

GAY SUNSHINE

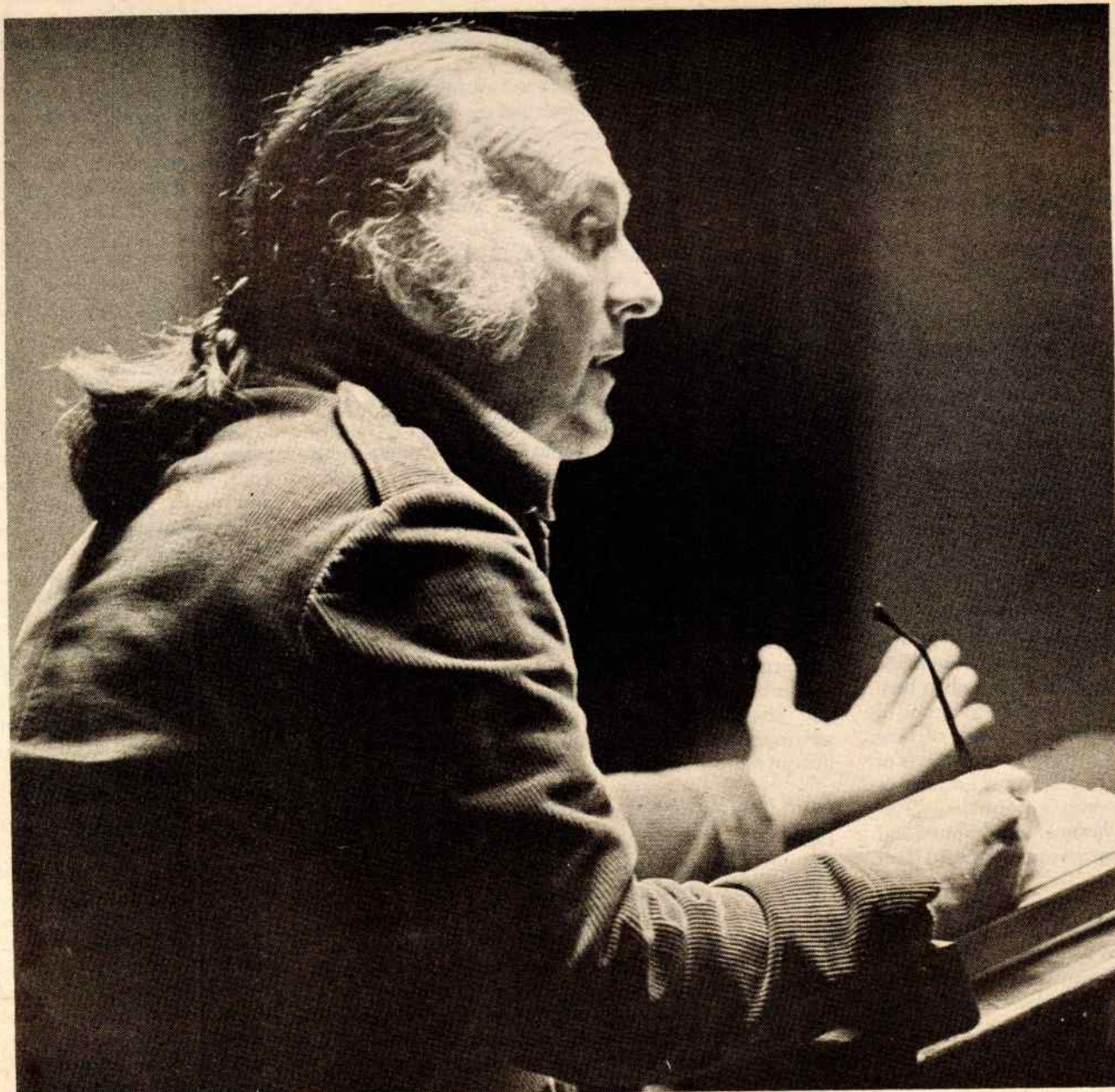
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Robert Duncan
reading in Australia 1976

