men aren't *really* good enough to hold public office, or a fear that our first representative might not be *perfect*. I guess since we live in a society that constantly tells us that gay is second rate, we are bound to believe it ourselves sometimes.

It also was the lesbian and gay reporters I dealt with rather than their straight counterparts who at times seemed the most ambivalent about Roberta's candidacy. Perhaps because these journalists also were gay they needed to prove their objectivity—by examining our every move with a microscope while a simple magnifying glass seemed to do just fine for our opponent.

One time the editor of a Minneapolis gay newspaper called to follow-up on a press release announcing Roberta's candidacy. "You say in here that Achtenberg and her partner



The race was close so our opponent tried to rev up voters' reservations about pulling the lever for a lesbian.



Mary Morgan are the parents of a son. What's going on here?" he demanded to know. "Which one of them is really his mother?"

"Roberta and Mary are both Benjie's parents," I answered, as I had had to dozens of reporters. "They don't discuss the details of his conception."

He went on to accuse us being part of a lesbian conspiracy that was setting back the gains the gay male movement had made in promoting public discussion of sexuality, and threatened to send the story,

"Lesbian Candidate for State Assembly Claims Stork Brought Her Baby," to the *National Enquirer* unless I put Roberta on the phone to explain herself.

Then there was the time an editor of one of the local gay papers cornered me at a campaign event to ask why Roberta was avoiding the "L-word." "Liberal?" I wondered to myself. "In that candidates debate the other night," he said, "I noticed that Roberta never said that she was a lesbian." Seems

you are damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Coming Up!, the Bay Area's gay paper with the largest lesbian readership, went into this campaign with a questionable history when it came to electoral endorsements; it had sided with the less progressive, and straight, Pelosi in the contest with Britt the year before. Kim Corsaro, the editor, told me in February she thought there wasn't much enthusiasm in the community for Roberta, but then she barely ran anything about the race in her paper to help do anything about what she saw as a problem.

Coming Up! finally endorsed Roberta a few days before the April 15 election, but Corsaro's article, in addition to containing several factual errors in criticisms she made about the campaign, expressed ambivalence about candidates who make their sexual preference such a big issue (as if we had control over that):

...when you walk into John Burton headquarters, one of the walls is covered with dozens of Polaroid snapshots...[that] look like the Rainbow Coalition—people of every color, trade unionists, environmentalists, progressives of every variety, and even a few gay men and lesbians. The gay community cannot be ignored: that's our message/Achtenberg's message in this campaign. But what does it say about us when other progressives stand together and we stand alone, apart from that coalition, when it appears to everyone else that the only thing we really care about is gay/lesbian rights?

Coming Up! reporters must have attended enough campaign events to know that Roberta was not a gay nationalist to the exclusion of other concerns; for a first-time candidate we had made important strides towards creating the coalition Roberta espoused, and made sure we told the paper about the support we were getting from labor unions, the Chinese community, and other "non-gay" constituencies. Did Corsaro have some personal agenda that led her to downplay the success we did have in this regard? What will take for someone like her to really rally the troops to elect one of our own?

Blowing Up the Bus

Strange behavior in our own community aside, the biggest battle we fought—at least from my vantage point—was against what the mainstream media considered newsworthy. The race received relatively little coverage, partly because the political reporters were all consumed with the antics of those seeking to move into the White House. One time we held a press conference, but only two reporters showed up because a bus had blown up somewhere. After that when we'd plan the week's itinerary, someone always would suggest that Roberta schedule time to go blow up a bus.

Our campaign centered around three major differences between the two candidates: ethics, effectiveness, and bringing minority communities together to change the balance of power in the city. Only the *Bay Guardian* (which ended up endorsing Robert-



One gay reporter threatened to send the story, "Lesbian Candidate for State Assembly Claims Stork Brought Her Baby," to the National Enquirer.





Achtenberg gets a hug on election night, as press secretary Debra Chasnoff (r) surveys the crowd

ta) picked up on the contradictions between Burton wrapping himself in a liberal, environmentalist cloak while maintaining his hefty retainer from PG&E. When we uncovered the fact that Burton had missed more than one-third of the votes his last six years in Congress, including key votes on abortion rights, environmental protection, assistance for old people, and job training, the daily papers couldn't be bothered.

Instead they portrayed the race as a personality contest—between the dyke dipping her toe into electoral waters for the first time and the reformed junkie wanting to dive back in. And least surprising of all, they gave no news inches to our talk of a new political coalition challenging the status quo.

Then there were the endorsement interviews with the newspaper editorial boards. I always felt from the way the men on these boards (and they were *all* white men over 50) could barely look us in the eyes, that they had never knowingly sat around a big oak table with two lesbians before.

At the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the questioning began with why Roberta insisted on being identified as a lesbian every time a reporter wrote a story about her—an absurdity that actually provided us with an opportunity to inform those at the top that that wasn't actually our goal when it came to news coverage.

The editors at the *San Francisco Examiner* (city paper number two) wanted to know why Roberta opposed mandatory HIV testing, a question I can't imagine they ever asked our opponent. In the course of her explanation, she brought up the concept of risk groups, and parenthetically suggested that she probably was less likely to contract AIDS than they were—an observation which led to a very hasty end to the meeting.

At the *San Francisco Progress* (city paper number three), it was unclear whether homophobia or inside political maneuvers were at play. At an initial interview with the reporters and editors who would be covering the race, we were promised a separate endorsement

meeting with the publisher. Weeks later when I called to schedule that rendez-vous, I was told that the publisher already had met Roberta (they had shaken hands once) and that the *Progress* would be endorsing Burton. Our supporters spent the rest of the day jamming the paper's phone lines. After that, though the paper did endorse Burton, its actual reporting about Roberta was reasonable.

The Good News

When we began the campaign a columnist at the *Chronicle* described the contest as one between the "woman with no last name versus the man with no first name"—a comment both about how the "Roberta!" on our signs and buttons was not a household name, and about how Burton was trying to play up his family's reputation while downplaying what he had been doing since he left Congress. On election eve, the front page headline of the *Examiner* blared, "Achtenberg, Burton battle to bitter end." It wasn't a cheery proclamation, but it did reflect the fact that despite our frustration with the press, in three short months Roberta had become more than "a little-known lesbian" (as another columnist had described her).

The entire lesbian and gay community won a victory every time a story ran about Roberta which presented her in a credible, fair manner. When the *Progress* ran a front page picture of Roberta holding Benjie in her arms, for example, we knew this campaign was important for reasons other than the final vote tally. A lesbian was in the news, and she wasn't having her child taken away, being thrown out of the army for kissing in the barracks, or being dragged away from an AIDS demonstration by cops wearing rubber gloves.

Besides making a favorable impression on the general public, this campaign helped heal some rifts in the lesbian and gay community itself. Most importantly, it brought men and women together in an unprecedented way. Separatism and chauvinism may still lurk beneath the surface, but there were an awful lot of "Men Coming Out for Roberta" fundraising events. Perhaps the alliances that lesbians and gay men have forged in the context of AIDS organizing finally have spilled over into other arenas as well.

The Achtenberg/Burton race came on the heels of two highly divisive elections in the San Francisco gay and lesbian community: the Art Agnos/John Molinari race for mayor and the Britt/Pelosi congressional contest. Burton's inroads were minimal. For the first time in a long time, the community had a candidate who garnered the endorsement of just about all the gay papers, organizations and individuals with name recognition in the community—even the Republicans.

As a result, the campaign raised more money than anyone predicted possible. Many wealthy, more conservative gay men who perhaps would prefer a representative whose views were to the right of Roberta's, supported her candidacy with sizable donations. She was able to convince them that the benefits of having an openly gay legislator outweighed their concerns about her positions on issues like urban development.

The fact that the community was solidly behind Roberta enabled us to take the campaign on the road and receive the financial backing of lesbians and gay men all over the country. There are only two openly gay or lesbian state legislators in the entire United States, Karen Clark and Allan Spear, both of Minnesota.* People in many states agreed this race was a rare opportunity to increase that paltry representation. With their help, we raised close to \$300,000, mostly in small donations—probably the most money any openly lesbian or gay candidate for state office ever has raised.

While gay leaders were closing ranks to stand together behind this candidate, leaders from other communities were breaking ranks to voice their interest in the kind of political change Roberta's election would bring to San Francisco. City supervisors, the Sheriff, school

and college board members, and dozens of activist organizations stood up to the Burton-Pelosi-Brown royal court and backed Roberta.

On election day, we didn't win, but Roberta did receive 36 percent of the vote—far better than any of the city's political pundits had predicted. In another context those kinds of results might not have seemed impressive. But given where we started, what we were up against and the little time we had to do it, accolades were in order, and indeed they poured in.

Politics as usual had been given a real run for its money and the post-election rumbling was loud. Even the usually skeptical *San Francisco Chronicle* admitted we had accomplished quite a feat:

Achtenberg ran a strong race as a political novice facing long odds and a huge fundraising disadvantage. Her respectable showing was both a personal victory and a symbolic demonstration of the strength of the city's gay community.

A New Kind of Candidate

It's probably true that lesbians or gay men only could undertake this kind of campaign in this country's most liberal cities. As one southern lesbian activist told us, "This all sounds like Disneyland to me." That means that for the foreseeable future, our electoral battles most likely will occur within the Democratic party, against politicians like John Burton rather than Republican right-wingers.

If we run against other "liberals" (or as "progressives" against liberals—the terms increasingly are losing their distinction), we must ask voters to do more than simply compare how the candidates would vote on any given issue. As John Burton always was eager to point out, "If you gave Roberta Achtenberg and me a multiple choice quiz, I'm sure we'd vote the same way 99 percent of the time."

Scratch the surface, though, and these two liberals do not have the same broader political agenda at all. Even if you put questions about Burton's ethics and energy level aside, his best rhetoric emphasized what he was going to do *for* people—a continuation of the top-down politics that enabled him to run and win in the first place. Roberta's candida-

cy, on the other hand, emerged from a political movement and reflected a more far-reaching vision for change. She talked about working *with* all of San Francisco's communities, about all of us going to the statehouse together.

It's easy—as the media tried—to reduce that difference to a mere variation in personal style or semantics. Our challenge is to make the distinction between the quality of leadership each candidate offers more visible to the voters, and to insist that tangible empowerment of lesbians and gay men must be a priority for all those claiming to be left-of-center.

In this election, that distinction did hit home for many. Of course we made our share of mistakes that we'll try to correct in future campaigns. Nonetheless, Roberta's candidacy provided a kind of inspiration, sense of accomplishment, and pride that is unusual even when you win on election day. One of the people who wrote to Roberta after the election seemed to capture the sentiments of many:

...thank you for giving me and so many others a dream we so desperately need right now...for involving me in a very real and truly personal way in the political process for the first time in my life; for running a campaign characterized by integrity, honesty, professionalism, and spirit; and for not being afraid to try to do what most thought was impossible, and which you proved is not....
[We are] tremendously proud. ▼

*In November 1988, Cal Anderson, an openly gay man who was appointed to fill a vacancy in the Washington State Senate, was re-elected, becoming the third such official.

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About the photographer: Barbara J. Maggiani, a political activist and photojournalist, currently resides in San Francisco while awaiting reincarnation as a sailfish in the waters off Key West.

BREAKING & ENTERING

A PLAY ON/ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN

by Sarah Schulman

SYLVIA

What's the matter?

BERNIECE

I just realized something.

SYLVIA

What?

BERNIECE

I just realized that I'm not a lesbian anymore.
I realized that women don't have fun together.
I realized that that's not love. I realized that
men are heroes after all.

SYLVIA

What is your definition of a hero?



BERNIECE

Someone you can be proud of. To be proud
someone they have to be bigger than you.
You can look up to them. You can feel safe
when they are near you. Especially a man
with soft skin. When a man is near you who
has soft skin, soft and sloping like a woman,
then you can feel safe.

SYLVIA

But he's not a woman.

BERNIECE

No.

SYLVIA

What is your definition of fun?

BERNIECE

Fun is when you get what you've always
imagined. When you've always known what
you want and then you get it. With a woman
you can't have this because you've never
imagined what you wanted. There's no grati-
fication. No gratification at all. Besides, don't
forget the most important thing.

SYLVIA

What is the most important thing?

BERNIECE

The most important thing is that he has a
penis. A penis is the best. It goes inside you
and there's pressure. It's always there. You
always see it. It grows in your hand.

SYLVIA

A clitoris grows in your hand.

BERNIECE

Yes, that's true, but only if you pay close at-
tention. Sometimes I get tired of paying atten-
tion. A penis grows without even having to not

it. Lesbians hate penises. I never met a lesbian who didn't. Don't you?

SYLVIA

Only when they're in my face.

BERNIECE

When are they in your face?

SYLVIA

Every minute of everyday.

BERNIECE

See what I mean?

(Enter Peter)

PETER

I came home early. Two days early. Now I am here.

SYLVIA

What do you want?

PETER

Guess.

BERNIECE

I know.

SYLVIA

How do you know what he wants without him saying it?

BERNIECE

I know because he's a man. Men don't have to say what they want. We already know. That's why I'm not a lesbian anymore. Lesbians have to say what they want. It's too noisy.

SYLVIA

Hello Peter.

PETER

I read a book. I read it on the train. On the first page was a word that reminded me of my loneliness. The word reminded me of my helplessness. It told me I was alone. I was sad. I had no friends and no one to take care of me. I have no one to take care of me because I have been abandoned. I was abandoned and over-protected. I was given everything and nothing. It ruined me. It made me awkward. Now I am vulnerable as a result. I am lost. I am a lost boy who cannot cry. I cannot cry. I cannot put up curtains. No one told me how. I have a large room that I cannot use because there are no curtains. The neighbors can look in and see my penis. I have to hide in the

smaller room. When I sit there I am alone. I feel alone. I feel hurt and soft. I am soft like a child. My skin slopes like a woman's. But I am not a woman. A woman leaves you when you are down. She walks out on you when you are vulnerable. If I was not vulnerable I would walk out on her, but I am, so I can't. I have to be morose. She forces me into it. I'm hungry and there is no food. I can't buy food, the stairs are too long. There was a flood. The food was burnt. I have to eat alone because she's a lesbian.

SYLVIA

Not anymore.

PETER

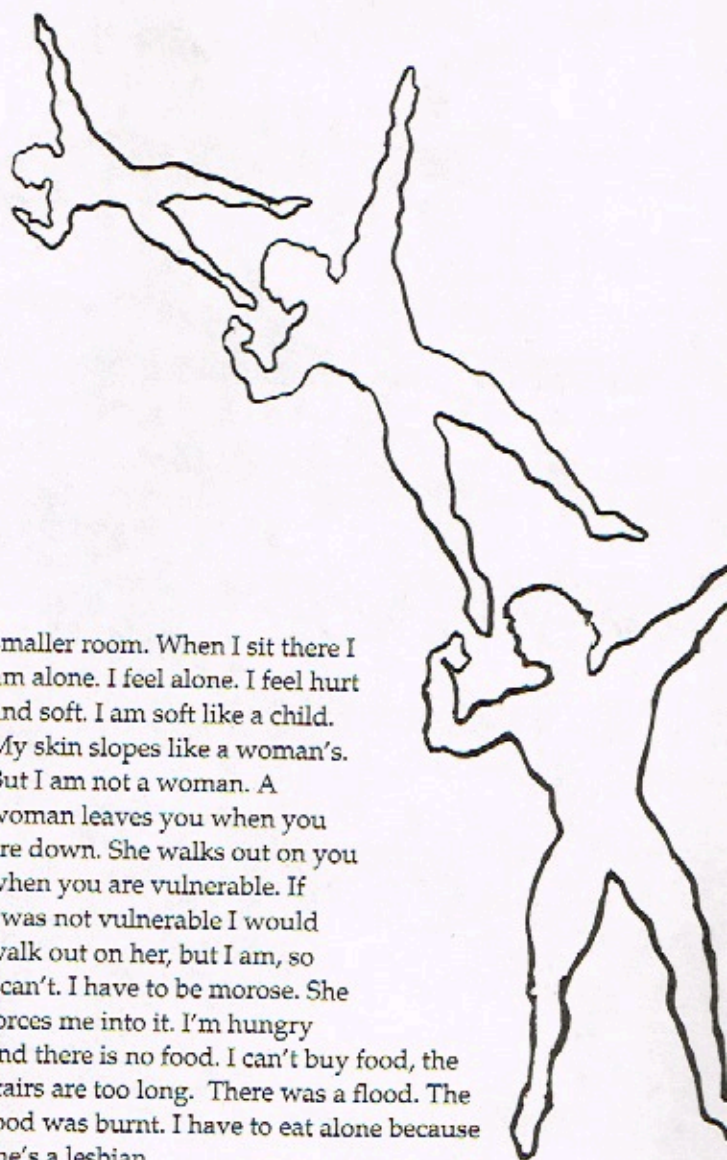
Is that true?

BERNIECE

My hero.

THE END. ▼

Sarah Schulman is the author of a number of produced stage plays and four novels: The Sophie Horowitz Story (Naiad Press, 1984), Girls, Visions and Everything (Seal Press, 1986), After Delores (E.P. Dutton, 1988), and People In Trouble, which will be published by E.P. Dutton in 1990.



All Dressed Up, But No Place to Go

STYLE WARS AND THE NEW LESBIANISM

by Arlene Stein

*Photography by Isa Massu**





PHOTO BY VICTORIA KAUFMAN

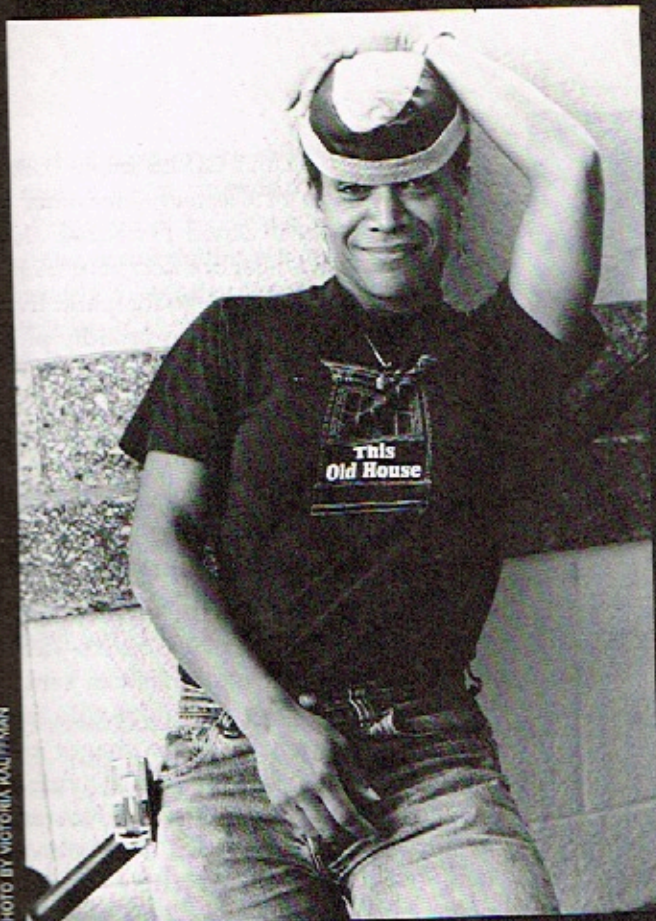


PHOTO BY VICTORIA KAUFMAN



"The women feel that in their choice of clothing they are striking a blow against the consumerism of a capitalist society as well as leveling class distinctions that might exist in the community. Their clothing mostly comes from "free boxes," in which people discard their still usable clothing to be recycled by anyone who wants it. Typical clothing consists of Levis or other sturdy pants, t-shirts, workshirts..."¹

As I read these words, from an account of San Francisco's lesbian community circa 1978, I find myself wondering whether the author, in her wildest imagination, could possibly have pictured that in 1988, the hottest lesbian club in town would unabashedly display dolled-up go-go dancers on pedestals, patrons clad in leather miniskirts, with nary a flannel shirt in the house.

Lesbian communities, in San Francisco and elsewhere, have undergone tremendous shifts in tone and emphasis during the past decade. A younger generation of lesbians, who have come of age in a period of relative conservatism, are constructing sexual identities that draw upon elements of 1970s lesbian-feminism, 1950s butch-femme, punk, and assorted other influences. In the battle for the redefinition of lesbianism in the eighties, style, along with sex (and the two are perhaps closely related), has become central battleground.



WHEN BOYISH GIRLS make their way onto the pages of *Glamour*, Madonna's out to a bemused David Letterman and actress friend Sandra Bernhard frequent certain lesbian bar in New York, and five dykes go on "Donahue" to proudly proclaim their sexuality, something is going on. Suddenly, almost imperceptibly, lesbians are becoming a more visible part of our cultural landscape.

It is a very different public face than which came before. The man-hating, burning, rabble-rousing dyke—the buxom Fellini's satire in "City of Women" and object of ridicule for many others—long existed with an image of lesbian sensuality that was the stuff of pornographic fantasy. When they do appear, those images increasingly are replaced by real-life symbols of androgynous strength (Martina Navratilova) or quirky artiness (Sandra Bernhard or Lang)—which isn't to say they appear often. And those few times that they do, the "L-word" is almost always conspicuous by its absence.

These trends probably don't signify a generalized thawing of homophobia or sexism as much as they represent the commercialization and popularization of feminist culture and the avant-garde art world—where many lesbians populate in discrete and not-so-discrete ways. Every day millions of women still fight internal and external battles just to claim the freedom of sexual choice. But in a few particularly tolerant areas of the nation, and increasingly among the young, hip, and artsy, it's almost (but not quite) cool to be queer. It is in these pockets, and to a lesser extent other areas of the nation, that the new lesbian fashion is incubating.

The lesbian look has never been monolithic; it's always reflected a rich combination of cultural forms and styles—local and national, underground and commercial, multicolored and polyethnic. But generally speaking, the "new lesbian" face peeking through today's mass culture is young, white and alluring, fiercely independent, and nearly free of the anger that typed her predecessors.



shrill and humorless. To tell whether she is *really* one of us, your radar must be finely tuned. For better or for worse, this is the public face that many younger women who have come out in the eighties are seeing and taking as their models.

What is the meaning of style for contemporary lesbian identity and politics? Are today's lesbian style wars skin-deep, or do they reflect a changed conception of what it means to be a dyke? If a new lesbian has in fact emerged, is she all flash and no substance, or is she at work busily carving out new lesbian politics that strike at the heart of dominant notions of gender and sexuality?

The Elements of (Lesbian) Style

"They loved it! People weren't used to seeing women look the way they looked—dressed up. After that they wouldn't go to a club unless it had a dress code.... Before it was really sad. We really had no place to go." —Caroline Clone, owner of a San Francisco club for "lipstick lesbians."²

In the 1970s, lesbian-feminists fashioned themselves as anti-fashion, flying in the face of reigning standards of femininity, beauty, and respectability. Wearing a flannel shirt and baggy pants was an affront to the dominant culture that liked to keep its women glossy and available, as well as a way for dykes to identify one other. In a world where feminist energies were channeled into the creation of battered women's shelters, anti-pornography campaigns, or women's music festivals, primping and fussing over your hair was strictly taboo.

Lesbian-feminist anti-style was an emblem of refusal, an attempt to strike a blow against the twin evils of capitalism and patriarchy, the fashion industry and the female objectification that fueled it. The flannel-and-denim look was not so much a style as it was anti-style—an attempt to replace the artifice of fashion with a supposed naturalness, free of gender roles and commercialized pretense.

Situated in this framework, today's self-conscious embrace of high-heels, short skirts and other utterly feminine trappings—along with a general revival of interest in fashion and appearance among many lesbians—have

been interpreted by some as a plainly regressive set of developments. When lesbian-feminists see young femmes strutting around in make-up and panty hose, they may see women intent on fitting in, assimilating into the straight world, shedding their anger, and forgetting their roots. It's somewhat like the clash between dark- and light-skinned blacks described by poet Langston Hughes in the 1920s: "The younger blacks were obsessed by money and position, fur coats and flashy cars; their ideals seemed most Nordic and un-Negro." Replace Nordic with "straight," Negro with "lesbian," and you get the picture.

Many lesbians also associate the resurgence of gendered fashion with a return to butch-femme roles and forbidden love in smoky bars. Roles were a central and highly-valued feature of lesbian culture—until they were given a bad rep by feminists and consequently stamped out as vestiges of a patriarchal past.

Today, roles *are* enjoying a renaissance among younger dykes, women who never fully parted with their butch and femme identities, and feminists who are finally recognizing

**In a few particularly
tolerant areas of the nation
it's almost (but not quite)
cool to be queer.**

ing the error of their ways. Many women have found that roles are an erotic charge, a way of understanding sexual preferences, and of identifying and attracting potential lovers and friends. But it's clear that roles mean something very different today than they once did.

Joan Nestle, co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, has written that butch-femme in the fifties was "a conspicuous flag of rebellion" in a highly stigmatized, secretive



world, a means of survival in an age when gender rules were heavy as lead weights. Being a butch was an assertion of strength against very narrow conceptions of what it meant to be a woman. Wearing a leather jacket and slicking back short hair wasn't simply an experiment with style—it was an embrace of one's "true nature" in the face of the dominant culture's notions of what it meant to be a woman: feminine and coy.³

Butch-femme roles, at least in their pre-feminist incarnation, linked sexuality, appearance and, frequently, economic position in a highly ritualized way. Dress was a reflection of sexual style, a signal to potential sexual and non-sexual partners, a clue to one's sensibility on a range of related issues, and a pretty good indicator of whether you worked as a secretary or an elevator operator.

Implicit within that old notion of roles was a great deal of permanence and consistency. One's identity as butch or femme was an essential part of one's being. Once a femme, always a femme. The same for butches. By imposing rules and placing limits on self-expression, roles eroticized difference, providing security and regularity in a tenuous, secretive world. They were often proud statements of lesbian resistance, but they were also the expression of an oppressed

minority faced with a paucity of alternatives.

Today's embrace of roles, though, is not a throwback to the 1950s. For many women adopting a role is more a matter of play than necessity; roles are more ambiguous and less naturalized. Many dykes still identify more strongly with one role than the other, but now there is a greater possibility of choice. Eighties butch-femme—if it accurately can be termed as such—is a self-conscious aesthetic that plays with style and power, rather than an embrace of one's "true" nature against the constraints of straight society. Gone is the tightly con-

structed relationship between personal style, erotic preference, and economic position—the hallmark of roles during the pre-feminist era.

There is no longer a clear one-to-one correspondence between fashion and identity. For many, clothes are transient, interchangeable; you can dress as a femme one day and a butch the next. You can wear a crew-cut along with a skirt. Wearing high heels during the day does not mean you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job. "Different communities have their own styles," commented Joan Nestle recently, "but on a good bar night the variety of self presentation runs the whole gamut from lesbian separatist drag to full fem regalia, to leather and chains."

The new lesbianism is defining itself against the memory of the old by rejecting the anti-style of the past. As the owner of a new lesbian nightclub in San Francisco implies when she praises the fact that women are "finally dressing up," lesbians are feeling good about themselves today (implying that they didn't in the past). Even the *Wall Street Journal* reports that "lipstick" lesbians are clashing with flannel-shirted "crunchies" in the hallowed halls of Yale. Lesbian-feminism is on the wane, and lifestyle lesbianism—particularly among younger, urban dykes, is on the rise.

Lifestyle Versus Politics

Popularized by advertising and marketing experts, *lifestyle* has become one of the buzzwords of the 1980s; it is used to refer to yuppies, gay men, and others thought to possess greater-than-average amounts of disposable income, or those who are at least willing to part with what they have to create the illusion that they do. Implicit in the use of this terminology is the belief that *lifestyle* is opposed to *politics*: you are either self-absorbed and obsessed with Things and Style, or you are ascetic and devoted to Higher Ends.

The American Dream, that manifestly apolitical vision, is predicated on buying a home, filling it with consumer durables, and insulating it as best as you can from outside intrusions. Laboring in dull jobs during the day, we should live for the weekend, for freedom, for shiny objects. The market and its plastic pretensions have pervaded all corners of our lives, distorting our needs and shaping our desires.

Lesbian-feminism, born of the counterculture, was partially conceived as a challenge to this crass materialism. Throughout the 1970s, while some gay men were busily carving out commercial niches in urban centers, many lesbians scoffed at such activities, and chose instead to build a non-sexist, anti-materialistic world. The asceticism and political correctness that frequently accompanied these pursuits may have been the unintended consequence of a defensive separatism. But politicizing every aspect of personhood, many later discovered, was just too tall an order to live with.

In 1970, the Radicalesbians declared, "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion." Today, we've lightened up. Witness the new lesbian comedians and novelists who convey a sense of lesbian life, warts and all, by constructing characters driven by anger, jealousy, and revenge—as well as love and community. The sex debates of the early 1980s, coupled with the increasing acknowledgement of racial, ethnic, and other forms of difference, have broken down the idea of a seamless, transhistorical lesbian identity which we all share.

While lesbian communities are perhaps less politically organized, less cohesive, and less homogeneous in thought and action than they were ten years ago, activism hasn't completely vanished though. The recent emergence of the Lesbian Agenda for Action, a city-wide political organization in San Francisco, is a testament to this, as is the recent National Lesbian Rights Conference sponsored by NOW or even the large number of dykes who staff numerous AIDS-related organizations. But it is a lot more difficult to pack an auditorium with women committed to any one issue than it was in the 1970s. There is a seeming multiplication of diverse subcultural pockets and cliques—corporate dykes, arty dykes, dykes of color, clean and sober dykes—of which political lesbians are but one among many.

What does it mean that often the most visible players in our communities today are lipstick lesbians, given that lesbian communi-



ties are more fragmented, that it's harder to scrounge for a living, and that—for many women—political involvements fail to provide the sort of personal sustenance they once did? The rise of the femme and the new ambiguity of lesbian style could be interpreted as a sign of retrenchment. It could be argued that lifestyle lesbianism promotes assimilation over separation, style over substance, and, is a sign of our growing conservatism.

Yet many lesbians today don't see it that way. Instead, they experience this new attention to lifestyle as a freedom, a testament to the fact that their identity is now a matter of personal choice rather than political compulsion. As a once-fervent activist remarked recently, "After years of holding myself back and dressing to hide myself, shopping, I've found out, can be a real joy."

Calling the new lesbianism a retrenchment or embracing it as a freedom both appear to reflect popular sentiments. Is there a way to reconcile them without lapsing into a simplistic plea to smash style, or a lamentation that politics is oh-so-boring so why not shop til we drop? Can we transcend the puritanism (shared by the left and the right in this

Wearing high heels during the day does not mean that you're a femme at night, passive in bed, or closeted on the job.

country) that one has to suffer to be noble, without depoliticizing lesbian identity?

Politics in a New Lesbian World

"You can analyze me to death, but it's just that I grew up as a tomboy and I prefer my hair being short and I love Nudie suits. Yeah, sure, the boys can be attracted to me, the girls can be attracted to me, your mother...your uncle, sure. It doesn't really matter to me." —Country-western singer k.d. lang⁴

My friends and I are all rabid fans of k.d. lang, a Canadian who sings traditional torch ballads tongue-in-cheek, appears regularly on Johnny Carson sporting a butch haircut, cow-girl skirt and no makeup, and defies every prescription of what a woman in country music—and indeed pop music—should be. To most of her straight fans, k.d. lang is simply a quirky, tomboyish character, a performer whose powerful voice and compelling originality compensate for her lack-of-fit in a musical genre where it's usually easy to tell the boys from the girls. But to her legions of dyke-devotees she is divine. When a newly-formed k.d. lang fan club sponsored a video night at one of the oldest dyke bars in San Francisco recently, the place was packed tighter than I ever can remember having seen it—testimony, perhaps, to how starved we are for media images of lesbianism, and to how attractive her image is to many of us.

She is one of a new breed of performers, all in their twenties, who came of age when women's music was *au courant*, but who've rejected that genre in favor of mainstream exposure. Without identifying themselves as dykes, they experiment with style and self-presentation, pushing up against the boundaries of what is acceptable for women. I've spent hours with friends discussing the pros and cons of whether k.d. and the others should come out, whether or not it really matters since, after all, we all know. Or is it all a big sell-out? When she calls herself a tomboy and says that she doesn't care whether men or women are attracted to her, is it simply a ploy to maintain her cover?

This dilemma lies at the heart of the new lesbianism.

On the one hand, the new lesbianism deconstructs the old, perhaps overly politicized or prescriptive notion of lesbianism by refusing ghettoization, acknowledging internal group differences, and affirming the value of individual choice when it comes to style and political and sexual expression. On the other hand, it comes perilously close to depoliticizing lesbian identity and perpetuating our invisibility by failing, frequently, to name itself to others.

Some might argue that if we define politics broadly as a series of contests between competing cultural images—of what it means to be a woman or a lesbian, for example—then the new lesbian style can be seen as a political act, a public assertion of lesbian identity. Yet this new political strategy of cultural visibility, if it can be called that, is paradoxical, because it emerges at a point in our history when lesbian identity is in the process of reformulation.

If lesbianism ceases to be the defining aspect of identity for many women and becomes simply an image, and if notions of what a lesbian looks like break down as fashion codes change and recombine, will we lose sight of what it means to be a lesbian in a largely heterosexual world? As cultural critic Stuart Ewen argues, when power is at stake, a politics of images is no substitute for a "politics of substance." Images are too easily manipulated, their meanings complex and evanescent.

By skirting the issue of power (no pun intended), the new lifestyle lesbianism comes perilously close to giving credence to the liberal belief that today, any sexual choice is possible. While the fragmentation of lesbian identity and decoding of lesbian style may be a justifiable response to an over-politicization of the personal, they run the risk of erasing the political dimension of lesbian communities. It may be easier to be a dyke today than even a decade ago, but the sobering truth remains that, in a heterosexist, male-dominated society, lesbianism is still not freely chosen. As Margaret Cerullo observed recently, the "hundred lifestyles" strategy, a strategy that calls for a pluralism of sexual choice, "doesn't represent an adequate response to the one

lifestyle that has all the power"—heterosexuality.⁵

A little history lesson could go a long way. In the trenches of the style wars, it's easy to forget that political lesbianism paved the way for lifestyle lesbianism. Lacking a sense of history, the new lesbian defines herself against those who came before her, unaware of the fact that greater choice is possible today because lesbians (as well as many straight feminists) fought long and hard for it. By struggling to destigmatize lesbianism, and by forging institutional spaces within which it could flourish, lesbian-feminism was largely responsible for creating the conditions under which a new, more mainstream and less radical lesbianism would eventually take root. That many women experience the new lesbianism as freedom is perhaps testimony to the success, rather than the failure, of the old.

Recognizing this doesn't mean the old political models don't need revising. If the emergence of lifestyle lesbianism tells us anything, it is that we need a political language that acknowledges our diversity as well as our commonality, that embodies playfulness along with rage, and that faces outward as well as inward. Lesbian style may be one of the central battlegrounds for the reformulation of lesbian identity today, but style itself is an insufficient basis for a lesbian politic.



That doesn't mean we should all discard our newly purchased dresses and cowboy boots and begin to boycott the hair salon once again. Rather, it suggests we should embrace style—along with anger—to forge a lesbianism that can take on the new, more complex realities of the 1980s and 1990s. ▼

Arlene Stein has written about politics and sexuality for The Nation, On Our Backs, and the San Francisco Sentinel (where portions of this article first appeared). This work is part of a longer project on the transformation of political identities in the 1980s.

About the artist: Isa Massu is a French photographer who currently lives and works in San Francisco.

I THINK MOST straight people perceive me as being an ugly butch pervert dyke, who would be quite threatening if she was not short. This may have a lot to do with wearing boots, a knife, 501s, t-shirts, a leather jacket, and a studded belt almost everywhere I go. I also like punk haircuts and neon hair coloring.

I am hardly ever mistaken for a man. I get called "sir" only if people are really busy, not looking too closely, or trying to be sarcastic. Apparently my gender as well as my sexual orientation and my sexual tastes are getting across quite well. Even when I "femme out" in a black dress or leather bodice and skirt, I am usually with women who are identifiably butch—or I actively

try to retain some item of apparel (like the motorcycle jacket) or retain some key piece of my appearance (like the short hair or weapons) that tells the straight boys the tits are not for them. It matters a lot to me that people know they are dealing with a dyke when they deal with me. This means that I have to be brave to do routine things like grocery shopping. But I think it is important to keep pushing that limit. If we all have to look heterosexual to be safe on the streets, who cares how many gay rights laws are passed or how long ago they repealed the laws against sodomy?

It wasn't until I started doing S/M that I found a sexual butch (and femme) style of dressing that felt like it told other women what I wanted from them, and communicated to straight men that I was intimidating, not available, and so weird they had better not mess with me. Punk fashion was especially good at

injecting a kind of violence into femme chic that made it trashy and threatening instead of submissive and vulnerable. I don't wear a skirt. There's a difference between being Madonna and being a Madonna. I'm not a foul-mouthed, sadistic bitch whose boot-heels are knives and whose tits are obviously weapons in a battle of sexual supremacy. The one thing that is nice about being a dyke is the fact that I have to wear an obscene tattoo on my back, so even if straight boys catch the tits and think it's hot business, if they see the tattoo they get freaked out by my too aggressive-looking appearance.

My appearance tells them that I am a sexual outlaw, an urban gender terrorist, and that on a very simple level because there are a lot of people in the city who hate queers, they are worried that they are going to call me names, chase me up, and even kill me one day of the way I look. I choose to look this way anyway to avoid, survive, thwart, and counter that hostility.

Within the lesbian community, it's political because I'm not a sweater girl

¹Deborah Wolf, *The Lesbian Community* (Berkeley Press, 1979), pp 85-86.

²Karen Everett, "Lipstick Lesbians Love the M," *San Francisco Sentinel*, 28 October 1988.

³Joan Nestle, "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexuality in the 1950s," *Heresies*, No. 12 (1981). See also Lisa Fiedler, "GenderBending," *Advocate*, 15 September 1988.

⁴Burt Kearns, "Canadian Cowpie," *Spin Magazine*, September 1988.

⁵Margaret Cerullo, "Night Visions: Toward a Lesbian/Gay Politics for the Present," *Radical Women*, vol. 21 (March-April 1987).

gay yuppie, I don't care about looking nice and having nice things. It says that I prefer rude girls and honest tarts, diesel dykes and leather fags to the camelhair suitcoat set. It is a class message as well as a message about my membership in a sexual minority. By dressing this way, I label myself as an unrepentant and unredeemable member of the working class who is not going to recant and become "a professional." It says that even within the gay community I am sexually deviant. And so that means that in some lesbian bars I get bad service or no service or may even be asked to leave. However, it also means vanilla dykes will eavesdrop on my conversations, which makes you feel important.

And in the S/M community it's also political because the fact that I look this way all the time means I am not passing, that S/M is a lifestyle for me, not a riding crop and a pair of black clothespins you can hide inside a drawer in the waterbed. By wearing leather, short hair, and keys on the left, I tell other women that I am the one who is willing to take sexual responsibility and initiative, that I am confident in my ability to solicit and conduct sexual interactions, that I can (to be crude) get them off, if anybody can. Whether I want to or not is another issue.

I refuse to present myself all the time as either a leather butch or a leather femme. I care a lot

about being able to look good in either role—although I am usually more comfortable wearing butch clothing. But I like knowing I have a choice. There is a bitchy mean streak in myself that I can't access unless I am wearing a dress and high heels. I also absolutely refuse to give up the femme bottom part of my sexuality, just because the

bar—are often the "contact people" for the underground social networks of sexual minority lesbians.

Basically what I am looking for is what anybody is looking for who gets dressed up, tries to look their best, and goes out cruising. I want appreciation, recognition, some warm attention and flirtation, maybe a little

S/M Aesthetic



world is a fucked-up place where men do terrible things to women and women do rotten things to each other. Gender is one of my favorite erotic playgrounds. So you can't assume that just because I'm in a dress I left my dick at home.

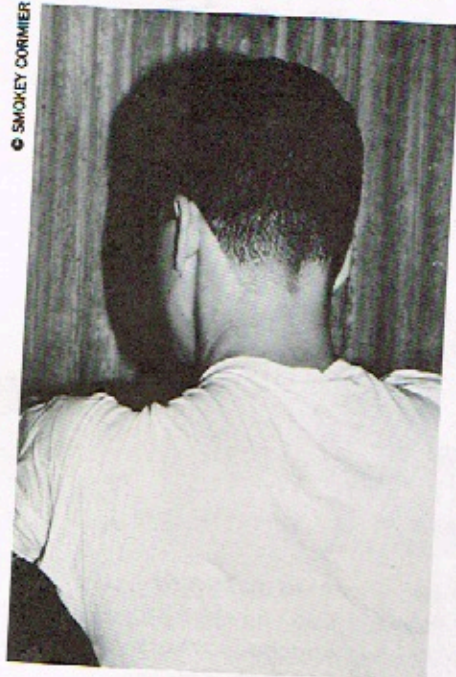
In many cities there is no organized support group for S/M dykes. And even if there is, you might not be the kind of person who writes to a post office box and waits to go to an orientation. Or you might not be able to get along with the folks who run the group. So visible leather dykes—the women who actually wear kinky stuff as they go about their daily lives, or go for a beer at the local lesbian

flattery. I want to make new friends and find somebody to love or just somebody who is fun to go to bed with. This flip attitude toward other people's hostility probably sounds forced and a little nasty. But it's self-protection; it's the only defense I know. Inside there are a lot of hurt feelings and fear. But this is who I am and looking this way is the simplest and only way I know to locate other women like me. ▼

Several lesbians were approached by OUT/LOOK to comment anonymously about style and politics in their lives. This is one of several responses we received. Others may be published in future issues.

NOBODY SEEMS to really know exactly what the "boy look" is. People I ask contradict each other—"It's this!" "No, it's that." Even the definite earmarks are contradictory—skin tight bicycle clothes/loose khakis, walking shorts/black jeans; Converse tennis shoes/thick-soled black oxfords; hair cuts with defined napes/long hair maybe pulled back into pony tails or even french braids; skateboarding anarchopunks/

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design dolls with too high of a credit limit at Macy's.

.....

My lover and I broke up. You could say I was rudely interrupted out of a monologue. I was back in circulation for the first time in years and I felt out of it, on the edge of the conversation. It was like learning a new language—at first I could make out only bits; the rest was a rush of unfamiliarity: what do you mean by that haircut, I don't understand those shoes,

your body confuses me. I hated my lack of fluency: my glasses are too emphatic, the colors that I wear are wrong, I don't know how to dance. And what is this conversation about, anyway?

.....

In 1988, the San Francisco *Sentinel* published an interview with the entrepreneur of "Boy Party" events in San Francisco. This guy railed against men who adopted the clone look, implicating them in the spread of AIDS. He claimed that that the new boy look represented bodies and lives that were non-diseased. The response to the article was furious, and the entrepreneur claimed that he had been misquoted.

It doesn't matter if he had been or not. The idea is out there—the boy look is somehow about AIDS, as would be any gay male style new since 1982. The boy look emphasizes youth and health. It implies that the "boy" was just not around during the era of intense transmission. Features that would read "no AIDS here" are emphasized. Since weight loss is a sign of AIDS, it is *de rigueur* not to be too thin, just a little plump. Clothes are worn loosely; a washboard tummy is not the treasure it once was. Skin tight bicycle clothes are the exception—in the US, bicycling is a juvenile sport. Another sign of AIDS is losing hair luster, so although hair may be cut short at the nape, some length is usually left on top. This hair should be rich and shiny; sometimes it is even oiled to add more luster. Of course there is the bicycle or baseball cap worn backwards, which covers most of the top of the head. But see, the cap is worn backwards, so that a little

tuft of obstinate curls can figure through in the front.

Youth represents innocence and innocence is a major agent in the conversation of the boy look. When we are told that a sperm is poison, our saliva treacherous, our sweat suspected it seems liberating to be released from culpability at the site of our bodies. Appearance tense, plays with fact: boys can have HIV, too.

The boy look is not as distinctively gay as the clone look and has more cross-over with the rest of the culture. This can make it easier to hide, to be closeted, and still participate in the scene. But it also reflects an impatience with the chauvinism of the clone look and the homogeneity constructed by blue jeans, plaid shirt or Izod, Adidas or work boots. Even though it was a cheap and accessible way to dress, it enforced commonality. The boy look conveys possibility, choice. It defies categorization and is open to a freedom of assembly. Blacks, Asians, and Latinos have all developed their own distinctive versions. The blue collar proletariat and its stylistic derivative, the spiffed hippy—both staples of the clone look—are discarded as absurd anachronisms. The current pretense is more to look like an art student or a frat brat on the prowl. But the boy look can be other things, too.

The boy look denigrates those born before Kennedy's last limo ride. But it can be surprisingly generous. I saw two fortyish men at the Midnight Sun in San Francisco, not together, wearing "BOY" t-shirts, and both were making pretty good time.