INTERVIEW

ROBERT DUNCAN

Born in Oakland in 1919, Robert Duncan lived for years in New York City where he edited *The Experimental Review* with Sanders Russell. He was part of the vigorous scene in the early 1950's at Black Mountain College, where he taught briefly, and became associated there with his contemporaries Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Denise Levertov. He returned to San Francisco in the later 1950's where he was instrumental in giving impetus to the Berkeley-San Francisco Renaissance of those years, along with Kenneth Rexroth and his friend Jack Spicer with whom, during a complex and challenging relationship, he helped begin the Poetry Center at San Francisco State. He has lived in San Francisco for most of the last thirty years with his close companion Jess Collins, the painter. Among Robert Duncan's more than twenty books are *Heavenly City*, *Earthly City* (1945), *Caesar's Gate*, *Poems 1949-1950* (1973), *Roots And Branches* (1964), and *Bending The Bow* (1968).

This interview took place during three day-long sessions in December 1978 and January 1979 at Aaron Shurin's house in San Francisco. There was a definite feeling of generosity in these discussions, a feeling that we were sharing experience, and in fact we all brought material to the interview; our own poems offered became part of the texts to be studied and were referred to in the course of our exploration.

Duncan's enthusiasm gives to his speech a head-over-heels impetus that often finds him interrupting himself to further his unfolding language. We tried to reflect this urgency in transcribing the tapes. To flesh out the picture, there is Duncan with his white tufted hair at either side of his commanding eaglelike face—one eye holding you down and one eye roving.

—S.A. and A.S.

INTERVIEWERS: Aaron Shurin (b. 1947) is a San Francisco poet, author of *The Night Sun* (1976). Steve Abbott (b. 1943) is a San Francisco poet, author of *Wrecked Hearts* (1978)—see review elsewhere in this issue.

ROBERT DUNCAN: The shattering experience when I was in love is why couldn't I say "I love you" and saying was impossible for me. I was struck dumb because the depth of feeling was so fundamental that if you advanced to the level of speech, the network of things drawn into that fundamental point was so complex you couldn't speak from it. It was felt thruout the entire body and you could not find within it any actual confidence of loving.

It was so intensely important that I be loved that I made situations absolutely painful to me. My lover N. was working on his thesis and if he wasn't back necking and fucking with me in a half hour I was in a sulk. I was like a monkey on his back, not really a creature capable of loving. You wouldn't do that to someone you loved right? We don't have a word meaning two entirely different things. We've got a nexus called "loving" and we experience falling in love as a terrible necessity that be brought into the domain of loving. Otherwise you could fall into sex or something. But the fact that we experience this terrible fall, this wrenching out of ourselves, this self-preoccupation, we suddenly come to something we are to care about or take care of. And against all that is how much we need to be loved. How does a child love its parents? It does but it also recognizes that it does not love the parents the way they do it. But in a sense it can take care of the parents too.

STEVEN ABBOTT: For me, the falling is like when Daddy throws you up in the air and then catches you. And when you're caught it's so wonderful.

DUNCAN: Exactly! I was always practicing that. Piaget sees that in the baby right away when he throws something out of the crib. So you make a toy by attaching a ball to a string. All those returns are delights. And he sees the first one as the hand which you don't first recognize as being yours and the delight in the movement which brings that hand around. Parents are always going and returning too. So those first (love) scenes I was describing were forcing returns for me. Not forcing but assuring that they would take place.

ABBOTT: But when you fall in love, don't you ask for a return that can't be returned? For instance I feel as if there were a hole in me, in my heart, where I don't feel I was ever loved enough. So I'm seeking a Daddy to fill this. But it can never really be returned and I'll have to live with this the rest of my life.

DUNCAN: Well, I see myself, at times it becomes a family joke, I say to Jess: "Here I wanted a Daddy and you're not any better than Daddy was at repairing these things." We've got a picture thruout our family life because it also reoccurs. I don't find any of this disappears. I'm no better off than when I was 18 except I've learned to expand areas of this feeling. I still have a figure called "trembling." We have an area of exchanging endearments and there are times we also say how intensely we feel but *still* you can't speak for that level, when all of a sudden you're almost near tears and trembling. And I don't know that it gets easier except that we're comfortable with each other and, in a way, some ground has been made.