.....

The Boy Look

.....

He came in late. He had to kneel behind the last row of seats so that the people standing against the wall could see. I was one of those standing. I wanted one of those two back seats that he used, one for each elbow. I wanted to lean back and feel his breath against my ear. I wanted to dip my shoulder and have his hand react. I wanted to know what he smelled like.

Seams. The seams of his baseball cap demarcated his head like the lines of a cantaloupe; the button on top is where I longed to press and sniff. The cap's bill worn backwards cast a soft arc of shadow across the swell, spinal gully, swell of his neck. He wore a well-washed black t-shirt, the sleeves seamed on top, a pucker and a fracture that contrasted with his firm, smooth arms. A thin, resilient layer of fat softened his muscles and his expressions—nothing definite rested too long on the surface. He bent his elbow and a bulge appeared and then relaxed: annoyance, boredom, interest, humor would register on his face, and then dissolve.

When he stood, the seams of his blue jeans fell gently down. No strain, his jeans fit loosely, comfortably. Their downward descent stopped abruptly at the bottom, the pants legs rolled up, around, around—room to grow into. The seams of his buff-colored hightops swirled, tightened, strengthened. An achievement of engineering, not sewing, not even cobbling. A boy's dream, his shoes were spotless, in the way they could only be for half a day.

.....

I go to the Box, a San Francisco dance club. I am a couple

of months too late to have experienced it when it was "really happening," which is probably just as well since my party arrived late but did not have to stand in line. And it was still fun.

The Box is famous for its stage, where those on the floor are invited to come up and dance. Like reflecting mirrors or a kaleidoscope, numerical definitions do not hold, but geometry does. You dance with your partner, your partner and you open up a little to dance with some people next to you, your partner and you and everybody else on the floor dances with the stage.

Two men on the stage capture my attention—

1. A man in a black boater, white shirt, black pants, black shoes, satin waistcoat, and glasses—an ironic, *recherché* look. The man is making a point that I feel in a position to elaborate on. Next time...

2. The icon of the evening. He sports a "Dennis the Menace" haircut. He wears loose khaki pants, any old tennis shoes, no shirt. He has a well-muscled—but not a body-builder's—torso. His skin glows a baby's shade of pink under the red spotlights. His underarms are shaved—a gesture of pre-pubescence.

He dances in front, willfully naive, easily joyous. ▼

Mark Leger is a new New Yorker and an old San Franciscan. He is a chapstick homosexual.

Styling by Christie Keith; hair by Christie Keith for Belli Capelli, San Francisco.

About the photographer: In addition to being a technical writer and artist, Smokey Cormier is a model for the middle-aged Tom Boy look.

© SMOKEY CORMIER



by Mark Leger

THE SHADOW

STAGE PLAY IN THREE ACTS

by Cherrie Moraga

Illustrations by Ester Hernández

Note on Language:

The blending of Spanish and English found in this work is very common among first-generation Chicanos/Latinos and those living in the barrios of the US. This is the "natural voice" of the play and its characters. I have included, however, in the back of the script a glossary of my own translations of passages in Spanish which are crucial to the comprehension of the play. All or any of these translations may be used in production at the Director's own discretion when playing to a predominantly English-speaking audience.

The *Shadow of a Man* principally revolves around the female members of a Chicano family and the various male figures (incarnate and in spirit) that haunt them. The characters presented in the following scene (Act II, Scene 1) are LUPE, the youngest daughter, age 12 and her Aunt (tía) ROSARIO, a woman in her mid-50s. The year is 1969.

ACT II, Scene 1

Rosario is downstage picking chiles in her jardín. Lupe is weeding next to her.

ROSARIO: (Taking a bite of one.) I still say que los chiles no saben buenos aquí. I think it's the smog. Aquí en Los Angeles the sun has to fight its way down to the plantas...the people, too. A'cept for those atrevidos como tu hermana que van a la playa and get mas prietos que los negros.

LUPE: She loves the ocean.

ROSARIO: (Taking another bite.) No sabe nada. Tómallo, try one.

LUPE: No, those things are like fire.

ROSARIO: Pruébalo, gallina.

LUPE: (Does, very gingerly.) Hmm. Not so bad. (Swallows.) Ay, tía! You tricked me! (Fanning her mouth.)

ROSARIO: (Laughing.) Eres gringuita!

LUPE: I swear I dunno how you can eat them like they were nut'ing.

ROSARIO: Vas a ver when your tía is gone and kicked the bucket, you'll be there hacien-

OF A MAN

do tortillas y el chile para recordarme nomás, even in your big Hollywood mansion or maybe you'll get la criada mexicana to do it.

LUPE: I won't have criadas. I don't believe in them.

ROSARIO: Es trabajo like anything else. There will always be ricos y los ricos will always need someone to clean up after them. Sabes que en Mexico, half the women son criadas. Not like en este país, allí you don' have to be ricos to have one.

LUPE: That's why it's better here.

ROSARIO: (*Sarcastically.*) Oh, sí...donde la tierra no me da un chile verdadero. (*Rosario moves over to the rose bushes, begins clipping.*) Mijita, me traes el hose? Estas rosas necesitan agua. I don' know why I let them go so long sin agua. (*Lupe goes over to the hose, then stops and shivers as if suddenly chilled, making the sign of the cross.*) Make sure you take your mami a few of these para la mesa. Mañana es domingo. (*She brings the hose to Rosario.*) Gracias, mija. (*To the roses as she waters.*) Ya, ya. No

estén enojados conmigo. Toman el agua. Ya, ya.

LUPE: Why do you talk to them, tía?

ROSARIO: To who? Las plantas?

LUPE: Yeah.

ROSARIO: Because they have souls, the same as you and me.

LUPE: You believe that?

ROSARIO: It's true.

LUPE: The Church doesn't say that.

ROSARIO: You think the Church is always right?

LUPE: I guess so.

ROSARIO: God is always right, not the Church. The Church is full of men. Men make mistakes. I oughta know.

LUPE: Do you think everything they say is a sin, is a sin?

ROSARIO: Some of the priests, hija, have more sins than both of us put together.

LUPE: (Back at her wedding, Rosario hums to herself.) Tía?

ROSARIO: Sí?

LUPE: You know how they say that...that when you get tha' chill that goes through your body...

ROSARIO: El escalofrío. Sí, es que el diablo te toca.

LUPE: Yeah, like he jus' comes up and kinda brushes past you, touching you on the shoulder or somet'ing, right?

ROSARIO: Sí, pero es un dicho, nomás.

LUPE: Pero, sabe qué, tía? A veces I really do feel it. El diablo me entra a mí.

ROSARIO: No hables así, hija. No es correcto. I don' know what those monjas teach you at that school sometimes.

LUPE: They never tole me this stuff!

ROSARIO: Well, take it out of your head. It's not good for you.

LUPE: Well, it's not like I'm trying to think about it, it jus' keeps popping up in my head. It's like the more you try not to think about somet'ing, the more it stays in your head. I mean your mind jus' thinks what it wants to, doesn't it?

ROSARIO: No, you have to train it. If you don', it could make you a very unhappy girl.

LUPE: (Digging at the earth, nervously.) But I can'. I still see him sometimes...

ROSARIO: Quién?

LUPE: El diablo.

ROSARIO: Adío.

LUPE: Well, he's not like a real diablo, but like a shadow...a shadow of a man. I can barely tell he's there, jus' kinda get a glimpse of him like a dark smudge outside the corner of my eye, like he's following me or somet'ing. But when I turn my head, he always gets away. I jus' kinda feel the brush of his tail as he goes by me.

ROSARIO: Tiene cola?

LUPE: Sí.

ROSARIO: El diablo.

LUPE: I tole you...and I get a chill all over.

ROSARIO: (Puts the hose back, wiping her hands on her apron.) Mijita, es la imaginación nomás. You got to stop thinking about this. Tu mama y yo teníamos una prima, Fina, a very good-looking girl, but she thought about el diablo y la religión y todo d'eso so much until she went crazy. Se volvió loca, hija. A' night, she would walk the streets of her pueblito. She needed air she say she couldn' breathe en la casa an' no wonder con kids pile all on top of each other in e'ry room. I don' know why my tía wan' so many chamacos. "Dios me manda," she would say. Wha's God haftu do with it?! A'course the girl wanted to get away from there. A la madrugada...before el gallo stretched his throat to sing, she would come back to the house, sudando por el calor del desierto y su fiebre...su pasión por Dios, she would say. But it wasn' God tha' give her the fever, it was the monjas....Andaba muy metida con ellas. They put thoughts in her head. They taught her to read. We dint go to school regular, but Fina...como tu sister was always con su nose in a book. Ay! Her eyes would light up like flames cuando me contaba los stories from the Bible! She wanted to join them en el convento. She begged my tío e'ry day pero no lo permitió.

LUPE: Why not?

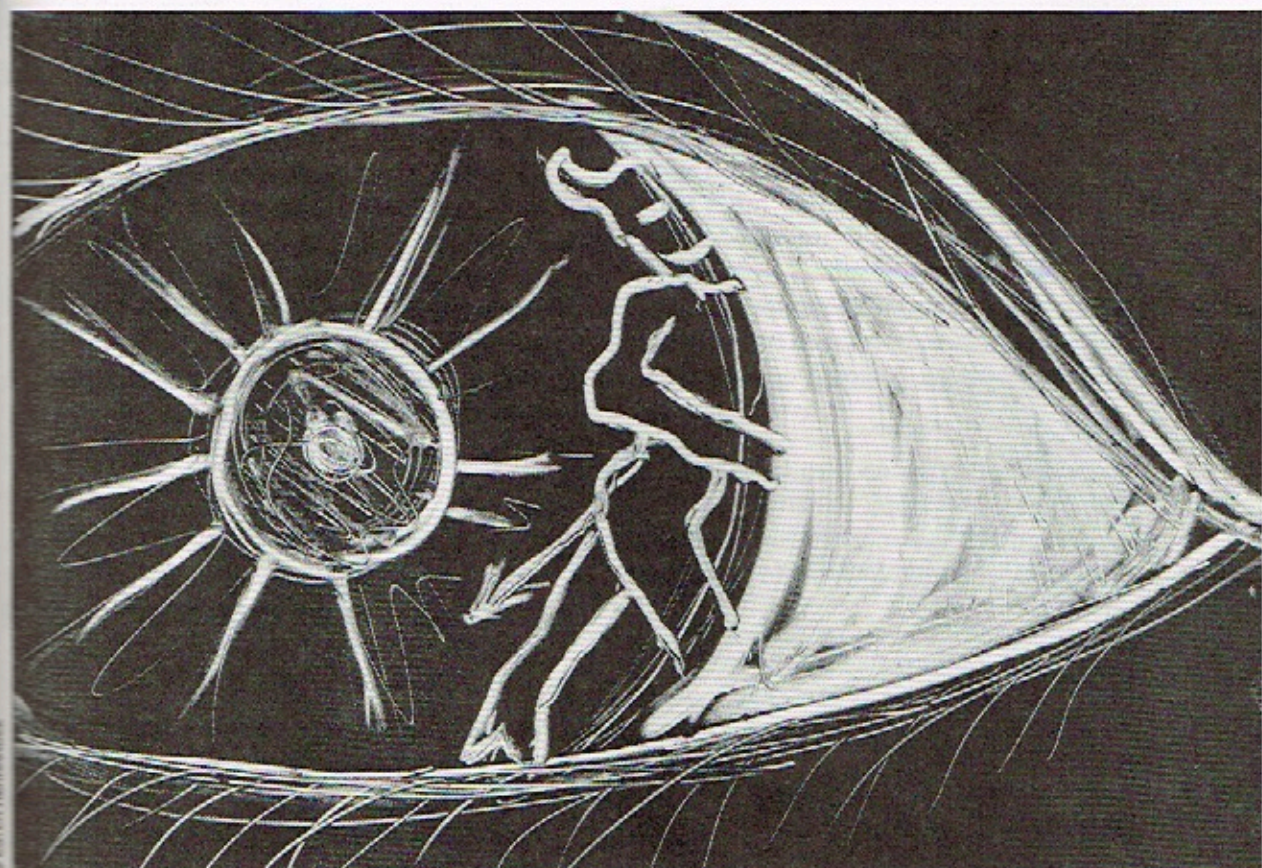
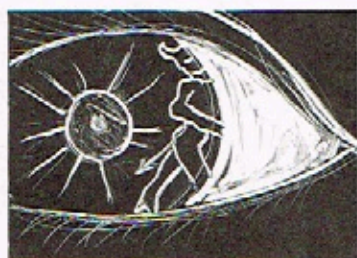
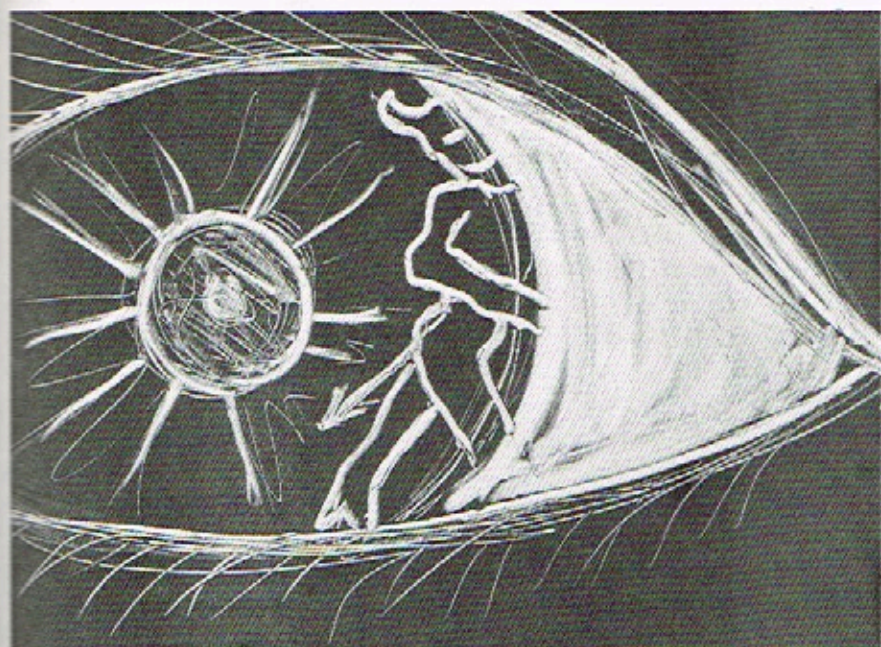
ROSARIO: He was against it, he said pasando tanto tiempo con too many together is what already make her crazy. But finally, they let her go porque se puso muy enferma. Iba a morirse.

LUPE: Jeez.

ROSARIO: Una vez, I went to see her en el convento. She change a lot. I saw her en la sala donde recibían a la gente y ahí estaba sentada con las manos (demonstrates), asleep un'erneath esa tela...wha' you callit?...que tienen aquí en el frente?

LUPE: Scapular.

ROSARIO: Sí, escapulario. Y la cosa que me afectó mucho...que hit me real hard...fueron los ojos. Her eyes had los' todo su pasión. Ay! Esos ojos verdes...they usetu burn como fuego! Later I found out they had to separate her from one of the monjas. They sent her to



another convento. She was in love with the woman.

LUPE: (*Shivers suddenly.*) Did they find them together?

ROSARIO: No sé...I guess so. (*Pause.*) Es que tenía algo fragil adentro ella misma. She was not a strong person, hija. (*With emphasis.*) She let too much influence her.

LUPE: (*Digging at the earth, defensive.*) Well, I'm not like that.

ROSARIO: No digo que eres así, only you got to be careful where your mind goes. Why should you worry about the Church so much? You should enjoy your childhood. You'll have plenty of time to be miserable. When I was your age, Dios mío, I was already working in Tijuana with nobody I could count on...ni mi papá, ni mis hermanos. An' I felt so alone, solita, solita. An' I would wake up in the middle of the night, llorando y rezando a Dios (*demonstrates*) que me ayudara.

LUPE: Me, too, tía. At night when I'm asleep that's when it's worst cuz that's when he catches me off guard.

ROSARIO: Mija...

LUPE: I try to stay awake to keep him away, jus' keep praying and praying, but, tía, then I get so tired and sooner or later I fall asleep 'n' tha's when he sneaks inside me. I wake up con tanto miedo. It's like my whole body's on fire 'n' I can har'ly breathe. I look over to Lettie 'n' she seems a million miles away. I try to call her pero la voz no me quiere salir.

ROSARIO: Es una pesadilla, nomás.

LUPE: No, I'm awake.

ROSARIO: Te digo no pienses en esas cosas. You should be happy. What do you have to worry about? Tus padres te quieren. Don't they always tell you que eres la preferida?

LUPE: Sí.

ROSARIO: Entonces...When I was a young girl, I dint get to be a child. I was already a woman. An' when you're only fourteen years y ya tiene que ser mujer es una cosa muy triste. What did I know about life? Nada. Veía muchas cosas que I dint un'erstand. Things about the world y...los hombres. And you

have to take care of yourself because nobody's going to watch out for you. Mi mamá never tole me nothing about life. Que tiene que hacer una señorita para protegerse cosas así. Nada. No me explicó nada. She dint know nothing 'bout my life working en las clubs. Lo único que le importaba was the money I put in her hand. Per te digo que I never did nothing to be ashamed of. No fue facil, mija. Estaba sola. I had to learn muy pronto. Habían cosas...things que even tu mamá still doesn't know that I had to learn. She was the baby...la bebita. I sheltered her myself. I was the one that made sure she always went to school. If she dint finish high school, it wasn't because I din't try to help her. She met Rodri...quiero decir...tu papá y sus amigos y pues, a man who turns a woman's head. She forgets to think about herself. She only thinks about what he will do for her, that he will make her feel like something special....And maybe he does, for awhile. (*Pause.*) People condemn me. I know que even tu mamá sometimes says que there's somet'ing wrong with me que I couldn't stay with a husband. But I'm not ashamed. After you see the other side of a man, your heart changes. It's harder to love. I seen that side too many times. (*Pause.*) Ahora I can' complain. Tengo mi casita, esta jardín, my kids are grown. What more do I need?

LUPE (*Disheartened.*): Nothing, I guess.

ROSARIO: Mija, no seas triste. Para qué? You got the whole world in front of you.

LUPE: But it's a sin to think about these things, isn't it, tía?

ROSARIO: No sé, mija...not if you can' help it.

LUPE: I can't! It's like I got these pictures in my head and they won't stop! You know like that picture abuelita used to have hanging over her bed.

ROSARIO: Sí...mi pobre mamá.

LUPE: The one of purgatory 'n' all those people, naked and burning up in those flames. Tha's how I feel, like I'm drowning in those flames. And there we all are stretching our arms up to Christ, but he's jus' out of our



reach. And tha's the worst suffering of all—that we can see him, but we can't touch him. What's strange though is that I'm not really in the picture. I'm in every single one of their bodies. The fire that's burning *their* skin is burning *my* skin. Their mouths that are dying for a drop of water is *my* mouth, my thirst. When they reach out their arms to God, I do, too. I cry their tears and I know and feel all their sins. Their sins are *my* sins.

ROSARIO: Pero qué sabes tú about these things?

LUPE: I dunno. It's jus' inside of me.

ROSARIO: Pero te digo. You're too young to worry about the sins of the world, mija. Si, el mundo es muy cruel. Siempre ha sido así, pero...

LUPE: Sometimes I jus' feel like I can see too much, all these things I don' wannu see. Like my eyes are too open for their own good. It's like the more you see, the more you got to be afraid of.

ROSARIO: Quieres saber la verdad, Lupita?

LUPE: What?

ROSARIO: Only los estúpidos don't know enough to be afraid.

LUPE: What?

ROSARIO: The rest of us, the smarter ones, we learn to live con nuestros diablitos. Tanto que if they weren't around, we wouldn't know who we were no more.

LUPE: But...

ROSARIO: Ya. No hables más de cosas tan feas. (*Gathering up the roses.*) Vente. Let's get some newspaper to wrap these with. Es sábado. Hoy pensamos en las rosas. Mañana...cuando we go to church, hay bastante tiempo para pensar en el diablo. (*Lupe removes her work gloves and exits with her tía. The lights fade to black.*) ▼

Internationally renowned artist Ester Hernández's images of women are among the strongest to emerge from the Chicano struggle and art movement.

GLOSSARY

mas prietos: darker

No sabe a nada: They don't taste like nut'ing.

haciendo tortillas y el chile para recordarme nomás: making tortillas and chile jus' to remember me by

criadas: maids

Oh sí...donde la tierra no me da un chile verdadero: Oh sí...with the earth can't give me one good chile.

Mañana es domingo: Tomorrow, it's Sunday.

No estén enojados conmigo: Don't be mad with me.

Sí, es que el diablo te toca: Yes, it's that...the devil touches you.

pero es un dicho nomás: but, it's jus' a saying they have.

El diablo me entra a mí: The devil comes inside of me.

monjas: nuns

Adió: Don't give me that.

Tiene cola?: He has a tail?

Tu mamá y yo teníamos una prima, Fina...: Your mamma an' me, we had a cousin once, Fina...

chamacos: kids

...sudando por el calor del desierto y su fiebre...su pasión por Dios: sweating from the heat of the desert and her fever...her passion for Christ,

cuando me contaba: when she would tell me

Pero no lo permitió: But he wouldn't let her.

...porque se puso muy enferma. Iba a morirse: ...because she got real sick. She was gointu die.

donde recibían la gente y ahí estaba sentada con las manos...: where they wait to meet the

people and there she was sitting with her hands...

Es que tenía algo fragil adentro ella misma: It's jus' that she had somet'ing soft inside a her.

...llorando y rezando a Dios que me ayudara: ...crying and praying to God for help

...pero la voz no me quiere salir: ...but my voice won't come out.

Es una pesadilla, nomás: It's only a nightmare.

...y ya tiene que ser mujer es una cosa muy triste: ...an' you already gottu be a woman it's a very sad thing.

Que tiene que hacer una señorita para protegerse, cosas así: What a young girl should to protect herself, things like that.

Lo único que le importaba...: The only thing she care 'bout...

quiero decir: I mean.

Tengo mi casita, esta jardín...: I have my little house, this garden...

Sí, el mundo es muy cruel. Siempre ha sido así, pero...: Sí, the world's a cruel place. It's always been, but...

Quieres saber la verdad, Lupita?: You want know the truth, Lupita?