The feeling of needing to do something cannot be immediately realized. First, you're not capable of love til you've found out how it's practiced and you find out how you love. You don't love straight out. Or you do, but it doesn't communicate to you or anybody else. It's like writing a poem. Just the feeling of writing the poem is terrific, to find out language is suddenly speaking for you as nothing has spoken before, including yourself. And all sorts of strange things prove to be you. But I never felt depressed because a poem was off although I certainly struggled with it trying to get it right. My feeling of its not being good was often how little it belonged to me. It was saying something and was exciting but was not yet what I really would feel. The same thing with falling in love when I go back to when I was 18.

I still feel my first lover is an eternal person for me. I was raised in terms of reincarnation and karma belief and falling in love was, and still is for me, experienced as an appointment. That first love relationship was absolutely painful. It must have been painful for him too, incidentally, because I could have an absolute scorn for his mind where he did not share my sense of things. He was not an artist in temperament; he was a school teacher and he was up against a kid who, when it came to modern art, Pound or Stravinsky, was demanding, absolute, very little willing to allow sharing unless sharing included the world of painting, writing, music I had come to believe so in. He thought of himself as the rational one and I was taken to be irrational, imaginative. The excitement was the union of opposite types.

The world of my mind and of my work was, even then, the most important. I sought a lover where sexual needs

and response and daily companionship would extend fully to include the central intent of an art. That's what I had to know fully in my heart about Jess before I went further with him, to recognize how much of an accord we were in our arts and responses. I had fixed in my account of falling in love that union of opposites, not here male and female, but of contending forces united in their contention by love; working out a karma struggle. But I broke through that fixation to admit that I was in love with him where the sense was of a deep accord, not of winning or losing, but of going on with him in a common life.

In my mid-twenties I had quit writing poetry and tried to settle down into the terms of one relationship. I tried to cease my driving concern for this mind and this work I had had because it seemed so much more important that the sexual love and the companionship be there. I was in love with him and I did not want to come to judge how he responded to art or poetry. My absolutism remained. I guess I only put it aside by staying away from the area of concern. He was an artist but a commercial artist. We could share fully our going to galleries to see art but whenever I got off about poetry and ideas of philosophy or structure, that look of the rational male barely countenancing the irrational flight of fancy would come over his face.

ABBOTT: How long did you stop writing poetry?

DUNCAN: Well, it was 1943 and 44. When Pound was finally captured by the American forces I was moved to write "Homage and Lament for Ezra Pound in Captivity, May 12, 1944." The basic forces of my poetry had been stored awaiting that time, but if I think of the revelation of my sexual nature in its development, I think of how important loss was, and lament. Early poems in the loss of my first lover are eaten through by self-pity as I remember them. Then in the earliest poems, a poem like "Persephone" written in 1939, the theme of rape, rapture and dread. And the blood in those poems comes forward from actual initiations in blood.

I see through this, and through many passages of my poetry still, two violent events of my highschool period in which I was absolutely saturated with blood, just covered with blood. I got my first car when I was a highschool sophomore. My father was an architect and when Roosevelt started the building the money came back. So we were really in high style. Anyway, I'd just gotten my driver's license and was driving a group of friends between Taft and Bakersfield over a rolling desert road. We'd not been drinking which was fortunate as you will see. We went over a hill like a roller coaster and they said: "Duncan, Duncan (it was 'Sims, Sims' then). Let's go back and do it again." So we did. Wow! The only trouble was the road turned. We weren't the first to go off there. We plunged into a ditch where only two weeks before a whole Mexican family had expired. I was the first to come to and the girl I'd taken to the football game and dance had her face split open by the rear view mirror. And I was absolutely saturated with blood. The steering wheel was coiled around me so how come I didn't even have a broken bone, who knows. The girl next to me was also seriously injured. So I see that blood thing.

The next blood thing came after my father's death. I was about 17. My mother was having suitors and we'd gone to a Chinese restaurant in downtown Bakersfield. They wanted to do something so I said, "Well, I'll walk home." Now it was near the end of summer so we've got that valley heat sort of thing. For some time I'd already experienced the area of fascination and played with it as a child. I'd catch a man looking at me and I'd look into the gaze and suddenly they'd behave like I never made men behave before. I did it once when I was in a car and a man was in a barber shop. He got so upset he had to get up out of the barber chair (laughs). I would catch a look and go deep into it. What was on my mind was I had discovered something I'd read about in Greek myth. It was really true like I thought it was true. My family believed in elementals, so satyrs were real to them and nymphs were real to them. I found out there was something satyr-like about me, something nymph-like about me. I could fascinate. And I was wise to it in some way I didn't know at all. Also I was always in a context in which I was vaguely aware that I was doing it because they couldn't get at me. I'd be surrounded by people. I was in a family car and so forth. So they would be behaving in an odd enough way, usually getting angry, but I wouldn't possibly know what happens next. I thought I was a hypnotist.