Ya, no hables mas de cosas tan feas. Vente. Let's get some newspaper to wrap these with. Es sábado. Hoy pensamos en las rosas. Mañana, cuando we go to church, hay bastante tiempo para pensar en el diablo: Ya. Don't talk no more about these bad things. Come. Let's get some newspaper to wrap these with. It's Saturday. Today we think about roses. Tomorrow, when we go to Church, there'll be plenty a time to think about the devil.

"Writing Is the Measure of My Life..."

An Interview with Cherrie Moraga

Cherrie Moraga, a native of Los Angeles, is a Chicana poet, playwright, essayist, and editor. Moraga has long been considered one of the most courageous, honest voices capturing the richness and depth of the third world woman's experience. She is co-founder of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, co-editor (with Gloria Anzaldúa) of the anthology This Bridge Called My Back, and author of Loving in the War Years, a collection of her work published in 1983. She is also currently an instructor of writing in the Chicano Studies Program at the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1984, she was selected as playwright-in-residence for INTAR, a Latino/Hispanic Theatre in New York City. Her first theatre piece, Giving Up the Ghost, will be produced by San Francisco's Theatre Rhinoceros in February 1989. The preceding excerpt is from her second play, The Shadow of a Man.

OUT/LOOK editors Dorothy Allison, Tomás Almaguer, and Jackie Goldsby interviewed Cherrie about the evolution of her work, the use of Spanish and English in her writing, and her recent foray into theatre.

OUT/LOOK: When did you start writing? When did you start showing your work to other people and what was their response?

Moraga: I started writing seriously when I got out of college. I initially felt that I could do something with it after I came out as a lesbian. Before that, I had been writing with a secret to myself and to the world. So somehow when that was lifted, I was able to write much better.

After I moved to the Bay Area, I did a reading at one of the women's bars and it really made the difference. It was the first time it occurred to me that I had a voice, and possibly even an original voice. As long as you're trying to copy white men, you will be a cheap imitation thereof. So you might as well go for the one shot you've got, which is your own natural voice.

For example, I wrote a poem in 1976, that has the line "I'm a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother." That poem reflected to me what I needed to do next. I tried to find a mirror that reflected back something that was a semblance of me. It involved making more



Photo: Annette Peacock

*As long as you're trying
to copy white men, you
will be a cheap
imitation thereof.*

connections with women of color but in particular, coming really around to Chicanos. This has been the journey. It continues to be a journey.

But writing as an out lesbian in the 1970s was not a good time to be gay in the Chicano movement at large, or in the Chicano literary movement. For instance, in 1983, when *Loving in the War Years* came out, I left the country because I was very frightened of bringing up the issue of being lesbian and Chicana together within the covers of a book. It is only now, because there is such a strong movement of women writers, some of whom are lesbians but taking on feminist themes, that there is now a community, in which to make that voice public.

O/L: One of the things that you do better than almost any other writer I know is write from inside a complicated mix of spirituality and sexuality that comes out of a women's resistance, a resistance to Catholicism and its strictures. In the selection of the play we are printing, there is a unique way of seeing sex and spirituality that make them intimately

related in ways not done in white culture.

M: I feel that if sexuality and spirituality have both been used as a source of oppression against women of color, in particular Chicanas, then both of those have to be taken in consideration in our liberation. They have always been fused in my own imagination. I think it's very Mexican to see those things as not separated and that basically is how I have always viewed them.

When the character Lupe, for instance, talks about the devil entering her, it's obviously a very sexual image. I feel that adolescence is such a fertile time. What happens is that you're becoming sexually aware, but also coming into contact with God. Because you're sexually open, all the barriers fall and you start having visions. James Baldwin wrote about that incredibly, I love that about his work. It's such an obvious connection, I've just tried to kind of stay close to that instinct.

O/L: Your work is so different, in this sense, than that of Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger*

of Memory. You see the connections between the body, the spirit, and the word. They are so disembodied in his work. Even though his words are very beautiful, so much of his passion is contained by his Catholicism.

M: Well, that's interesting because our books have been often compared. Lots of Chicano Studies and English programs compare Rodriguez to me, and always start cracking up because our political perspectives are so completely different. What strikes me the most about his work is how sexuality is the essence of his "Mr. Secrets." Yes, that's the one thing that he's not acknowledging, the one thing that is influencing his perspective of everything. Although he does experience things very passionately, he uses language as a way to separate himself from that. But I think, in spite of himself, the book is very Mexican, even in its repression. But, of course, he's not gonna talk about that.

O/L: You've said before how words and language can separate you from *la gente* [Chicanos]. Langston Hughes

You open your ears with your heart.

also wrestled with this issue, with black folk speech and culture. Yet, a recent autobiography shows how he was incredibly alienated from it. Like he needed it for that sustenance, while at the same time feeling estranged from it.

M: I think it's comparable. It's hard when you talk about Chicanos, however, because we have two distinct languages, Spanish and English—not a variation of English. That's not to devalue the authenticity of black English, but Spanish is a completely different language.

The separation is similar in that it's also a class question. There are different kinds of English and different kinds of Spanish, depending on your class. So, for the most part, what typifies the working class Chicano/Mexicano experience is a non-standard usage of both—it's not an educated usage of either. What you also have is a combining of the languages—of English and Spanish—that is very much affected by how long you have lived in this country, and where you live.

For example, in "Shadow of a Man," it could just as well be

that Rosario, the aunt, spoke completely in Spanish and the kid responded completely in English. Yet, they understand each other. That would be a completely valid thing to do, very realistic. It doesn't work so well in theatre, however, because it absolutely necessitates a completely bilingual audience.

Getting back to Langston Hughes, on the separation and language, I really don't feel that. I have a variety of languages to choose from. The only thing I don't do very well is well-educated Spanish. My English, sometimes I have to say, is a little shabby too [laughter]. That's one thing I'm trying to improve on. But also being a student of the language my people speak, I have my ears wide open. You open your ears with your heart.

O/L: What are Chicano writers, writers of color like yourself, moving toward in your art? Do you sense a change? How has it affected your own sensibility and your own art?

M: It's not a great surprise for me to move from autobiography to theatre. When *This Bridge Called My Back* came out, we

were writing in resistance. As long as you're writing in resistance, you're on some level explaining, and having to explain does not produce great art. Though we'd like to think otherwise, it just doesn't. I feel that things have changed politically somewhat and I've also changed. But one of the things I realize after "A Long Line of Vendidas," [an essay from *Loving in the War Years*] is that I'm never going to explain again.

It cost me too much to explain, and it didn't give me what art gives me; it didn't give me back, you know? And I don't think it's what I do best. That doesn't mean I'll never write essays again; although sometimes I think I won't. If I was going to write essays, I would like to write them the way Adrienne Rich gets to write them. She doesn't explain anything to anybody because, as a poet, she is the voice of authority.

But that's not how I wrote essays. I was writing like: "Okay. I'm going to explain this to you one more time." Grabbing someone's arm and saying, "Listen to me. Turn your

I always feel that the poet, on some level, is saying the stuff that the politico can't say.

face here. Watch this. Have you thought of this?"

What I do feel fortunate about, in terms of Chicano publishing and writing, is that there has been a broadening of its terms. There are men and women interested in expanding the definition of what it means to be Chicano, and in so doing, critique our culture through literature. I think that's enormously exciting. I have felt since I've moved back to California [from New York], a great deal of support for my concerns, for my voice. That has been great because if everybody ignored me, then one can lose faith and not produce. I haven't met those walls to the same degree that I did earlier.

O/L: Are you as optimistic that these walls will tumble down in the same way with the gay/lesbian community?

M: I don't pay attention to it [laughter]. I don't, I can't. In your own lives, of course, you make various decisions. On a functional level, one lives around the people you feel most comfortable with. In political terms and in terms of literature, I just don't pay much attention

to it. It just doesn't interest me. What I also realize is that anyone can open up a lesbian/gay rag and it could be ten years ago. There's a new breed of 27-year-olds asking the same questions. That's not to be condescending. The thing is, though, I did my time.

The way lesbian and gay issues are defined in this country, on a national level, is from a white, dominant class perspective. There's no way around it. Even the way the question of sexuality is originally conceived is from that perspective. It's part and parcel of it. Even in the effort to have diversity, it means that the person of color has to be able to translate his or her concern into that dominant language in order to be recognized.

It's not just the gay and lesbian community. You can talk about Latin American solidarity movements in the same light. There's no place even for US Latinos in the solidarity movement because the solidarity movement is conceptualized from an Anglo, dominant perspective. It's about Latin Americans "over there." So they can still do their work, which is positive work—I'm not saying

it's not positive work—but their concerns about Latin America are conceived with non-Latino mentality. So there's no place for us there.

Over the years, I have encountered many Anglo individuals, a number of lesbian and gay men, that on a personal level, have really responded to my work. I'm not saying that that's impossible, you know. And I'm gratified by that; I want anybody who can to respond to my work. But I am not going to put my time and money, as they say, investing in that because I have tried to do that before and came out empty handed.

O/L: That's so true. I think Spike Lee's "She's Gotta Have It." I had so many problems with that movie. But the thing is, that's still moving about it, I remember sitting in the Grand Lake theater in Oakland with 400 black folks all around me, hearing ourselves, seeing ourselves be sexual. If anything, we got to see ourselves be sexual. And I love that film to this day for that.

M: Ultimately, you're talking about the survival of artists

*The family is the place
where, for better or worse,
we learn how to love.*

always feel that the poet, on some level, is saying the stuff that the politico can't say, because he or she is too busy trying to figure out how to strategize. Which is valid—we need politicians. But the poet is that voice who's going to say "yes, but." "You didn't look at this." When your goal is the preservation and the cultivation of those poets, then you start saying: "Go where you're gonna get what you need to get." And quit trying to explain just because you're gay, or you're a feminist. You don't need to be explaining. And the times are such that people of color have to do less of that. When you're the only black lesbian within 700 trillion miles, then you're gonna feel like you gotta explain in order to survive. But beyond survival, third-world artists need each other. Like when you saw the film; you need to hear that voice, so that you can go home and use it!

O/L: I've always thought that the essential thing that working-class gay people need to do is to write about family. It's this thing that cries out inside you but that we are not sup-

posed to discuss. You're only expected to talk about how you are rejected by your family. That's the legitimate story to tell if you're queer. But when you want to talk about your family in ways that are complicated and rich, it's hard to hear it. Yet, that's the story that I hear in almost all of your work.

M: I never felt that I wasn't supposed to talk about that. Again, that's the dominant mentality of the gay and lesbian movement. I never felt that and never responded to that censorship. My poetry, for example, has a lot of stuff about my mother. I do think that as a feminist, I was not supposed to write negative stuff about my mother.

O/L: And you were about your father?

M: Yeah, that was all right but that's not the whole picture. Life is much more complex than that. Women will not always wind up being heroes and victims and the men will not end up being bastards and ogres. The family is the place where, for better or worse, we learn how to love. Even upper-class white writers have to explore

that, because that's where they either learn to love or don't. I'm talking about being thrown together between these four walls, two to three to ten people, depending on what your family was like. There are all of these ways of connecting and relating that happen in that environment. So they affect how we love, how we experience ourselves sexually, how we try to relate to other people sexually. There's no way around it. So, I feel it's our task to give expression to that experience. Particularly for lesbian and gay people, because we're supposed to be writing about love and sex—and that's where it all initially happens. ▼

erol

BY CHERYL CLARK

Erol's van was part art gallery,
juke joint, and mobile home.
The block boys bragged about the
"serious partyin" Erol'd done
in it
from Dallas
to L.A.
one fall.

"A serious crib,"
I agreed in city vernacular.

The way Erol bullied the brothers
for their paunches
their dependencies
their dull choices
and lack of wit
puzzled me.
They loved him
and hung on his every word
and coolly begged to do some
"serious partyin" with him.
Always, he'd cruelly refuse:

"Time for you triflin niggers
to git now. Got some serious
partyin to do, now. No time for
country coons like y'all."

I was only a visitor from out of town
a neighbor's cousin twice removed
Stirred by the country and its
skeletons,
I stayed behind to find out
finally what Erol meant by

I was an out of town neighbor relation
and Erol treated me sweetly because of this
and chivalrously
and did not ridicule me like he did
the brothers who sought his company.

Would I have let him spend time with me
take me on his boat
show me the coastline
the egret
the ibis
the nesting osprey,
the porpoises at a distance
in the grave Atlantic
if I'd known then that what
he glibly called "serious partyin"
could not include me?

Would the brothers have loved him
and vied so for his smile and horseplay
if they were to know the men he measured them
by?

And with the children
would Erol still have had the
power of tongues?
Would his favorites so readily ride
in his van to museums, beaches, revivals?
Would they linger in the arbor of his
awesome hospitality,
his African-ness?
Would they throw him the ball with such abandon?
Would their elders have let them sit so freely
on the earth that was his classroom?

Would the women
who honored his mother's memory,
who claimed nightly visitations from her
still bring Erol voluptuous fruits,
tender greens from their willing gardens?
Would the elder men
who all called him "Son"
be so generous with their fish and game?

Would they sit with him?
Would they wink at him and
spontaneously touch him
if they knew he lived that other life,
that exquisite secret?

Would any of them still envy the way
Erol twirled a toothpick with his tongue?

*Cheryl Clarke is the author of Living as a Lesbian and
Scarred Rocks, forthcoming from Firebrand Books.*

"serious partyin" long after Erol
made the brothers leave.
Parked amid the austere pines
smoking hash
drinking sangria
Erol spinning Marvin Gaye.

I was stuck on my city ways
and down for some "serious partyin".
To sing on Erol's arm and dance,
the humid pitch of his blackness
covering me would make several good
stories to stock my adolescent store
of lore in the naked urban winter.

"Just between you and me, baby,
and the inside of this here chariot.
Just because you're from the North
and understand shit niggers down
here can't get a handle on.
You can't stay. You understand.
Just between you and me. You know.
I ain't about gals, baby."

Legend has it that Erol's mother
spit him out,
star child of a star child,
seventh power of a seventh power
dazzling the gray-pink dusk.
Saturn of Saturn.

Erol entered a gathering,
everyone—old, blind, or in love—
at once made him welcome, fed him,
held him to her breast,
made him stand back
and admired his heroic looks.

Would they indulge him as mightily if they
knew that other indulgence he called
"serious partyin?"

Carey Alan Johnson is the managing editor of *Other Countries*, an anthology of black gay voices. Reprinted from *Other Countries*, Spring 1988.

BY CAREY ALAN JOHNSON

J E L A N & J E M A L

Jelan and Jamali.
They born Lamu.
Grow together from boyness.
Grow together are one.
Together race seabirds. Share
cassava cooked in a blackened pot.

Jelan and Jamali.
Two sailors of a Lamu dhow.
Fish boat sail on water.
Jelan brown
high tones slim
long fine like sisal.
Jamali is Swahili dark
warm shiny
tanned blackness
muscles round like
knotted
rope.

Twenty-three.
Pay down on boat.
When they work they
sail.
Wazungu pay money
to ride on Jelani
and Jemali's boat
Men women pay money
to ride the waves
of Jamali and Jelani.
Jelani long fine like sisal
like rope. They love
cassava cooked in a blackened pot.

When there is no work they
sail
and race seabirds.
Smoke laugh dance on water.
Tell tales of Lamu fishermen.
Sleep on bottom of boat.
Sleep on sail as mattress.
Sleep on coils and coils of rope.
Each dreaming in his brother's arms.
And this is an African love poem.

WILL ROSCOE'S ARTICLE "The Zuñi Man-Woman," in the Summer 1988 issue of *OUT/LOOK* was an interesting cultural text. I was delighted to read that Will's "odyssey" into Pueblo Indian culture had been guided by my old friend Harry Hay. In 1978 I too met Harry Hay in Santa Fe. I was then a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin and had returned home to write on Pueblo-Spanish relations in New Mexico's history. Harry befriended me, shared his library, and revealed the secrets of the berdaches to me, probably much in the same way as he befriended Will. The conclusions I reached about berdaches after ten years of research on the Pueblo Indians are very different from those Will Roscoe comes to. I wish to share some of the fruits of my research and offer a perspective very different from that found in the voluminous literature on the sex of the berdaches.¹ On pondering this essay readers will have to judge for themselves whether the berdache status in general, the Zuñi Indian We'wha in particular, really offers moderns an exemplary "gay role."

BERDACHE STATUS, that social arrangement whereby a man or group of men press another male into impersonating a female, forcing him to perform work generally associated with women, offering passive sexual service to men, and donning women's clothes, is widely reported historically throughout East Asia, in the Americas, in Islamic Africa, and is generally believed to have been diffused from these areas to Europe.² What we know about the Spanish American variant called *bradaje* (the Spanish word for male whore or prostitute) be it in New Mexico or Tierra del Fuego, comes largely from the narratives of the Spanish conquest and subsequent travelers' reports. Francisco Guerra recently collected all known references to *bradaje* in post-conquest sources in his book *The Pre-Columbian Mind*. The patterns of behavior which emerge from this compilation warrant our attention.



Must We Deracinate Indians to Find Gay Roots?

by Ramón A. Gutiérrez

In every North and South American Indian group in which berdaches were reported after 1492, their numbers were always small; often only between one and six, and rarely more than twenty. Berdache status was one principally ascribed to defeated enemies. Among the insults and humiliations inflicted on prisoners of war were homosexual rape, castration, the wearing of women's clothes, and performing women's work.³ Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca said as much during his 1523-33 trek across New Mexico: "I saw one man married to another, and these are impotent, effeminate men and they go about dressed as women, and do women's tasks, and shoot with a bow, and carry great burdens...and they are huskier than the other men and taller."⁴ That the berdaches were generally described as men who wielded instruments of war, who were stronger and taller than most, and who were forced to carry burdens, should lead us to warfare to explain their status. Wearing clothes, particularly women's clothing, among naked warriors, is another clue. When Cabeza de Vaca wrote the words cited above, he himself was naked and spoke of the nakedness of the Indian men. Why were the berdaches dressed when none of the other men were? To mark their status and humiliation among men.

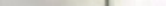
RICHARD TREXLER proposes in his forthcoming book *Europe on Top: Male Homosexuality and the Conquests of America, 1400-1700*, that in the Old World and in the New, there was a rather universal gender representation of conquest: victors on vanquishing their enemies asserted their virility by transforming losers into effeminates. Enemies had to perform women's work and to wear women's clothes as a sign of vanquishment. We certainly know that heterosexual rape was a common habit of war. What we are only now starting to admit is that losing men were similarly treated and were forced to perform what were considered demeaning forms of sexual service. Thus, it does not matter much whether we examine male prisoners of war

among the Zuni and the Arawaks, Aztec and Inca male temple slaves, or those figures on pre-Columbian Moche pottery jars from northern Peru depicting male slaves in women's clothes being passively penetrated in homosexual intercourse, to see the status inversion marked through gender symbols that were so frequently associated with defeated men.⁵

Conquest narratives, travelers' accounts and ethnographies also indicate that the social status of the berdaches had meaning primarily in the socio-political world of men. Berdaches were reported as being under male ownership. They were frequently found in male social spaces performing activities associated with females during male rituals: fellating powerful men or being anally mounted by them. Through the long historical evolution of the berdache status, it appears that they gradually came to be regarded as temple experts or as shamans who fulfilled magical and cosmological functions.⁶

TO UNDERSTAND HOW these comparative ethnographic facts on berdache status square with Pueblo Indian culture, let us examine briefly the organization of space within pueblo life. Until quite recently, residential segregation by sex was the rule in every pueblo. Pedro de Castañeda, one of New Mexico's first explorers, observed in 1541 that the "young men live in the *estufas* [*kivas* or male ceremonial lodges]...it is punishable for the women to sleep in the *estufas* or to enter them for any other purpose than to bring food to their husbands or sons." Diego Pérez de Luxán reiterated this point in 1582, as did Fray Jerónimo Zárate de Salmerón when he wrote in 1623: "The women and young children sleep in [houses]; the men sleep in the *kiva*."⁷

Segregated from women in the *kiva*, men practiced the religious or political lore which kept the community at peace with itself and with its gods. Women's rituals, centered in the household, celebrated their powers over seed life and human reproduction. Their



powers to bring forth life were immense and predictable. Men's magical powers over war, hunting, curing, and rain-making—the basic preoccupations of pueblo life—were always more unpredictable and precarious, and thus more elaborately ritualized. From men's perspective, women's capacity to produce, indeed to overproduce, was the problem that threatened to destroy the balance that existed in the cosmos between femininity and masculinity. Only by isolating themselves in ritual and placating the gods would men keep potent femininity from destroying everything. Women constantly sapped men of their energy—the men had to toil in fields that belonged to their mothers and wives, they had to protect the village from internal, external, natural, and supernatural enemies, and they constantly had to give semen to their voracious wives. Men got nothing in return from women in this agricultural society, for even if women bore children, until puberty those children belonged to their mothers.⁸

IT IS IN THIS isolated and fragile world of masculine political ritual that we must place berdaches or the *la'mana*, as they are known at Zuñi Pueblo. Male ritual was highly stratified. Men who became war chiefs, hunt chiefs or medicine men were persons with enormous political power by virtue of their physical strength, their knowledge of animal behavior, or their psychological acumen. It should thus not surprise us that the men who were pressed into berdache status were there primarily to service and delight the chiefs. Pedro de Castañeda, who observed a 1540 berdache initiation in New Mexico, noted that after the berdache had been cloaked in female garb,

the dignitaries came in to make use of her one at a time, and after them all the others who cared to. From then on she was not to deny herself to any one, as she was paid a certain established amount for the service. And even though she might take a husband later on, she was not thereby free to deny herself to any one who offered her pay.⁹

Several centuries later, in 1852, Dr. William A. Hammond, the US Surgeon Gen-

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eral, observed that the berdaches (he called them *mujerado*, literally "made into a woman") he met at Laguna and Acoma Pueblos, not far from Zuñi, were essential persons in the saturnalia or orgies, in which these Indians, like the ancient Greeks, Egyptians and other nations, indulge. He is the chief passive agent in the pederastic ceremonies, which form so important a part in the performances. These take place in the Spring of every year.

Hammond added that when a man was transformed into a berdache,

if he is a man occupying a prominent place in the councils of the pueblo, he is at once relieved of all power and responsibility, and his influence is at an end. If he is married, his wife and children pass from under his control, whether, however, through his wish or theirs, or by the orders of the council, I could not ascertain.