Now we've got me, I'm 16 or 17. I picked up one of those glances and it followed me. It was a boy of about 18 or 19, a fairly husky road-boy as there still were in the late depression. And my experience there was Oh! Here we've moved into an entirely different realm! I knew there were other realms so I experienced it as a new dimension. Everything's changed! I could see everything's changed! That's what this gaze means. Now I understand in a new way the heat of May. Now I can hear what the grass and the trees were saying. Now I'm in entirely the same dimension as birds and water. And in this poem of Persephone you have me back in a winter landscape where I used to cut out from my house, going to see a girl I had a crush on, and walked to her house some five or six miles, walking through the Kern River bed. And all the way I used to have fantasies about what kind of men lived in these houses and are that close to this landscape which seemed to me, when I was 14 or 15 or 16, almost *dizzily* sexual. And yet I had not yet admitted to any threshold that I could possibly masturbate although there was mutual masturbation going on. At school they talked about boys who went and jerked off in circles and I couldn't exactly understand what jerking off was but I knew it was some kind of rite. I pictured a rite that the boys who were in the

know did. And yet when I went the river way, I waited for a river spirit or nature spirit. So with this exchange of glances, in a way we get right to the Persephone rape that underlies it.

The dusk was already coming and instead of stopping at our house—between our house and the park was a fairly large field, about four or five blocks, that wasn't developed. Now I knew I had this power but I never connected this eye-power with playing sex games with kids in schools or necking in cars. I understood that in Bakersfield, in cars, necking, there wasn't that much distinction. Although it's interesting that no one went down on me when I was in highschool. My experience when I saw, written on a john wall, something about sucking cock, I thought, "There's somebody crazy around here. Next I'll be reading about cannibals." I was just horrified! And when I went to college and came home, having read *Ulysses* where Molly has her fantasy—I remember saying earnestly to a lesbian friend of the family, "What's Molly thinking about? I would never think something like that." She roared with laughter and said: "Tell me that after next semester."

So it was all heavy necking. Even with mutual masturbation it was rubbing without taking your penis out of your trousers. Or you would sleep together and still in that little cognizant state where you're not actually recognizing what's going on. I would leave masturbating to when the hand now only becomes a sexual organ. The hand changes character, it gets sexual and then we're talking about masturbating. But this was cuming somehow as you hug and snuggle but you're not yet genitalized. You're polymorphous and the genitals are as significantly aroused, but not more so, than any other part of your body.

AARONSHURIN: So you're cuming but not coming out.

DUNCAN: Well, in this particular one—by the way, this pick-up, I'm coming out into a different world remember. I'm coming out now into my Greek world, and yet, I would have been allied to it no matter what. It never disappears. It's constantly present. I was raised on these myths but more than that, my family believed they were true. And they, in their religion, had gone into that realm and I discovered it in poetry as possibly being there. I'd been in it before: being all alone with a tree, being all alone with a creek running or falls. That was it. I'd been there. But this is the first time I'd been in the other part I knew was there, the sexual part, because I'd read about the rape of Persephone. The first time I'd encountered one of those people I was looking for in the river valley! And those people were always male! But then no wonder that I caught an absolutely lunatic glance. Probably by the time one of these glances got through to me, and I was taking them up, it was a very disturbed person, a tremendously repressed homosexual.

So we went to an area far enough from the tennis court that it was dark, though it was still quite visible. I had no dimension in which I thought we should not be public. The tennis courts, to me, looked as if we were already in the realm I'm talking about, the realm of my near hypnagogic self, the visionary realm. And right over there was the other realm. The people playing tennis were lit up. It made it more clear that the park where we were was in that other domain. I had no calculation that we might be seen or arrested, any of this.

But in this particular case now, the character that was following me was *also* that removed from reality. The excitement I felt, or the pitch of it, was felt with all the violence of the Greek scene. My mind was on the kind of power Ganymede had over Zeus, but you must remember, Zeus was not in the realm of the living. So I knew what Persephone felt but there was also no question in my mind that I was a male nymph.