When Hammond asked if he could perform a physical exam on the Acoma berdache, it was Acoma's town chief who brought the berdache to Hammond and remained there throughout the examination. What these observations point to is the close association between Pueblo strong men or chiefs and the berdaches who offered sexual service. More important still is the status degeneration associated with these effeminates—they lost their social standing and family and were at the whim of any man who cared to use them.¹⁰

In Pueblo life, unmarried bachelors and junior men spent most of their time in the *kivas*. Ostensibly this was so that they could

master religious lore, but in reality, also to minimize conflicts between juniors and seniors over claims to access to female sexuality which adult married men enjoyed. Sex with a berdache not only served a personal erotic need, but was also an assertion of power by these young men which served a religious (political) end. So long as bachelors were having sex with the berdaches, their village was not beset with conflicts between men over women. For as Hernando de Alarcón would note in 1540, berdaches "could not have carnal relations with women at all, but they themselves could be used by all marriageable youths." This may have been the reason why the Spaniards also called berdaches *putos* (male whores). European prostitutes initiated young men to sexuality and gave married men a sexual outlet without disrupting family, marriage or patrimony. Male prisoners of war pressed into prostitu-

tion in women's clothes were living testaments to their conqueror's virility and prowess. When berdaches were offered to guests as a gesture of generosity and hospitality, this too testified to the master's power. And like every slave historically, berdaches became economic assets when sold to other men—so that they could play out their fantasies of domination.¹¹

THE VIOLENT MASCULINE WORLD of Pueblo Indian warriors is the cultural context within which we must place We'wha and the other *la'mana* that were reported at Zuñi Pueblo between 1880 and 1930. But bear in mind that conquest and annexation by the United States Army had, by these dates, totally constrained the ability of Pueblo men to wage war. What was left were the memories and rituals of war. In Pueblo religion, all ritual roles which are performed during ceremonies are believed to have supernatural antecedents or sanction. Will Roscoe correctly points us to the Zuñi myth "Destruction of the Kia'nakwe, and Songs of Thanksgiving," as the mythic explanation for the *la'mana*. I quote the myth here because it so poignantly elucidates the origins of berdache status.

The myth tells of war between the Zuñi gods and a group known as the Kia'nakwe. On the second night of what would be four days of fighting, the Zuñi Twin War Gods, U'yuyewi and Matsai'lema, were dispatched to Ko'thluwala'wa:

to implore the Council of the Gods to cause rainfall, that the A'shiwi bowstrings, which were made of yucca fiber, might be made strong, and the bowstrings of the enemy, made of deer sinew, might be weakened. The A'shiwi secured their arrows for the engagement with the Kia'nakwe on Ko'yemshi mountain. The prayers of the A'shiwi brought heavy rains on the third morning, and again they met the enemy. This time their forces were strengthened by the Kok'ko, present at the request of U'yuyewi and Matsai'lema, who were now the recognized Gods of War. Again Ku'yapalitsa, the Cha'kwena [Warrior Woman], walked in front of her army, shaking her rattle. She suc-



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ceeded in capturing four of the gods from Ko'thluwala'wa—Kor'kokshi, the first born of Si'wulutsiwa and Si'wulutsitsa; It'tsepa-sha (game-maker), one of the nine last-born; a Sa'yathlia (blue horn, a warrior god); and a Sha'lako (one of the couriers to the u'wannami (rain-makers). These gods succeeded in making their escape, but all were captured except the Sha'lako, who ran so like a hare that he could not be caught. The Kia'nakwe had a dance in which the prisoner gods appeared in celebration of their capture. Kor'kokshi, the first-born, was so angry and unmanageable that Ku'yapalitsa had him dressed in female attire previous to the dance, saying to him: 'You will now perhaps be less angry.'¹²

Matilda Coxe Stevenson, the anthropologist who transcribed this tale, explained in a marginal note that "in the Zuñi dramatization of the Kia'nakwe dance of thanksgiving for the capture of the gods the one personating the Kor'kokshi wears woman's dress and is referred to as the ko'thlama, meaning a man who has permanently adopted female attire." Elsie C. Parsons, another anthropologist, was told in 1916 that the reason the *la'mana* performed in the *kia'nakwe* dance was "because together with other *ko'ko* [gods] he [the *la'mana*] was taken prisoner by the *kia'nakwe*."

We know from other ethnographic sources that the person who personified Kor'kokshi during ceremonials not only wore female clothes, but also had blood smeared between his thighs. Matilda Coxe Stevenson and Elsie C. Parsons, the two persons who first observed this fact, as women, were predisposed to assume that a man dressed as a woman with blood between his thighs signified menstruation. Pueblo men greatly feared menstruating women and believed that they had the power to pollute male ritual. It thus seems highly unlikely that men would have represented a menstruating women in their rites. Rather, since the Kia'nakwe dance is about the capture and vanquishment of enemies, the blood might be explained more adequately as coming from a torn anus due to homosexual rape or castration.¹³

If we place We'wha and the other Zuñi berdaches in a larger comparative context, and in the thick description of the culture

from which they were torn, does our understanding of them change? Matilda Coxe Stevenson described We'wha in 1904 as "the tallest person in Zuñi; certainly the strongest." During an 1890 fracas with American soldiers from Fort Wingate, We'wha was apprehended fighting alongside Zuñi's governor and members of the warrior society (the Bow priests). When Zuñi men staged their ceremonials, observed Elsie C. Parsons in 1916, the *la'mana* dressed like a woman, styled his hair like a woman, and then personified a woman in dance. Yet, when a *la'mana* died, the corpse was dressed like a woman except that "under the woman's skirt a pair of trousers are put on." *La'mana* were always buried among the men. Indeed, the Zuñi would say of We'wha and other *la'mana*, "she is a man." And while the berdaches may have performed women's work, and lived and dressed like women, their "behavior was not typical of Zuñi women," as Will Roscoe observes.¹⁴

GAY SCHOLARS HAVE been all too eager to cast the berdache as a gender role to which someone is socialized rather than as a social status a person was pressed into or assumed. American anthropologists on the other hand have been content to see the berdaches in the context of the Apollonian orderliness, peacefulness, and consensus that was once mistakenly imputed to Pueblo society. As for the issue of gender role or social status, let us squeeze the ethnographies a little harder. In 1904, Matilda Coxe Stevenson observed that "the men of the family...not only discourage men from unsexing [that is, becoming berdaches]...but ridicule them." Elsie C. Parsons wrote of Zuñi's *la'mana* in 1916, "in general a family would be somewhat ashamed of having a *la'mana* among its members." Of a Zuñi berdache named U'k, Parsons stated, "U'k was teased...by the children." During one of the *sha'lako* dances Parsons saw at Zuñi, the audience "grinned and even chuckled" at U'k; "a very infrequent display of amusement during these *sha'lako* dances," Parsons confid-

ed. After the dance ended, Parsons' Cherokee hostess asked her: "Did you notice them laughing at her [U'k]?...She is a great joke to the people..."¹⁵

How do we reconcile the ridicule and low status the berdaches had in Zuni society with the high status and praise others lavish on them? For example, Roscoe writes:

By all standards, We'wha was an important member of his community. Stevenson described him as "the strongest character and the most intelligent of the Zuni tribe." The anthropologist Elsie Clew Parsons referred to him as "the celebrated *la'mana*."

The Pueblo Indians are well known for their aloofness toward outsiders, their general unwillingness to talk, and the secrecy with which they guard their esoteric knowledge and religion, even from their own young. We must thus ask why were berdaches like We'wha so eager to talk to American anthropologists in the 1890s? I suspect that as marginalized and low status individuals in the male political world, they were quite eager to tell their story to anyone willing to listen. Matilda Coxe Stevenson, Ruth Benedict and Elsie C. Parsons—all women who were themselves marginalized in the male academic world—listened to We'wha. As a result,

We'wha was elevated greatly in social status in the eyes of all those whites who subsequently read about him. He quickly acculturated, and as Will Roscoe tells us, "We'wha was one of the first Zunis to earn cash. After Stevenson showed him the bene-



How do we reconcile the ridicule and low status the berdaches had in Zuñi society with the high status and praise others lavish on them?

fits of using soap to wash clothes, he went into business doing laundry for local whites." And eventually We'wha even went to Washington, DC to mimic those caricatures of Indians which whites had created in their own minds.

In thinking about the meaning of berdache status among American Indians, we can profit by comparing it in different societies. It is equally important that when we pluck out an individual from his or her culture (be it We'wha, U'k or the countless other berdaches that once lived) that we place them in the context of those societies' hierarchies of gender. As for gays who seek a less rigid gender hierarchy in which to grow and prosper, the berdache status as a gender representation of power in war is probably not the place to find it. By finding gay models where they do not exist, let us not perpetrate on We'wha or U'k yet another level of humiliation with our pens. For then, the "conspiracy of silence" about the berdaches which Harry Hay had hoped to shatter will only be shrouded once again in romantic obfuscations. ▼

¹Those interested in this literature should consult J. Katz, *Gay American History* (New York, 1976) and C. Callender and L. Kochems, "The North American Berdache," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1963), pp. 443-70.

²Though the berdache status is reported for men and women, the male variant is best known. Harriet Whitehead does examine female berdache status in "The bow and the burden strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America," in Ortner and Whitehead, eds., *Sexual Meanings* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 80-115.

³R. Treppler, *Europe on Top: Male Homosexuality and the Conquests of America, 1400-1700* (forthcoming, Polity Press); C. Callender and L. Kochems, "The North American Berdache," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1963), pp. 443-70.

⁴"Naufrhios de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," quoted in J. Katz, *Gay American History* (New York, 1976), p. 285.

⁵R. Treppler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980).

⁶On berdaches as shamans see W. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston, 1986).

⁷G. Hammond and A. Rey, eds. and trans., *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition 1540-1542* (Albuquerque, 1940), pp. 254-55; G. Hammond and A. Rey, eds. and trans., *The Rediscovery of New Mexico 1580-1594* (Albuquerque, 1966), p. 178; Fray J. Zárate de Salmérón, *Relación* (Albuquerque, 1967), paragraph 74.

⁸H. Haeberlin, *The Idea of Fertilization in the Culture of the Pueblo Indians* (New York, 1916); J. Collier, *Marriage in Classless Societies* (Stanford, 1988).

⁹Hammond and Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition*, p. 248.

¹⁰H. Hay, "The Hammond Report," *One Institute Quarterly* 6 (1963), p. 11.

¹¹Hammond and Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition*, p. 147-48.

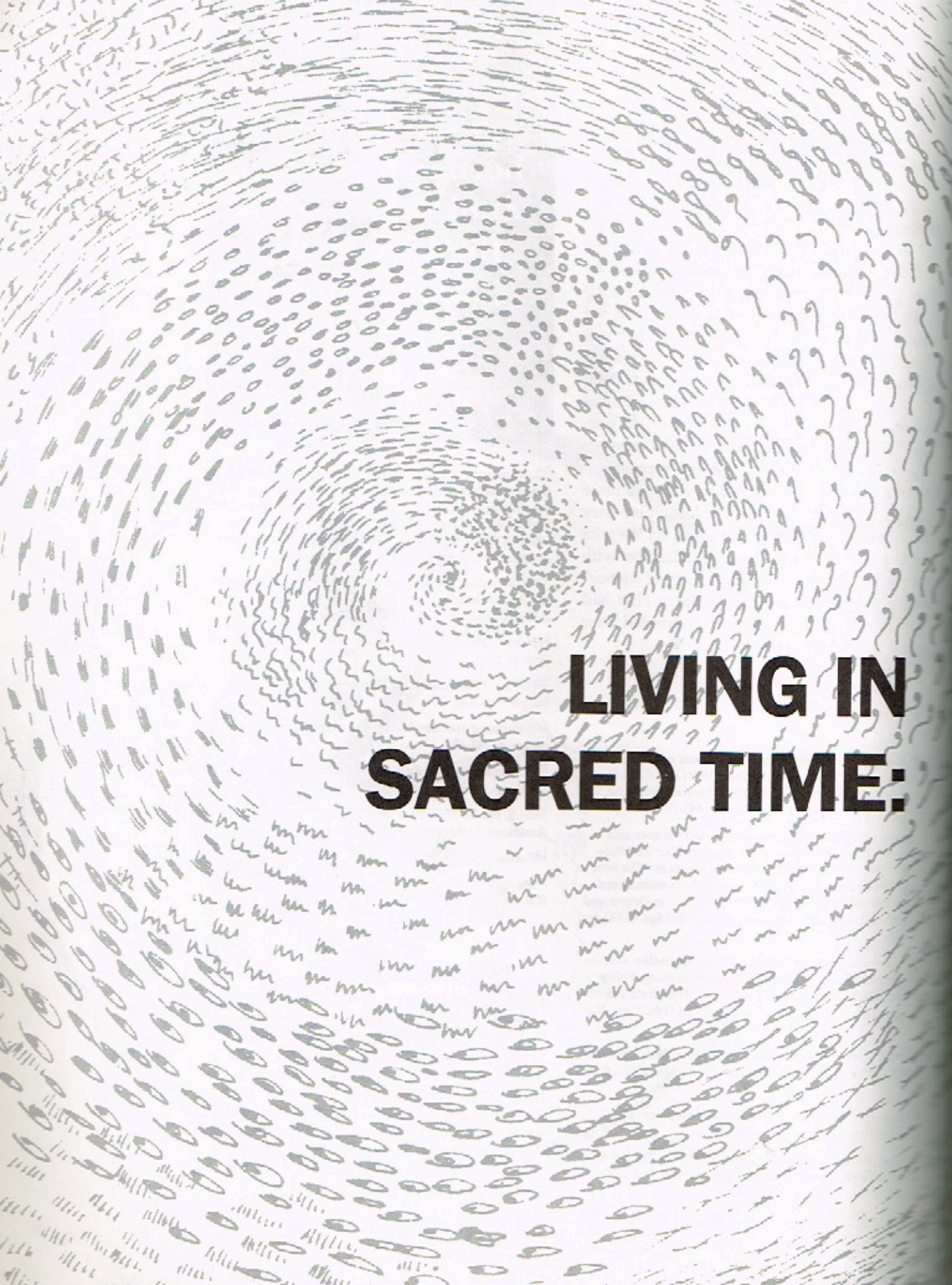
¹²M. Stevenson, *The Zuñi Indians* (Washington, D.C., 1904), pp. 36-37.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 36-37; E. Parsons, "The Zuñi La'mana," *American Anthropologist* 18 (1916), p. 525.

¹⁴Parsons, p. 529.

¹⁵Stevenson, *The Zuñi Indians*, p. 37; Parsons, pp. 526, 528.

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LIVING IN SACRED TIME:

January 1988

On New Year's Day, Barbara and I sit cradling steaming mugs of tea at our kitchen table, planning a ritual to mark the anniversary of our commitment ceremony and to honor the final stage of her living and dying. The cancer has begun to grow again in her liver, infiltrating nearly all her organs and resisting any but the most extreme and debilitating treatment. Time has become compressed and collapsed. There is no longer information to gather, data to review, choices to weigh. Barbara will die within a few months. Everything that could be done has been done, her cancer is considered "uncontrolled." Now Barbara is left to engage with another kind of knowledge, one beyond predictability, beyond understanding, which, in her case, borders on wisdom.

Barbara insists on choosing, on entering the "sacred" time, on facing her own death squarely, honestly, saying everything that needs to be said. She is involved in all the reading, the research, the preparation, the ritual. Needing to die at home in our bed with

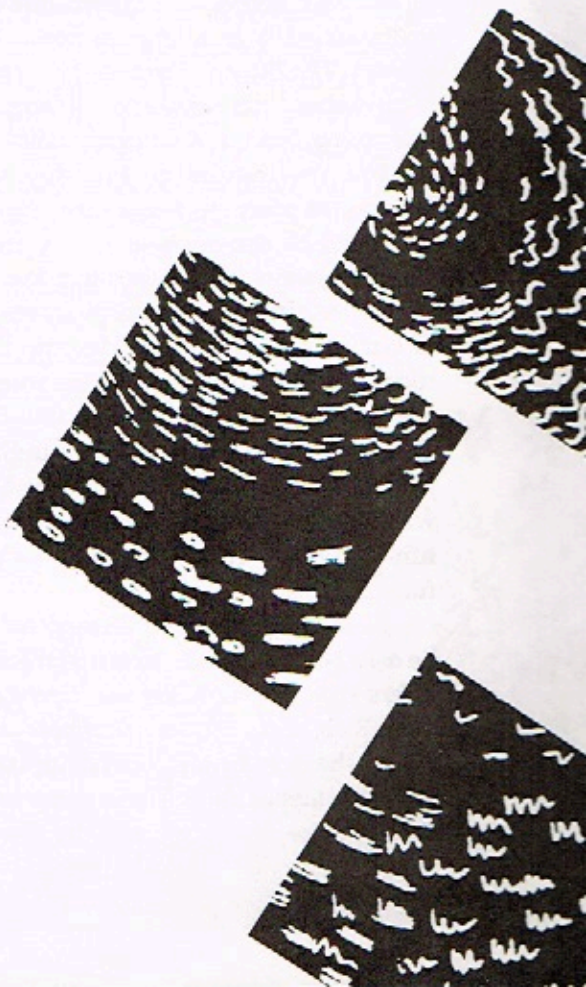
me, her friend Stan, her sister Ruth, near her. Insistent that she take back the control that was wrested from her by the inexorable spread of the disease, the depletion of her strength, her energy, the possibility of more time. She took control of her living and her dying when she decided not to continue "salvage" treatment—when she weighed the risks against the gains and chose a conscious death. After that searing decision was made, we both softened into her last weeks.

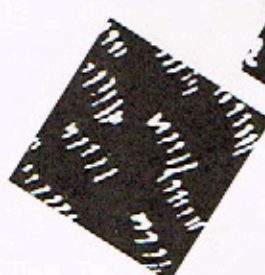
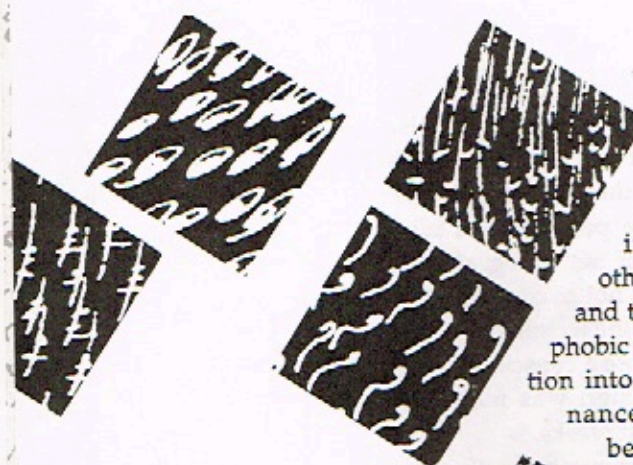
Each Monday morning now, Barbara meets with the rabbi of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, a small gay and lesbian synagogue. It is an unexpected return to a religious history that was handled ambivalently by her parents who defined themselves as cultural and political, but not religious, Jews. This connection gives Barbara comfort, a sense of place and time, and an ability to see herself on a continuum—between life and death, between the past and the future, between her beloved grandmother, now dead for decades, and her two-year-old nephew, Asher. The synagogue

JOURNAL OF A SURVIVOR

by Sandra Butler

Illustrations by Rachel Katz





has become the place where she can say prayers for her grandmother, where together we can join in community with other gay and lesbian Jews and translate an often homophobic and male-defined tradition into one of comfort, sustenance, and continuity. She begins to study Talmud and ethical wills of the 16th century. She prepares to take a *mikvah*, the ritual bath of purification.

I drive her to the synagogue where she eagerly climbs the steep flight of stairs to the rabbi's book-lined office. Returning an hour later, her face shining with enthusiasm, she races towards me in the cafe across the street. She chatters enthusiastically as I drive us home. *The Book of Jonah. The Talmud.* The post-Holocaust view of cremation. Her mind races to keep up with this young, kind, and scholarly rabbi.

But the inevitable Monday morning arrives, the morning when she is too weak to dress and be driven across town, too frail to climb the stairs, to reason, spar, and struggle with ideas. Instead, the rabbi agrees to come to our home, and I usher him into the living room where Barbara rests on the sofa, preparing to absent myself. But on this morning, Barbara pats the sofa beside her, urging me to join them. I sit uncertainly as she leans forward towards the rabbi and looks directly at him, saying, "Today we need to plan my funeral."

Recovering from this unexpected request, he asks how she wants to shape the ritual. He offers the words of Stephen Spender, Adrienne Rich, other modern prophets and poets. "No," she says firmly, nearly cutting him off in mid-sentence. "No. That's not what I want. This service is for my parents. They don't

know who Adrienne Rich is or what Stephen Spender wrote. They won't understand or be comforted with the language of strangers. They need the ancient words. The prayers. The sounds."

Barbara had been writing a series of letters to her nephew, Asher—each to be a birthday gift and bound in a book for his *bar mitzvah*. Each letter addressed a dimension reflective of a moral life. She wrote of courage, of honor, of choice and commitment, of fullness. She asks Rabbi Kahn to read from the letter about the importance of having a social dream. It was the letter in which the lives of her parents were honored, a life of walking precincts, knocking on doors, marching demonstrations, a legacy Barbara described as their gentle brand of Brooklynese socialism. In this letter, she also wrote of her own motivation to become a teacher. "I wanted to inspire my students with the passion of a social dream. I believe strongly that knowledge is power, and I wanted to be an agent of transmission of knowledge. I wanted my students to have hope, to have the energy to fight great struggles, and I wanted to pass my dream to hundreds of people I could influence."

As their discussion continues, and my pads fill with suggested readings and prayers, I turn to Barbara and interrupt them. "I want to speak too, love. I need to have the sound of my words a part of the funeral service." "Of course," she smiles, squeezing my hand weakly. "It couldn't be any other way. My words are a part of everything." Flashing a teasing smile, her energy visibly faded, she excuses herself to return to the bed where she spends much of her time now.

I lead the rabbi down the long hallway, my eyes burning with tears. "Thank you," I murmur as I open the front door. "Thank you for being so responsive, so gentle, so present. Our eyes hold each other's for a brief moment. He moves down the front stairs, and I return to my rocking chair positioned beside our bed. I spend much of my time there now so that Barbara can see me when she wakes so I can sit and read to her, write with her, close by.



February 1988

"I think it will be my time soon," she whispers. Her bloated, swollen body is unable to turn, to move, to walk. Mouth sores make speech uncomfortable. She is reduced now from sentences to words, from glasses of iced water to a moistened cloth laid gently upon her cracked lips. Silently, unable to answer, I stroke her leg that is bent towards me, towards contact. It is the only part of her body I can touch or caress now without discomfort for her, the only way I can soothe her sore, sweet flesh. I whisper again, as I have so many times in the past year, that I will be at her side when her death comes. With that reassurance, she drifts back to sleep, and I know with a mournful clarity that this might be one of the last nights I will ever lie beside her, hear her breath rise and fall, place my lips on her shoulder, her ear, her arm. I remain awake beside her all through the rest of the night. Loving her.

The next morning, Valentine's Day, I sit beside her as she dozes, Ruth and Stan at the kitchen table talking quietly together. Mid-morning, I rise to prepare a tray of herb tea and ice water, and when I re-enter the bedroom, she is dead. Her body is warm and open, her eyes open, her lips soft and parted. Placing the tray beside the now unnecessary bottles, pills, medications, I lay down beside her, gather her into my arms and whisper, "I love you. Go towards the light, my dearest love. Go with love and with calm. *Sh'ma Israel Adonai Eloheinu Adonei Echod*. Go love, gently peacefully toward the light."

My hand rests on her narrow chest, making circles over her heart. My hand on her heart where it had been a year before as we stood together under the *chupa* which sheltered us and symbolized our

shared home. Now, for the last time, my hand on her heart, my words becoming sighs, I dimly hear Ruth singing traditional Yiddish songs from their shared childhood.

I cradle Barbara into me, her limp body now able to be held without pain. I run my hands along her familiar shape, needing to make an imprint on my palms, kissing her on her parched lips to remind myself of her taste, her feel, her smell. Memories to carry with me for my life.

"Goodbye, my dearest love. Thank you for loving me so deeply and so well. I will keep you in my heart for as long as I live. You fill and nourish me now as you did in life. I have been blessed with you. May you travel with mercy and with light."

Days later, her body covered in the same clothes she had worn at our commitment ceremony, the rabbi


mounts the pulpit above the redwood box, carved with a Star of David, to lead the service they had written together. He leads the prayers, speaks the ancient words, reads from her writing; the cantor sings the traditional songs as her parents, David and Regina, sit beside me, dazed, the cut black ribbon visible

**They won't be
comforted with the
language of
strangers.**

**They need the
ancient words.**

The prayers.

The sounds.



evidence of their broken hearts, a slash upon their chests.

Midway through the service, the rabbi pauses, and I rise to read the words I had written that morning at 5:30. When I finish, I look down at the coffin, picturing Barbara inside it in her purple satin sweat shirt, black silk pants, and speak directly to her. "It truly was a sacred pilgrimage. Thank you, love."

Descending from the pulpit, I move past her parents, still staring ahead, past her sister Ruth, her best friend Stan, and lower myself onto the wooden pew. As the rabbi closes the service by leading the mourners in the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, the living disrupt Barbara's carefully arranged offering. The words of the prayer, *yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei-ra-ba* fill the chapel and with them the sound of a shriek, sustained for a heartbeat and becoming a wail, growing higher and higher as Barbara's mother pushes herself out of her seat and begins to move heavily across the small aisle to the coffin containing her firstborn. The sound is a barrier, a shield to stop the inexorable process of this prayer, this ending. It rises above the murmuring of the assembled congregation, gathering force, gathering strength. As her throat pushes forth these primitive moans, I remember the cries of labor, the elemental noises the body makes when it is beyond its capacity to tolerate pain. Her wails become keening, then blurred back into language, pleading. Words she is speaking to Barbara, to God, to anyone who could erase this moment.

"No—no—they're not saying this. Not for my Barbara. Take me. Please take me. I'm old and I'm ready. It's not right. It's not natural. Let me go in her place." Her face contorts as she moves towards Barbara. Words insufficient now, she presses herself toward her

child and begins to wail again, no tears left, but in their place, an agonizing sound that is both riveting in its force and horrifying in its anguish.

Barbara's sister rises, now her mother's only remaining child, and she and Stan flank the old couple, moving them out of the chapel, Barbara's mother's body sagging, her cries growing fainter and more desperate as she is led away. As the Kaddish ends, I rise to greet the mourners. I feel before I see my two daughters move to surround me, to flank me in the same way Regina had been enclosed by her husband and daughter. These grown women, my children, stand silently on each side of me, a parenthesis of my life, a devotion of continuity, making this moment bearable.

Returning home, the house is already filled with women moving briskly around the kitchen. Coffee is brewed, cakes are piled high on platters—the traditional meal of consolation. Barbara's mother, led in by her husband and daughter, lowers herself heavily into my father's old tufted leather chair, its high back and sturdy arms dwarfing her, her legs scarcely touching the floor. She has been sedated and responds to the steady stream of friends who approach her with a polite blankness. A friend who counsels people with advanced cancer approaches me; she places her hand gently on my arm and says, "Barbara's mother remembers how to mourn, how to make the sound we have all forgotten and needed to hear. She is a woman who is not muted and well-behaved in her grief as we have learned to be."

I understand then what Barbara had overlooked in her careful planning, the missing link in her loving preparations. She had forgotten the necessity of yet another sound. The one a mother makes when she must outlive her firstborn. Then, the day becomes

**She had
forgotten the
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her firstborn.**

whole and intact. There has been the ancient Hebrew, the chanting, the secular readings, the words honoring a political life, the prayers, and finally, the wailing and shrieking. Let there be gnashing of teeth—crashes of thunder, bolts of lightning. The heavens opened and took her firstborn child. The ritual is now complete. Then the moment shifts, stillness descends upon the living room with the soft grey leather sofa, the botanical prints, the coffee, pound cake, and buzzing of well-behaved mourners.

During the week of *shiva*, the period of mourning, the house is filled with bustling women, relieved to have tasks to occupy them and a concrete way to express their sorrow. Others are awkward, needing language, words to shape their experience of this loss. And some are content to just sit quietly among the chattering mourners. Pies, cakes, noodle pudding, briskets, and soups fill the counters and refrigerator—although I cannot force myself to eat. Sleep is impossible, and I fill the nights by prowling in and out of each room, lifting and replacing each object, picture, and book that remind me of our life together. Each evening, the rabbi and cantor come to the house to lead the prayers and chanting that marks the *shiva* period. I remain suspended, poised for Friday, the last Sabbath. It will mark the completion of our final shared ritual, the moment when I will put Barbara back into her garden, the 10-by-10 plot of ground she had tended and nurtured for 15 years.

Ruth and her parents have returned to Brooklyn after the funeral, needing their familiar environment, unable to stay in a home so filled with memories of Barbara. Stan has remained with me for the *shiva* period, and we drive to the chapel on Friday afternoon to retrieve Barbara's ashes. I gather up the square, brown, plastic box with urgen-

cy, hurry home, and place it on the glass table next to the Sabbath candlesticks. At sundown, the eight friends Barbara and I had chosen gather in our living room to participate in this ceremony. The Sabbath candles are lit and blessed, creating a counterpoint to the candle on the mantle, burning for seven

days to symbolize the period of mourning. After the prayers are completed, we all file down the back staircase into Barbara's garden.

Each person brought a plant to be placed into the ground, and after patting the soil gently around the roots of their offering, completing their goodbyes to Barbara, after the Tibetan bell was rung—the bell that had begun our commitment ceremony—I reached for the brown box, cradling it with both hands.

"It's time to put my honey into the garden now."

Opening the box, I bury my hand in the coarse ash and pieces of bone, and scoop out handfuls letting them sift through my fingers and drift down to blanket the soil. Circling the garden three times, being sure her essence covered every inch of the small space, I tenderly complete the cycle of re-birth in this small sanctuary.

Amen. ▼

This piece is excerpted from Cancer in Two Voices, a work-in-progress, begun by Barbara Rosenblum and Sandra Butler. It is written for women who face life-threatening illness and those who love them.

Sandra Butler's partner, Barbara Rosenblum, wrote "Living in an Unstable Body" which appeared in the Spring 1988 issue of OUT/LOOK. February 14 marks the yartzeit (anniversary) of Barbara's death.

About the artist: Rachel Katz is an artist who is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in psychology.

Pasivos y Activos *en Nicaragua:*

H O M O -
S E X U A L I T Y
W I T H O U T
A G A Y
W O R L D

by Barry Adam

NICARAGUA IS A SOCIETY that has never had the accoutrements of a modern gay world—no commercial enterprises, voluntary organizations, nor social movement composed of self-identified homosexual people.*

In recent years, gay studies have shown that there are many varieties of homosexuality. Historical and anthropological evidence on sexual and emotional bonding between men and between women shows no lack of same-sex attraction, but little of gay worlds or lesbian movements. Though all of these examples can be grouped together under the category of "homosexuality" (even if heterosexuals want us to claim the sexual but not the emotional as our own), "homosexually-interested" people have at least as much in common with other people of their own culture as with homosexual people elsewhere.

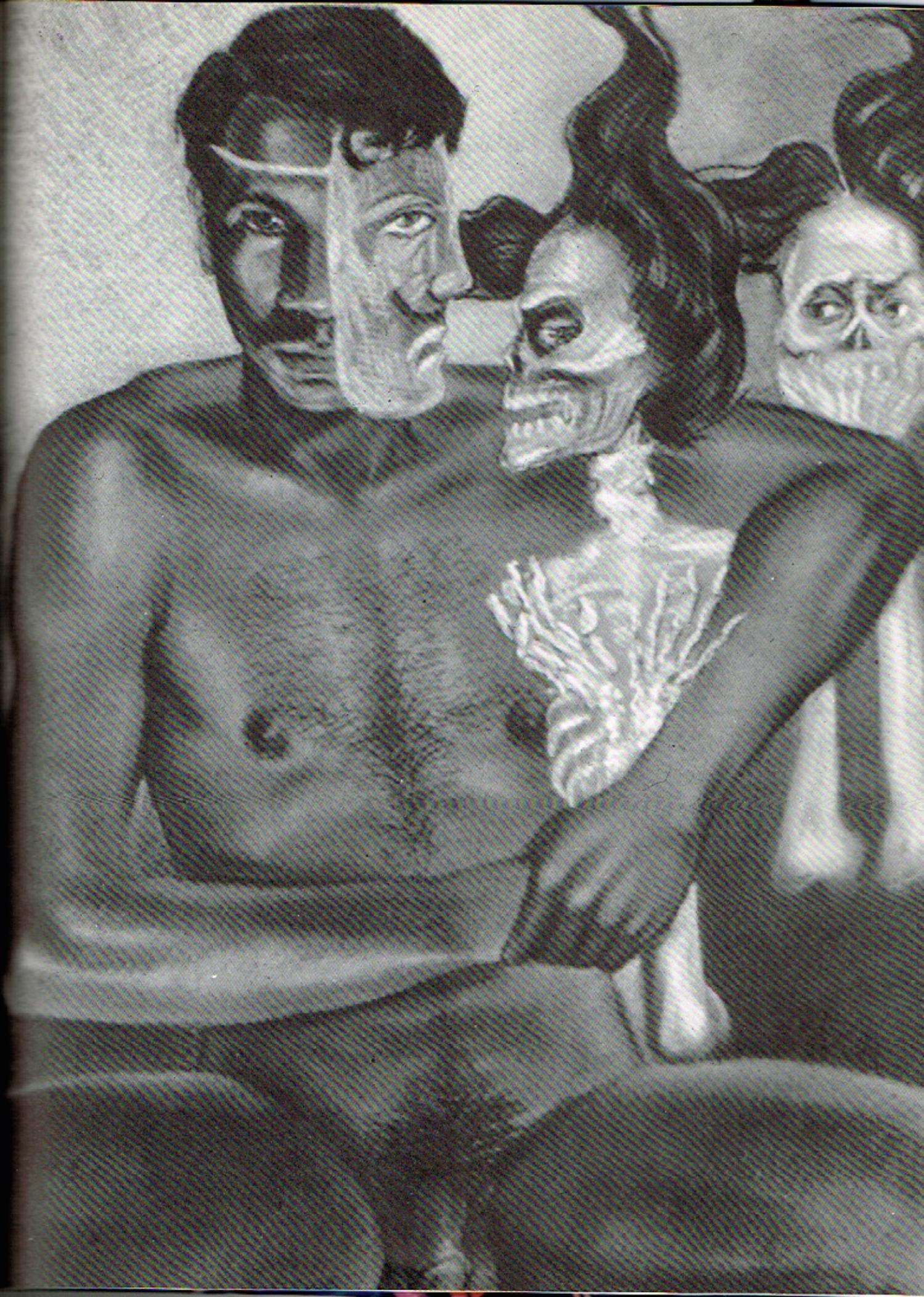
Nicaraguan men tend to interpret their "homosexual" experiences in a way common to most of Latin America. They tend to divide

the world into the "real men" and the "sissies." But, at the same time, Nicaraguans with more education and international contacts are developing an awareness of gay definitions of homosexual experience. Most people of whatever sexual orientation recognize the word "gay" from the international press.

EVEN TOWNS OF 30,000 or 40,000 have loose networks of homosexually-interested men, but the lack of a developed gay world in Managua, a city of about 750,000, is striking especially in comparison to the adjacent capital of San José, Costa Rica, with its bars and saunas and relative lack of role-defined homosexuality.

An understanding of the current social and economic conditions of the city and the nation can begin to throw light on the situation in Managua. A recent issue of *Ensayos*

*Because I met too few lesbians during my stay in Nicaragua to be able to comment intelligently, I am confining my remarks to gay men.



Nicaraguan magazine, describes Managua as barely a capital and even less urban or sophisticated. In fact, it is an immense, sprawling rural town....With its infrequent traffic lights and even more infrequent sidewalks, the city is actually a knitted belt of neighborhoods wrapped around a wasteland made empty by the 1972 earthquake....Transport and communication, already difficult before the war, are now nearly impossible. The steamy city lacks recreation or diversion centers, with the exception of some baseball lots and few badly air-conditioned theaters.

The rural atmosphere is reinforced by goats grazing in the middle of major boulevards and a cacophony of roosters heard every morning throughout the city.

The 1972 earthquake destroyed much of the housing in the city and, with the second highest birthrate in the western hemisphere and an influx of rural migrants, most people in Managua live in very crowded quarters. The Contra war, waged over the last eight years by the Reagan administration with U.S. taxpayers' money, has bankrupted the country, forcing it to turn half of its national budget to defense. And many social programs intended to improve the medical, educational,

homosexual men "hanging out, keeping their eyes open" in the most populated bars, streets, and cinemas of the eastern neighborhoods of Bello Horizonte and Costa Rica and the newly named Avenida Williams Romero. Meeting other gay people, then, is not easy or convenient.

These social and economic constraints mean that very few have control over personal space—most unmarried men are unable to find or afford housing of their own. This inability to avoid family supervision is compounded by the architecture of houses and commercial establishments. Except for the homes of the small middle class, most people live in houses that open directly onto the street, permitting passersby to apprehend at a glance the activities of all the residents inside. Though there is a bar owned by two gay men, like other cafes and bars in the neighborhood it is separated from the street by no more than a metal grill, obliging its homosexual patrons to observe the norms of heterosexual propriety.

Managua is a set of loosely connected small towns in which most inhabitants spend a great deal of their lives; they know everyone and are, in turn, known by all. These living conditions create fundamentally different conceptions of what is public and what is private—so coming out is a different experience than in northern societies. Without privacy, homosexuals remain fully embedded in family life and involved in its rituals while, at the same time, they are held to the expectations of heterosexuality. With the difficulty of getting around the city and lack of money, people spend a great deal of their lives in their home neighborhoods. In this way, families and neighbors are rapidly apprised of each other's personal habits—including homosexual inclinations.

When I went with a friend to the mountain town where he grew up, we walked easily through the streets, looking in windows and stepping unannounced through unlocked doors into houses to talk to townsfolk who showed no surprise at our apparent intrusion. He was also able to let me know who was "interested" and who wasn't. Just as he knew

Without privacy, homosexuals remain fully embedded in the rituals of family life while they are at the same time held to the expectations of heterosexuality.

and nutritional standards of the people are on hold. Almost all Nicaraguans are now feeling intense economic pressure. With salaries ranging from \$35-\$45 per month for most blue collar and white collar workers and no more than \$60-\$70 for professionals, few are able to survive on the income from one job alone and, with wages controlled by the state and an inflation rate of 1200 percent in 1987, few escape a severe financial squeeze. And last fall's Hurricane Joan only exacerbated the economic situation.

These conditions inhibit the growth of a public gay life beyond the current scene of

about everyone else, little about him was not known to his kin and neighbors. The result is that coming out is not such an issue when everyone already knows. Ironically, neighborhood gossip efficiently informs homosexual people about others in their area.

Despite being known about, however, there is no publicly recognized gay identity; men with homosexual interests are still regularly asked about their marital status, about girl friends, and are likely to be lectured on the virtues of family life, as are all other unmarried men. Knowledge, then, does not entail any allowance or respect for alternative domestic arrangements. Rather, it is "unofficial" and in some sense unmentionable, like a host of other personal habits and peculiarities known about other members of the neighborhood.



PHOTO BY JESSE SANCHEZ

SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS among men in Nicaragua typically display the gender-defined codes observed elsewhere in Latin America. It is the *pasivos* who are usually equated with *homosexuales* by both *homosexuales* and the larger society, while *activos* are largely indistinguishable from the rest of the male population and generally escape unlabeled. Though there are few words of self-appellation, the Spanish language requires that all nouns show gender; *pasivos* share a sense of collective identity by referring to themselves with a wide range of feminine terms. It is the *pasivos*, as well, who appear to have well-developed social networks and a culture of "queen talk" recognizable to anyone from a society that does have an explicitly gay world.

Among themselves, *pasivos* are "sisters." Most *pasivos* believe that sexual interests develop only across the "gender" line. Every-

one is slotted into one or another of the folk categories, though everyone knows that actual behavior is not always so easily categorized. Assignment to one or another of these categories is neither self-evident nor automatic as there is no necessary link between *pasivos* and effeminacy, and roles may have to be worked out between individuals.

The *activos* are, at least theoretically, ordinary men and as such, have no identity or society apart from the mainstream. When I remarked to an *activo* that in North America, "gay" refers to sexual orientation and includes both *activo* and *pasivo*, he concluded that everyone must be gay, because the entire gender complex depends on the *machista* ideology that men have the right to fuck anyone (gender of the partner being irrelevant), while those who are fucked are subordinate/feminine. In this, Nicaragua shares a common gender system and understanding of homosexuality with other, less urbanized regions of Latin America.

Sexual contact itself is limited by the general absence of privacy to vacant lots, parks, and dark recesses, which are also sought by young heterosexual pairs, and subject to invasion or interruption at any moment by passersby (not to mention the inconvenience of biting ants and poisonous snakes). Nevertheless, there are some male couples who

have succeeded in living together in Managua, even though they may present themselves as cousins to their neighbors.

Overall, homosexual life in Nicaragua has been little influenced by official or expert discourses. There are no books on homosexuality in the National Library and only one antiquated Catholic text at the university. Medicine, it would appear, has been so preoccupied with the pressing crises of infant mortality, malaria, and abysmal health conditions that it has not launched into more esoteric realms such as sexuality. Awareness of the gay world and political movements elsewhere tends to be confined to personal contact with foreigners.

Recognizable or "suspect" homosexual men may be subjected to harassment or assault, evicted from bars, or taunted in the street. In a city where youth gangs have become a problem, homosexual men feel especially vulnerable, as they do in so many

other cities of the world. There is also entrapment, not by the police, but by *machos* who chat up the unsuspecting for blackmail. In any society as poor as this, economics intrudes: either benignly, in young men who are attracted to successful men they hope will become their sponsors, or malevolently through blackmail.

The most widely perceived sources of oppression are *machismo*, family, and the church. The revolutionary government is recognized as a progressive coalition working to break down the hegemony of *machismo* and Roman Catholicism, and homosexual men and women are involved and even publicly known to be involved in Sandinista organizations. In a country of three million, the rumor circuits keep everyone up-to-date on the scandals and foibles of the leadership, and few heterosexual Nicaraguans have not heard persistent reports of certain homosexual male and female comandantes. Official spokesper-

Update:

AIDS EDUCATION— NICARAGUAN STYLE

by Tatiana Schreiber
and Lynn Stephen

Since the Sandinista government started a campaign to prevent AIDS, Nicaragua's imports of condoms have jumped to five million a year for its population of three million. Other Latin American countries have kept the discussion of condoms, sexuality, and AIDS under wraps—as well as condoms themselves. But Nicaragua,

through MINSA (its Ministry of Health) and a collective of community health workers, has already launched a safe-sex education program at the grassroots community level.

Currently one percent of the sexually active population in Nicaragua (about 20,000 people) has had anonymous HIV tests. The reported incidence of seropositive cases is five among Nicaraguans and 21 among foreigners. As of October 1988, two

people have died of AIDS in Nicaragua—one heterosexual man and one gay man.

While AIDS prevention programs have not yet reached the majority of the population, something important has happened nonetheless. By distributing condoms and safe-sex information in public cruising parks, on college and high school campuses, and in youth and military organizations, lesbian and gay community health outreach workers have helped create a protected space for public dialogue about sexuality. This open discussion, particularly about lesbian and gay sexuality, may not have existed until a year or two ago.

There are several explanations for the government's willingness to start talking about sex. The Sandinistas have a pre-

sons of AMNLAE, the Sandinista women's association, insist that there is no restriction by sexual orientation on membership in the mass organizations, and that the work of gay men and lesbians for the revolution is respected.

Although there are no laws about or against homosexuality, the issue of gay rights is not a public topic or part of the political culture. Outside observers, mindful of the repressive roles of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in Cuba, have questioned the role of the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) in Nicaragua, but in fact the CDS have steered away from regulating personal morality or sexuality.

There are both historical and national reasons for this difference between the two coun-



tries. In seeking to rid the island of US exploitation in 1959, the Cuban revolutionaries evicted the American corporate elite and the mob-run casinos and brothels. At that time, homosexuality got lumped in as another "foreign vice." In Nicaragua, there had been no history of a US-dominated "sin industry" to attract local resentment. Both left- and

ventive approach to healthcare in general—a model that enabled the country to eradicate polio, for instance, in only two years. They also opt to have popular education programs conducted by those groups closest to, and most affected by, particular issues. In addition, the Sandinista AIDS programs have been influenced by the strong presence of US lesbians and gay men in the Central American solidarity movement, and the friendships between lesbians and gay men living in Managua and those from other countries. (The terms "gay" and "lesbian" are used with caution here since not all Nicaraguan men and women use these labels. Nicaraguan "gay and lesbian" health workers may have more of an identification with the political and social meaning of the words

through their contact with foreigners.)