He... at the point in which we turned to face each other... How do I so much know and with *no*, again no words, or *maybe* just the most strangled sort of key words that admit you're present in a lunatic like way? I mean we'd just followed each other to a place where there are no people and it was... He had a *very* strange look in his eyes that matched the way I felt. His eyes looked like moonstars look—beautiful and exciting! And all the time I'm trying to look beautiful and exciting, trying to look like him, because I *feel* my face change. I'm entranced but so is he. That's what I caught. So I answer entrancement with being entranced. So I'm facing him and at 60, I'm facing something I faced when I was 16.

He's taller than I am, more muscular than me. Then *trembling!* Both of us trembling! He embraced me very... he... we *move* to the ground! All what we're doing now physically was exactly what I'd been doing in cars, necking and so on with boyfriends, staying overnight with T. And *very*, *very* gentle! Now we come... and, and... we're rubbing but I really began to suddenly be afraid. But this is still where all the rest of us would get off like when you've come to the rest of a wave and it's continuous to the whole body feeling and no one has taken out a penis in front of you. So you're *encased* in it, in this continuous feeling, and you get wet.

It's moving with a terrific rapture and I see "My God! But this rapture is not only moving somewhere I ain't never been before but it's actually *scarey*." So I move myself from it in a *very* weak tone of voice, *very*, and I say "I gotta go home. It's, it's kinda late and I..." Well, I *had* to go home because I knew, my God, that something appalling was going to happen. Now what's interesting about this threshold is that I'm not sure exactly what would have happened and at this time he says "I've gotta piss" and he turns away from me. And that's still logical except I'm shaking and know, instinctively, I'll get in trouble if I start walking away.

Then he turns around and the face facing me, his face, is one of MANIACAL fury! He has brass knuckles on and says "You dirty little cock teaser, I'm really going to give it to you." He grabs me by the—suddenly the physical force is really very present—and starts hitting me on the chin first. You can still see the scars though I was on a plastic surgeon's table afterwards. And at this point I'm still in another dimension. I can see the people playing tennis. They're so close and the court absolutely lighted that I can see their faces and their studied not hearing. I start *screaming* just as loud as I can. It's *inconceivable* to me! There's quite a lot of confusion because that was a magical realm as on a lighted stage and they almost look supernatural because they're so far away but not physically far away. What does happen is a woman four blocks away phones the police 'cause she can hear the screams and has no trouble reading that there's a bloody murder going on. So the police are on their way.

He then gets me... Also I learned, of course, you don't suffer any pain. I wasn't aware of anything at all because when your chin is torn open, the nerves torn open, you don't have any sensation, brass knuckles or nothin'. They've gone too far already. So he's succeeded in grabbing me by my leather jacket and he starts hitting, repeatedly, on the back of my neck where he should, of course, have killed me. But my skull is an extreme barrier at this point.

I meanwhile had moved into still another dimension. Everything is absolutely clear. I realize I have only to wait a few seconds more, almost as if I had an interior timer, and my coat would be so bloodied that when I—I could wiggle out of my coat, I knew that. But this is how calculated it all was. My coat would be so bloody he wouldn't be able to hold onto me. So I slipped out of my coat, grabbed it, and started running. By this time there's police cars all around but I don't connect to them or they to me. They went to the park but there was nobody there except for the tennis players who said: "Well, we were so intent on our game here..."

Now in the Depression years we had a Catholic school teacher renting a room from us. I used to talk about God with her and interesting theological things. So when I got home I went to the bathroom because, well, my first problem is I can't explain my bloody coat and bloody shirt. But when I went into the bathroom to clean up and saw the *bone* of my chin exposed and shreds of flesh around it, I mean, already I was a little sick at the idea. So I walk down the hall and tap at the door of the Catholic maiden teacher. She says: "Come in Robert," and I open the door. At that point she turns around and faints and I faint (laughs).

Luckily my mother soon arrives home and when I come to, my mother and the chief of police are bending over me. I was in the hospital waiting to be rolled into the operating room and they're saying: "You've gotta describe him, he..." And, and I say "I was to blame. I was the one who led him on. I was to blame. I was the one who led him on." And my mother says: "No, no. You don't understand." And the chief of police says: "He's killed two boys already. We've got to get his description." And I refused. I would not give a description.