Before there were any reported individuals who tested HIV-positive, MINSA appointed an AIDS commission. A turning point in the work of this commission came in 1986 when the Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club of San Francisco sent a group of health workers to the fourth annual North American-Nicaraguan Colloquium on Health. As a result of the exchange at the Colloquium, MINSA decided to incorporate AIDS information into another campaign it was planning against sexually transmitted diseases in general. Members of the Harvey Milk Brigade also held several safe-sex workshops in parks and homes around Managua, sessions that became models for those now conduct-

ed by the Community Health Outreach Workers.

After the Colloquium, Nicaraguan lesbian and gay health workers began to come out of the closet and approach MINSA about working on the AIDS campaign themselves. Their leadership was welcomed. Just as peasants were heavily involved in the rural literacy campaign after the 1979 revolution, gay men and lesbians have been encouraged to take on major roles in the national AIDS education campaign—both as workers and as advisors to the government. They have helped ensure that all of the campaign materials are sensitive to the varied sexualities of Nicaraguans. Some lesbian health workers have begun to work with female prostitutes as well.

Recently, one of us visited

**Although there are no laws about
or against homosexuality in Nicaragua,
the issue of gay rights is not a public topic
or part of the political culture.**

right-wing ideologies of the 1950s agreed on the wickedness of homosexuality. Both McCarthyism in the United States and Stalinism in the Soviet Union embraced campaigns of persecution against gay people. By the 1970s, gay liberation had entered on the side of the "good guys" among Eurocommunists and progressive movements of Europe and North America. The Sandinista approach to homosexuality reflects the modern era.

Police harassment has been reported, but this seems to stem more from *machismo* than any official policy. While I was in Managua,

one of my friends—after becoming totally drunk—accosted a stranger in the street who reported him to the police. The police kept him overnight in the local station to dry out. He emerged next morning, without any charges having been made, and with a broad grin on his face, told us about the "adventure" he had had with a fellow inmate during the night.

Though there has been very little public discussion of homosexuality in postrevolutionary Nicaragua, the topic did come into print during November of 1985 in the pages of the daily *El Nuevo Diario*. The issue surfaced in an editorial about Managua's perennial garbage problem, in which homosexuals were referred to as garbage (*basura*). This was followed by an editorial page commentary by Pablo Juarez Calvo who charged:

The assertion is clearly defamatory for a minority, or not a minority, of humanity, for a group of human beings in any case. Is not

Nicaragua and observed one of the AIDS prevention workshops that regularly take place between lesbian and gay health workers and the men who cruise Managua's public parks to pick up partners and have sex. One Friday evening, about 20 young men had gathered, arms wrapped around each other. Most of them called themselves *muchachos* (girls). The *machos*, or *activos*, didn't participate actively in the conversation, but listened in the background.

The talk was frank; one man said he wouldn't agree to have sex if someone approached him who didn't want to use condoms. There were so many questions about testing that the educators made plans to come back for a special workshop on that topic alone. Then the edu-

cators counted the number of men and divided up the supply of condoms and safe-sex pamphlets. One man organized another meeting for those who wanted to go together to the anonymous testing facility. As the meeting ended, the police drove up. Instead of harassing the men, the officers got out of their car and sat on the hood, chatting and smoking.

While a scene like this is by no means commonplace in Nicaragua, it is indicative of an incremental but important change in attitudes regarding sexuality. As Amy Bank, who works in Managua as a liaison with the San Francisco Nicaraguan AIDS Education Project, says, "The Ministry of Health has promoted an image of activism, caring and participation by gay people rather than

shoving them to one side, or simply saying this is not a gay disease. They could have ignored the gay question, but instead they promoted...[it]... in terms of a good, public response to AIDS."

As MINSA expands its sexual education programs to all sectors of Nicaraguan society, the dialogue on sex—including lesbian, gay, and bisexual—will increasingly become part of the official discourse on health, sexuality, AIDS, and the construction of a revolutionary society. ▀

Contributions for Nicaraguan AIDS Education Project can be made to the Vanguard Foundation/Bill Kraus Fund, 3181 Mission Street #13, San Francisco, California 94110. Bill Kraus, who died of AIDS, was a gay activist involved in the Central American solidarity movement.

Tatiana Schreiber works for the Resist Foundation in Boston. Lynn Stephen is an assistant professor of Anthropology at Northeastern University.

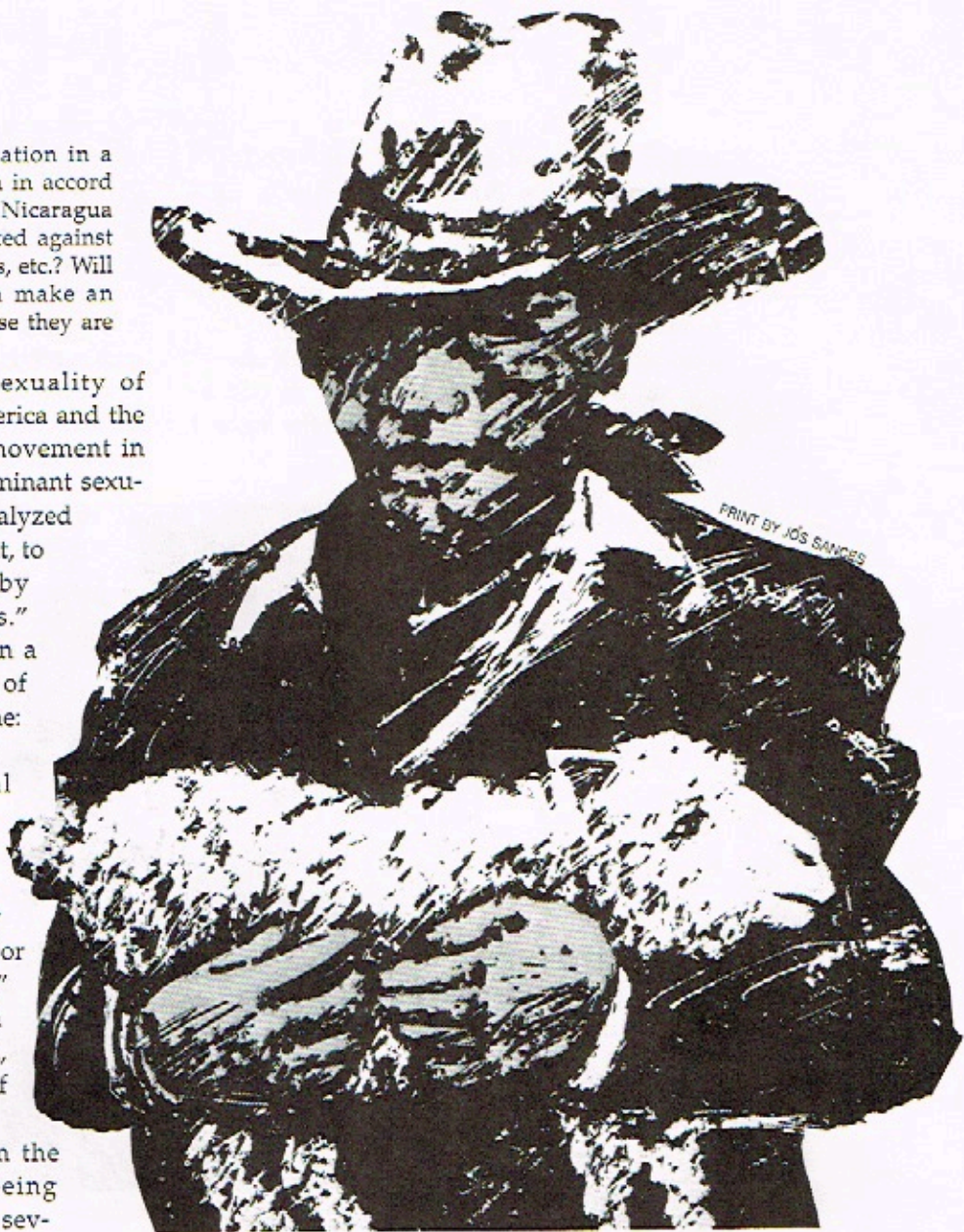
this claim the product of education in a *machista* society? Is such a claim in accord with the future Constitution of Nicaragua where all discrimination is rejected against people for religious, racial reasons, etc.? Will the Constitution of Nicaragua make an exception for homosexuals because they are "garbage"?

After mentioning the homosexuality of indigenous peoples of Latin America and the founding of the Mexican gay movement in 1978, Juarez concludes: "The dominant sexuality condemns this minority, paralyzed by the politics of secrecy and guilt, to a clandestine existence fed by repression over three centuries." (None of these remarks occurs in a news vacuum; the facing page of the newspaper carries the headline: "Rock Hudson's lover appears!")

The author of the original *basura* remark then responded that, "if we accept homosexuality as natural, we will have to accept gay and lesbian clubs, gay marriage, men kissing in parks, or holding hands at the movies," trotting out the usual shopworn appeals to nature, reproduction, sickness, and the seduction of youth.

"Better homosexuality than the many unwanted children being born," replied Juarez, and after several more letters, the paper closed the debate by granting the last word to Mario Gutierrez Morales, who declared:

The rejection of the procreative sex act is a rebellion against the limitation of sexuality to procreation and against the institutions which guarantee it, rebellion against a society which uses sexuality as a "means to an end." We are falling into a subversion which is plotting against a *machista*, racist, sexist, and classist system that is trying to perpetuate itself. Furthermore, it should be said that if humanity desires happiness, pleasure as such, as the end or principal objective of sexuality, then the human species in the current state of things is highly subversive, even "perverted," in that happiness, love, is the main aim of humanity.



After denouncing the persecution of homosexuals by the Argentine dictatorship, Gutierrez concluded that homophobia is "an ultra-reactionary ideology...denying democratic liberties, human rights, the right to participate in the construction of a pluralist, revolutionary and democratic society."

Since 1985, *Barricada* and *El Nuevo Diario* have printed regular news items on AIDS, usually direct translations of wire service reports without editorial comment. The first AIDS case was not reported until 1988 and blood is being refused from foreign donors as the antibody screening test remains unavailable. In December 1985, an AIDS seminar was held for physicians and residents in Managua

under the leadership of Dr. Rodolfo Rodriguez Cruz, National Director of Epidemiology in the Cuban Ministry of Health. There, Dr. Rodriguez cautioned the audience about the necessity of "taking preventive measures without falling into hysteria" against both heterosexual and homosexual transmission, and of developing "an educative campaign among groups with the highest incidence."

In a nation with extremely limited resources, however, health education literature of every type is scarce. Never having seen a person with AIDS, the homosexual men I knew treated AIDS, as does a popular song of the day called "El SIDA," as a joking matter. Safe sex was unknown.

IT IS NOTEWORTHY that the self-understanding of Nicaraguan homosexual men today is remarkably similar to that of gay society in the United States in the 1920s. Historian George Chauncey, for example, found that the role distinction between the "queers" and their "friends" and "husbands" in Rhode Island 60 years ago closely parallels Nicaraguan folk categories, and raises the question of how the relationship between role-defined and gay constructions of sexuality has developed. We do know that a commercial gay world already existed in major US cities in the 1920s. In North America, the role-defined code slowly declined into a submerged "minor" tradition, as gay definitions gained precedence. The gay/lesbian cosmos has reduced the heterosexist imprint in personal relationships, and increased the value of same-sex relations where exclusive homosexuality is possible for both partners. Age and gender roles have been displaced by egalitarian norms, and a self-conscious cultural and

political group has asserted a will toward collective change.

In discussing these differences with Nicaraguans, I was impressed by the strong interest *pasivos* showed in gay ideas (as they interpreted them) as a way of counteracting widespread homophobia and gaining respect, equality, and loyalty in relationships with *activos* who often treat them with the disdain characteristic of male privilege. It is worth noting that the gay movements that have emerged in Spain, Greece, and Mexico, where genderized codes of homosexuality have been strong, have sought to challenge, rather than affirm, folk categories in the name of equality. *Machismo* is being questioned by Sandinista reform in law, education, and television broadcasting, and there are at least two friendship networks in the eastern and southern neighborhoods of Managua that have talked about forming a movement organization, perhaps under the Sandinista umbrella. ▼



An earlier version of this article was presented in a paper to the International Scientific Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies in Amsterdam and appeared in the newsletter of the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists. Remarks here are based on participation in an east-side Managua social network in January and February 1987, and in May and August 1988.

Barry Adam teaches sociology at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada. He is the author of *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Twayne, 1987).

About the artists: Otto Aguilar Rojas is a gay artist from Managua who is active in the *Juventud Sandinista* (Sandinista Youth). Jos Sances teaches art in the San Francisco county jail and is a freelance community political artist.

URANIAN WORLDS

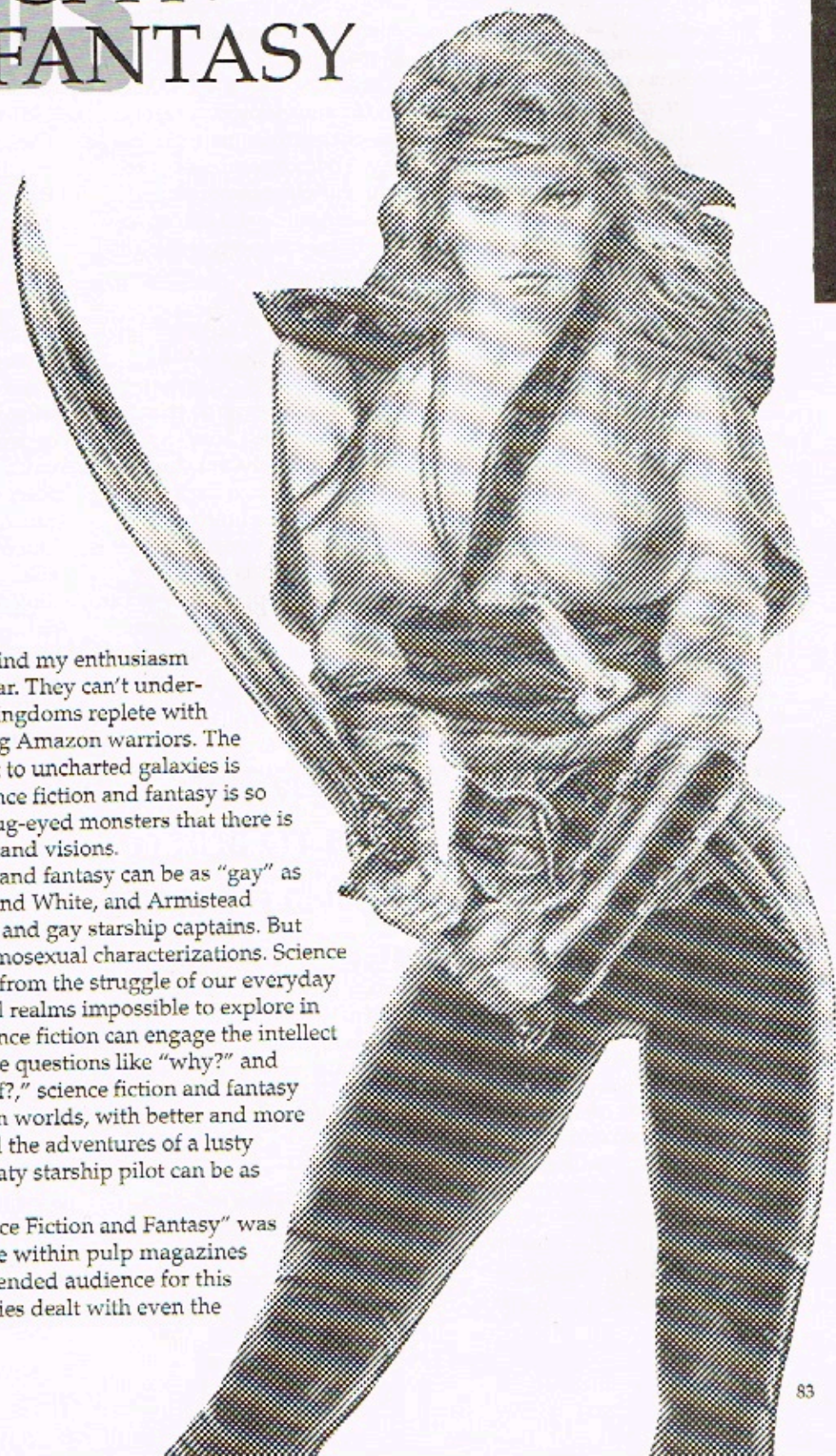
THE BEST OF GAY SCI-FI AND FANTASY

by Eric Garber

SEVERAL OF MY closest friends find my enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy peculiar. They can't understand my fascination for barbarian kingdoms replete with dragons, sorcery, and sword-wielding Amazon warriors. The wonder of an interstellar space flight to uncharted galaxies is lost on them. They imagine that science fiction and fantasy is so filled with spaceships, robots, and bug-eyed monsters that there is no room for lesbian and gay dreams and visions.

I know differently. Science fiction and fantasy can be as "gay" as the works of Rita Mae Brown, Edmund White, and Armistead Maupin. There are lesbian Amazons and gay starship captains. But the genre offers much more than homosexual characterizations. Science fiction can provide a healthy escape from the struggle of our everyday lives, an immediate ticket to fictional realms impossible to explore in standard or "mundane" fiction. Science fiction can engage the intellect in gripping discourse, and encourage questions like "why?" and "what if?" By imagining the "what if?," science fiction and fantasy challenges readers to build their own worlds, with better and more humane cultures than our own. And the adventures of a lusty Amazon or the tribulations of a sweaty starship pilot can be as sexy as the latest erotic video.

What is now referred to as "Science Fiction and Fantasy" was codified into a unique literary genre within pulp magazines during the 1920s and 1930s. The intended audience for this early fiction was teenagers; few stories dealt with even the



most superficial aspects of sex. But sexual material was not entirely absent, and occasionally homosexuality was mentioned.

Some science fiction writers and readers realized that the genre provided ingenious means to discuss homosexuality without naming it. In "The Feminine Metamorphosis" by David H. Keller (1929), a group of rich, talented businesswomen band together to take over the American economy and dispense with men. It was one of numerous variations on the theme of single-sexed or sex segregated societies which appeared regularly in the pulps. By using this science fiction convention, authors could describe women who loathe men and prefer women, and explore gender roles and sexual politics without being forced to discuss homosexuality.

Other pulp authors used the traditional vampire story to circumvent prohibitions by disguising same-sex passion as

bodies. Comic situations abound as the wife (in her husband's body) flirts with a male friend, with same-sex attraction played entirely for laughs. But whether a "soul sick lesbian," an effeminate caricature, or a sex-changing human, the image of the homosexual was overwhelmingly stereotypic and one-dimensional. Lesbian and gay characters were denied full development, social context, or intelligent dialogue.

With the 1952 publication of Theodore Sturgeon's "The World Well Lost" in *Amazing*, the situation began to change. "The World Well Lost" concerned a pair of alien "lovebirds" who charm Earth until it is learned they are homosexual. Once their secret is out, the lovebirds must face homophobic oppression and are returned to their home planet. Sturgeon continued his path-breaking exploration of gay subject matter in his 1957 "The

MARION ZIMMER Bradley stands out among the science fiction authors of the 1950s and early 1960s. Bradley began her professional career with the 1954 publication of "Centaurus Changeling" in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Early in her career, Bradley began incorporating homosexual themes into her fiction. In her 1958 short story, "The Planet Savers," set on the imaginary world of Darkover, a repressed homosexual is the protagonist. Five years later, *Fantasy and Science Fiction* published Bradley's "Another Rib," co-written with her friend Juanita Coulson. As pathbreaking as Sturgeon's work, "Another Rib" concerned an all-male crew's homosexual adaptation to an alien environment. Bradley's sensitivities were not surprising; she had been an early contributor to both *The Ladder* and *The Mattachine Review*.

The mid-1960s brought an upsurge of political activism to American life, and this social reality was reflected in a new kind of science fiction. J. G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, Robert Silverberg, Thomas Disch, Samuel R. Delany, and Joanna Russ emerged as "new wave" science fiction writers, willing to experiment radically with style and content.

As lesbians and gay men came out of the closets throughout the 1970s, social change remained thematic in science fiction. For the first time, lesbians and gay men emerged as protagonists in science fiction and fantasy. One of the first attempts to incorporate the "sexual revolution" of the time into the genre was science fic-

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY CHALLENGES READERS TO BUILD THEIR OWN WORLDS, WITH BETTER AND MORE HUMANE CULTURES THAN OUR OWN.

vampiric blood lust. Hermaphrodites, androgynes, and sex changes offered early science fiction and fantasy authors additional possibilities. One of the wittiest examples of this was Thorne Smith's charming 1931 novel, *Turnabout*, in which a happily married couple swap

Affair of the Green Monkey, in which an effeminate alien is taught to "pass" as human. Sturgeon opened the door to open discussion of homosexuality within the genre, and several science fiction writers followed his lead in the decades that followed.

tion master Robert A. Heinlein's confused attempt to explore transexuality in *I Will Fear No Evil* (1970). More effective was Robert Silverberg's 1972 novel *Book of Skulls* which hosted two very different gay men as protagonists. Arthur C. Clarke's 1975 novel *Imperial Earth* and Ray Bradbury's 1976 short story "A Better Part of Wisdom" contained strong, positively-depicted gay male themes. Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* (1977) featured a neurotic, repressed homosexual as the protagonist. A flood of lesbian and gay male images had begun.

Among the authors directly responsible for this flood were Marion Zimmer Bradley, Samuel Delany, and Joanna Russ. Samuel Delany published his massive novel *Dhalgren* in 1975 after a long absence from publishing. The brilliant, kaleidoscopic blockbuster, which readers either loved or despised, revolved around a nameless bisexual drifter in a near-deserted American city, and introduced explicit sexuality to the genre. Delany's *Triton* (1976) described a feminist utopia where homosexuality is neither condemned nor proscribed. And the hero of Delany's 1979 fantasy collection, *Tales of Nevèryön*, was a gay ex-slave who leads a revolution for freedom.

Joanna Russ almost single-handedly introduced the lesbian-feminist movement to science fiction. Her powerful short story "When It Changed" (1972) is one of the first science fiction pieces to portray an all-female society as positive, and her novel *The Female Man* (1975), with its juxtaposition of four very different female realities, is

recognized as both a science fiction and feminist classic.

Several authors continued to use the closeted science fiction conventions of the past, but they transformed them into something new and often openly gay. Joanna Russ' planet of Whileaway, for example, was an all-female planet that didn't want to become heterosexual. Sally Miller Gearhart, James Tiptree, Jr., and Suzy McKee Charnas created similar feminist worlds. And the vampires in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) fall passionately in love with each other.

The mainstream explosion of gay-themed science fiction peaked in the early 1980s and has since subsided. Gay and lesbian science fiction and fantasy is now more often published by the gay and feminist presses, like Alyson, Naiad, and Spinsters Ink, which aim at a more specialized audience.

But if no longer as frequently the protagonists, lesbian and gay characters abound within the genre, and in many cases are no longer confined by stereotypes. Gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, for example, appear regularly within "cyberpunk" fiction—one of the newest forms of science fiction characterized by rock and roll imagery, and best represented by the stylistic works of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Feminist-oriented science fiction and fantasy has remained a prominent component in the field. Strong, independent female protagonists are now commonplace.

Inevitably, AIDS has entered the scope of science fiction. One of the first science fiction stories to use AIDS as a subject was Samuel Delany's "The Tale of

Plagues and Carnivals," in which an ancient plague in the barbarian world of Nevèryön is intercut with the author's candid observations and concerns about AIDS. Michael Bishop, in his *Unicorn Mountain*, is equally profound in his quiet portrait of a young gay man with AIDS whose contact with Native American culture and a small herd of unicorns results in a magical transformation. A more bleak and homophobic vision is rendered in Norman Spinrad's nightmarish "Journals of the Plague Years," published last year in the anthology *Full Spectrum*. Spinrad imagines a future of sexual and religious fascism in which people who test HIV-positive are institutionalized, while a cure for AIDS is repressed by corporate greed. AIDS is cured in F.M. Busby's new novel *The Breeds of Man*, but the genetic tampering required for the cure results in a new, sexually androgynous kind of human being.

The following lesbian and gay science fiction and fantasy was all published after 1979. This list is not meant to be complete, but rather is my own assessment of the best of the bunch. ▼

Thanks to Lyn Paleo for her help with this article.

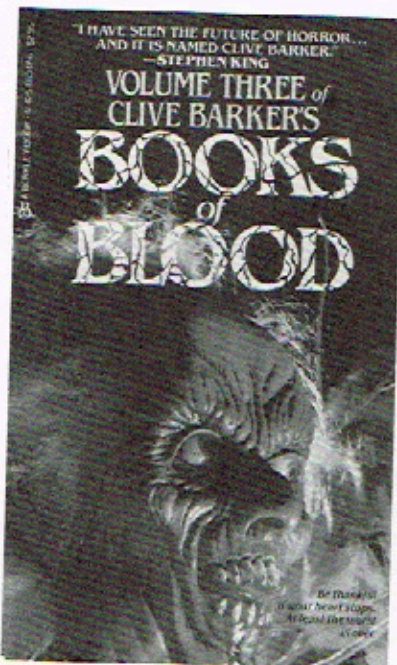
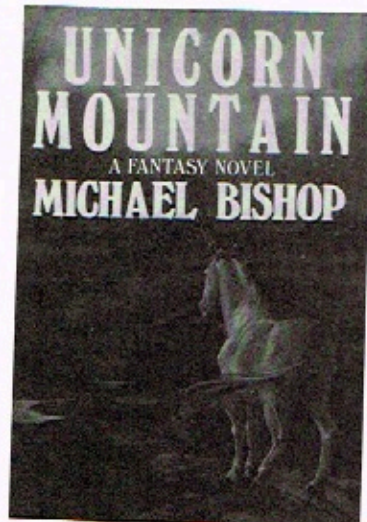
Eric Garber is a historian and community activist with a strong desire to discover, document, and protect lesbian and gay culture. With Lyn Paleo, he co-authored *Uranian Worlds: A Reader's Guide to Alternative Sexuality in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (G.K. Hall, 1983), and is a co-editor of *Worlds Apart: An Anthology of Lesbian and Gay Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Alyson, 1986). Garber and Paleo are currently updating *Uranian Worlds* to include those books published since 1979.

Sharon Baker. *Quarreling, They Met the Dragon*. NY: Avon, 1984.

This is a fascinating, kinky, first novel, which manages to cover hustling, sadomasochism, and boy love, in one big leap. Senruh is a young slave and male prostitute on the cruel world of Naphar. When Senruh meets an aristocratic Lady, he imagines a rescue from bondage, but his hopes are dashed when he discovers the Lady's sado-masochistic desires. Senruh finally manages to escape her manipulations, helped in large part by his love for Pell, a younger friend. Baker has returned to Naphar twice, in *Journey to Memblair* (Avon, 1987) and its sequel *Burning Tears of Sassurum* (Avon, 1988), but neither has as strong a homosexual theme as *Quarreling*.

Clive Barker. "Human Remains" and "In the Hills, the Cities" in *Books of Blood*. London: Sphere, 1984. Reprinted. NY: Berkley, 1986.

Clive Barker has developed an impressive reputation as a writer of horror fiction. His clean writing, graphic violence and adult approach to sexuality have given him a wide following and made novels like *The Damnation Game* and *Cabal* international bestsellers. Several of his early short stories, first published in his *Books of Blood* series, deal directly with homosexual themes. "Human Remains" concerns Gavin, an attractive, young London male prostitute who encounters a blood-thirsty, soul-stealing client. In "In the Hills, the Cities," a gay male couple vacationing in Eastern Europe stumbles upon an ancient and horrifying pagan ritual. For Barker, homosexuality is simply another part of the sexual world; unlike most horror novelists, he neither condemns nor punishes it.



Michael Bishop. *Unicorn Mountain*. NY: Arbor House, 1988.

Michael Bishop is the author of many fantasy and science fiction stories and twice won the Nebula Award for best short fiction. His latest fantasy novel, *Unicorn Mountain*, combines condoms, AIDS, Native Americans, and unicorns into a magical story. Libby Quarrel, a divorced rancher trying to eke out a living in the isolated Colorado Rockies, grudgingly shares her ranch with her ranch hand and friend Sam Coldpony, a Ute Indian. She takes in Bo Gavin, a young gay relative with AIDS, after he has been rejected by his lover and his family. These three people find their lives transformed when a small herd of unicorns is discovered on their ranch.

Marion Zimmer Bradley. *City of Sorcery*. NY: DAW, 1984.

Like much of Marion Zimmer Bradley's science fiction, *City of Sorcery* is set on her imaginary world of Darkover. The Terran colonizers of Darkover have been out of communication with their mother world for centuries and have interbred with an indigenous, telepathic people. Darkover is feudal and its aristocrats have inherited the indigenous psychic gifts. *City of Sorcery* is set decades after Earth has rediscovered Darkover and Terran/Darkover relations have been normalized. Free Amazons—women who live outside the cultural values that keep the rest of Darkover's female population subservient—have become an important link between the two cultures. Amazon Camilla and Magda Loran are lesbian lovers who search for a mysterious city of telepathic Amazons.

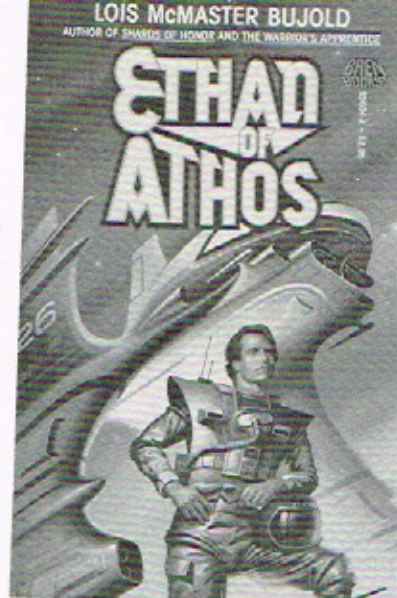
Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Sharra's Exile*. NY: DAW, 1981.

A sequel to *Heritage of Hastur*, Bradley's 1976 novel of gay male awakening. The plot focuses on the return of a powerful psychic matrix to Darkover. A heterosexual love affair is the central theme of the novel, but significant gay male subplots abound. Regis Hastur, the gay protagonist of *Heritage of Hastur*, reaffirms his love for Danilo, decadent bisexual Lerrys Ridenow secretly plots treason, and the manipulative Lord Dyan Ardais, the villain of *Heritage*, ultimately redeems himself. Under the leadership of Regis Hastur, Darkover develops ongoing relations with the Terrans.



Marion Zimmer Bradley. *Thendara House*. NY: DAW, 1983.

The protagonists of Bradley's 1976 *The Shattered Chain*, Magda Lorne and Jaelle n'ha Melora, switch places. Jaelle moves to the Terran complex with her heterosexual "freemate," starts a Terran job, and tries to reconcile her Amazon oath with her new life. When she becomes pregnant, her loyalty to her husband, to her Amazon sisters, and to her family heritage are in conflict. Meanwhile Magda has entered an Amazon Guild house and eventually discovers her love of women, taking Camilla as her lover. The collapse of Jaelle's marriage sends her into the wilderness, and Magda must use her Amazon skills to rescue her friend. Magda and Jaelle learn that their love for each other is of primary importance to them both.



Lois McMaster Bujold. *Ethan of Athos*. NY: Baen, 1986.

Lois McMaster Bujold sets her novel on Athos, an all-male planet once founded by misogynistic religious fanatics and now entirely homosexual. Athosians reproduce by manipulating ovarian cultures in mechanical wombs. When the imported cultures prove infertile, Dr. Ethan Urquhart is sent off-planet where he finds intrigue and adventure. After learning that women are not the monsters he had been taught they were, but surprisingly not succumbing to the temptations of heterosexuality, Dr. Urquhart returns to Athos with a potential new male lover.

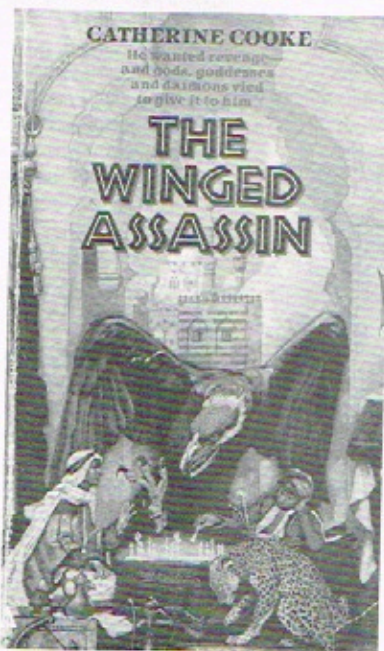
Jo Clayton. *The Duel of Sorcery*. (Moongather. NY: DAW, 1982; Moonscatter. NY: DAW, 1983; Changer's Moon. NY: DAW, 1985)

Jo Clayton is a prolific fantasy and science fiction author known for including assertive and adventuresome female protagonists in her works. In her *Duel of Sorcery* trilogy, Clayton's hero is not just female, but also lesbian...well, sort of. Serroi, a warrior woman, finds herself a pawn in a dueling match between a fallen sorcerer and The Goddess. Serroi's beloved "shieldmate" Tayyan is apparently also her lover, which seems to imply a lesbian sexuality. But Tayyan is murdered within the trilogy's first pages, and Serroi's lesbianism evaporates. By the trilogy's second novel, Serroi's heterosexuality is blossoming. Despite this minor irritation, *The Duel of Sorcery* is worth reading. Serroi is, after all, assertive and adventuresome.

Catherine Cooke. *The Winged Assassin*. NY: Ace, 1987; *Realm of the Gods*. Ace, 1988.

Catherine Cooke sets her two richly woven and intricate fantasy novels in a

magical Arabian Nights world. Arris is just a young boy when his life is plunged into political and spiritual intrigue. Unknown to him, he is actually a chosen one of the Goddess. Her manipulations force Arris into series of dangerous and exotic adventures, including being a slave and skilled lover of a cruel Emperor. While living with the Emperor, Arris is trained as an assassin and is eventually sent on a mission—to kill the powerful Prince Saresha. But instead of killing the Prince, Arris falls in love with him.



Samuel R. Delany. *Return to Nevèryön*. (Tales of Nevèryön. NY: Bantam, 1979; *Nevèryön, or The Tale of Signs and Cities*. NY: Bantam, 1983; *Flight from Nevèryön*. NY: Bantam, 1985; and *The Bridge of Lost Desire*. NY: Arbor House, 1987.)

Samuel Delany continues his growth as an author and an artist with his four-volume fantasy series *Return to Nevèryön*. Delany's world of Nevèryön is a pre-historic place; a world of "dragons, barbarians, Amazons, prehistoric splendor, perverse passions, and primitive precocity." Numerous characters inhabit the Nevèryön stories, but a central figure in most of them is Gorik, an ex-mine slave who leads a successful rebellion and rises in political power. Delany uses these stories, written in the "Sword and Sorcery" tradition of "Conan the Barbarian," to offer brilliant, and some-

times long-winded, monologues about historical philosophy, the development of capitalism, sadomasochism, AIDS, and the meaning of freedom.

Samuel R. Delany. *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*. NY: Bantam, 1984.

Rat Korga is a slave on the planet Rhyonon until a planetary cataclysm completely alters his circumstances. He is discovered to be the ideal erotic partner of Marq Dyeth, a diplomat from the planet Velm. But fate and social prejudice soon separate the lovers. This is classic science fiction space opera, but of a highly intellectual sort. Delany is a meticulous stylist and not always easy reading. Some readers may find him too dense. But for those who find his fiction to be challenging, thought-provoking and highly erotic, *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand* is delicious. Will Korga and Dyeth get back together? The answer must wait until Delany's sequel—*The Splendor and Misery of Bodies, of Cities*—is released.

Jeffery M. Elliot, ed. *Kindred Spirits: An Anthology of Gay and Lesbian Science Fiction Stories*. Boston: Alyson, 1984.

Despite a few clunker stories, Jeffery Elliot's *Kindred Spirits* is a landmark: the first gay and lesbian science fiction anthology ever published. Standout stories include Edgar Pangborn's "The Night Wind," Rachel Pollack's "Black Rose and White Rose," and Joanna Russ' "When It Changed." The anthology also includes tales by Elizabeth A. Lynn, David Gerrold and Jessica Amanda Salmonson.



Katherine V. Forrest. *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*. Tallahassee: Naiad, 1984.

Katherine V. Forrest is one of the current stellar lights of lesbian fiction. Her "Kate Delafield" mysteries have acquired a strong and devoted following which appreciates Forrest's use of exciting action and hot lesbian sexuality. In *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*, Forrest's first venture into science fiction, thousands of women, descendants of a single alien mother, flee Earth to colonize a woman-only world. While the plot of *Daughters* meanders a bit and is not as effective as some of Forrest's best mysteries, the novel shows its author to

have great promise in the science fiction field.

Katherine V. Forrest. *Swords and Dreams*. Tallahassee: Naiad, 1987.

An entertaining collection of short fiction dealing with lesbian and gay themes, including several science fiction pieces. "Xessex," for example, first published under a pseudonym in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, concerns the sexual relationships between an alien and two—very different—space men, and "The Test" perceives lesbians and gay men as humankind's new evolutionary step. Perhaps the most intriguing piece in the collection is "O Captain, My Captain," a spicy story about a mysterious vampiric space captain who gets her nourishment from cunnilingus.

Jewelle Gomez. "No Day Too Long," *Worlds Apart*, edited by DeCarnin, et al. Boston: Alyson, 1986.

Jewelle Gomez's identity as a black lesbian and feminist is an essential component of her "Gilda Stories," a regrettably uncollected, delightful series of feminist vampire tales. Gilda became a vampire while escaping slavery in the ante-bellum South; in many ways, her

vampirism and her lesbianism are her freedom. Like most traditional vampires, Gilda survives through the centuries by drinking her victims' blood, but she only kills when she has to. "No Day Too Long," the only Gilda story currently in print, is set on contemporary Long Island, where Gilda becomes intimately involved with a group of black lesbian feminists.

Wingwomen of Hera



Sandi Hall

BOOK ONE OF THE
COSMIC BOTANISTS
TRILOGY

Sandi Hall. *Wingwomen of Hera*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

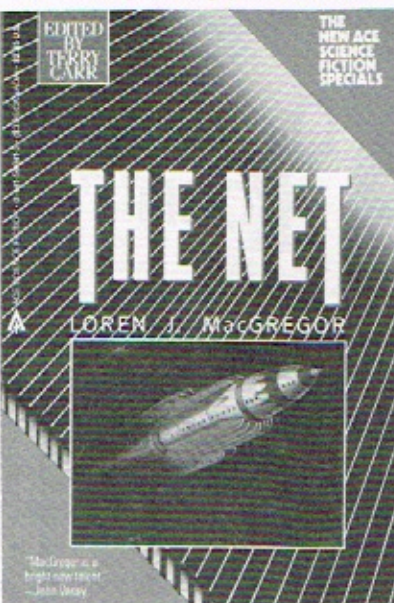
Sandi Hall, author of an earlier lesbian science fiction novel, *The Godmothers* (1982), offers the first book of her *Cosmic Botanists Trilogy*. The focus is two very different planets, Hera and Maladar. Hera supports an all-female population, reproducing by parthenogenetics. Maladar has a co-sexual population and a mechanized, authoritarian government. Each culture develops its own problems, and eventually contact between the two worlds becomes necessary.

Michael McDowell. *Blackwater*. (The Flood. NY: Avon, 1983; The Levee. NY: Avon, 1983; The House. NY: Avon, 1983; The War. NY: Avon, 1983; The Fortune. NY: Avon, 1983; Rain. NY: Avon, 1983)

Michael McDowell is half of the writing team that produced the delightful "Nathan Aldyne" mysteries; he also is a screenwriter of popular motion pictures like *Beetlejuice*. He has a skill for combining imagination, suspense, and horror, yet avoids the unnecessary and gratuitous violence so common in the horror field. In his six-part *Blackwater*, The Caskeys, a large backwater family, is disturbed for generations by the residual evil of a mysterious 1919 flood in Perdido, Alabama. This evil takes the form of Elinor Dammert, who exerts a supernatural influence over the family... and the river! McDowell includes both gay male and lesbian characterizations in this sprawling family saga.

Michael McDowell. *The Elementals*. NY: Avon, 1981.

McDowell again uses his Southern roots as a locale in *The Elementals*. A funeral brings the far-flung members of the McCrays and the Savages, two respected Mobile families, to a summer reunion at the deserted family beach-front property on the Gulf. As the hot summer wears on, the skeletons in the family closet begin literally to haunt the party. This is suspenseful and well-drawn horror fiction, enhanced with significant and positive gay male content.

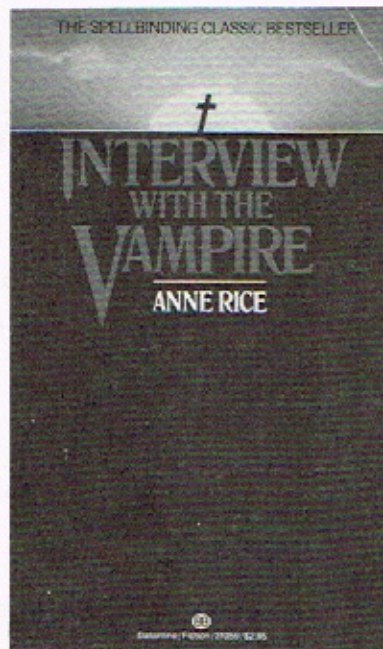


Loren McGregor. *The Net*. NY: Ace, 1987.

The Net, by up-and-coming writer Loren McGregor, is a finely wrought visit to a dazzling future where the risks are high and the stakes are great. Wealthy space captain Jason Horiuchi is offered a challenge: to steal a priceless ruby from a well guarded museum. Horiuchi's pride and curiosity are stimulated and she accepts. The ensuing caper is fast and exciting. Horiuchi's future is extremely high tech and body alterations are common. The captain's lesbian lover, for example, has a pelt of fur implanted on her shoulders.

Rice, Anne. *Chronicles of the Vampires: Interview with the Vampire*. NY: Knopf, 1975; *The Vampire Lestat*. NY: Knopf, 1985; *Queen of the Damned*. NY: Knopf, 1988.

It isn't surprising that Anne Rice's vampires leap out of their closet doors.



Her non-vampire fiction, sometimes written under the name A.N. Roquelaure, is rich in eroticism and sensuality. In *Interview with the Vampire*, the earliest volume of Rice's vampire series, the author introduces Louis, a weary vampire living near Castro Street in San Francisco. Louis has been made a vampire by Lestat, a handsome aristocratic Frenchman with whom Louis has fallen in love. So begins a saga that leads from Castro Street, to a southern plantation, 19th century Paris, ancient Egypt, then back to San Francisco. When Akasha, the Queen of the Vampires, is awakened from her eternal slumber—watch out! Great fun to read, *Chronicles of the Vampires* has developed a devoted following.

J.F. Rivkin. *Silverglass*. NY: Ace, 1986; *Web of Wind*. NY: Ace, 1987.

J.F. Rivkin has taken the conventions of the sword and sorcery novels and turned them inside out. Her dashing, lusty mercenary protagonist is a woman. She is as comfortable bedding the serving girl as the stableman. In *Silverglass* she is hired to assassinate the Lady Nystasia, a reputed sorceress, but the Lady proves too beautiful for the mercenary to kill. Instead, the two women flee Nystasia's enemies. *Web of Wind* continues the couple's fast-paced adventures as they search for hidden treasure.

Marty Rubin. *The Boiled Frog Syndrome*. Boston, Alyson, 1987.

Marty Rubin's compelling thriller is more accurately considered a "near future warning" than a science fantasy. Rubin envisions a future United States overrun with religious fascism. The election of right-wing preacher Peter Wicklerly to the presidency has resulted in

mass censorship and concentration camps for lesbians and gay men. Leatherman Stephen Ashcroft escapes the homophobic roundups, but joins the Resistance to free his incarcerated lover.

Jessica Amanda Salmonson. *The Tomoe Gozen Saga*. (Tomoe Gozen. NY: Ace, 1981; *The Golden Naginata*. NY: Ace, 1981; *Thousand Shrine Warrior*. Ace, 1984.)

Jessica Amanda Salmonson, editor of the award-winning *Amazons* anthology, spins a fantasy trilogy revolving around a female Samurai warrior named Tomoe Gozen. Set in an alternative world based on medieval Japan, Tomoe Gozen is forced by fate and duty to lead armies to slaughter demons and sometimes to love beautiful women. The action is swift, but may be a bit bloody for some tastes.



Joan Slonczewski. *A Door into Ocean*. NY: Arbor House, 1986.

Joan Slonczewski, a biology professor, uses her scientific expertise to depict Shora, a planet completely covered by water. The all-female inhabitants of Shora live ecologically balanced lives within enormous floating rafts. When the patriarchal planet of Valedon attacks the watery world, the Shorian women, psychologically and ethically incapable of fighting, must confront the invaders in their own fashion.



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