My family whisked me away soon afterwards but while I was in the hospital I talked, so certain levels of Bakersfield knew what had happened. Not so much in my mother's circle but telephone operators and the like so that when I went to college, I met old friends there who knew what had happened. Even here I think we both, the attacker and I, belonged to what happened, *hmm?* But what I knew in the aftermath is that when I went back to T., my schoolboy crush, I was afraid of him. I was afraid something was going to happen that would go beyond what we had been talking about.

ABBOTT: If you'd not interrupted the road boy by saying you had to leave, do you think the violence still would have occurred?

DUNCAN: Well, we don't know those other boys left. And when they finally did catch him, he had the picture that he was eradicating evil. I mean I had no picture that he was just a disappointed male. After all, I'd seen a few like T. coming back from the bathroom when he'd just had to get it off himself. No, this violence wasn't violence *per se*. He was an actual paranoid schizophrenic who was killing these magic creatures who made him feel such horrible sexual compulsions.

SHURIN: Can I take this back a little bit, into the realm of imagination. We've got this figure of falling in love, and you have the landscape, the Persephone landscape in which...

DUNCAN: Rape. Rapture and rape. now that wasn't the experience of falling in love.

SHURIN: Right, except that certainly Persephone fell. If anybody fell she fell all the way down.

DUNCAN: Oh, I see. Yah, right. But she makes the descent which is different. She's raped and drawn into the descent. My figures of falling are really figures of falling. I remember when I got involved with Marjorie in NY, and Manhattan has ruined *more* of my scenes than any other city, her psychiatrist told her she should stop seeing me. I remember we were around 34th and Madison when she told me this. And I *fell*. My legs literally gave way. Hesiod says "The primal eros loosens the limbs" and as I told Olsen: "I know what that means. You fall." But now Ekbert Faas, who is working on a biography of my early life, has found in interviewing Marjorie that I didn't actually fall. What was important to me in my account of myself was that I experienced the metaphor. I hallucinated the falling.

SHURIN: What I wanted to get at was the image that was propelling you toward these sexual encounters. What I was hitting off was your line "My other is not a woman but a man." And I wanted to know what sense of the other at that time.

DUNCAN: I think in this scene of the attack I described we'd be in that one because, remember, I said I looked at the face and became its mate. My face became its other. Now this is certainly an other that is of the same species, not a Narcissus, because I didn't dream my face would look like his. But of the order because I thought I was entering a realm and being drawn into it. That's the dangerous foyer, the primal eros. The tenderness in that world is all felt differently from affection but it IS tenderness. There was tenderness in my foyer experience and I still don't see that tenderness is manipulative. For me the tenderness and something terrifying were mixed.

SHURIN: Now were you writing poetry at this point?

DUNCAN: No. Well, yes I was writing some and I have some because my mother saved poetry from this period. When my highschool teacher, who started me writing, was asked: "What was his poetry like?" she replied: "I only remember darkness and blood." That's what it was. But really, writing poetry starts after this episode.

SHURIN: This field of sexuality where darkness and blood are somehow bound up was one of the earliest points which you were driven to write about?

DUNCAN: Early, very early. And it becomes dispersed throught my poetry. And in Passages, one of the forms of Passages always was like a seizure with a mounting terror and then a suspension within it and with a potentiality. So very early I had initiations that I found profoundly important. They're blood initiations. I'll give you a third blood one. The book that the Venice poem belongs to starts with three poems for J. In Nov. of '47 I was drawn into an immensely intoxicating sexual relationship and then, very swiftly, was living with J. This was intense but wasn't exactly falling in love.

My ideal, my strong picture like with N., with whom I did fall in love, was of someone ten years older than me. In that way I think I was replicating my mother's and father's relationship in which I was my mother falling in love with my father. I don't feel it so much physically but there was a lot, in falling in love, with the actual identification with the woman's position for me. So I set my cap for N. who was a wolf playing the scene. I hadn't met him but had heard about him first and then snared him and so on. It was Jane Austen all over again, getting my man like I saw it in the movies.

I met N. at this dance place, I could follow as well as lead in dancing, and afterwards we went home together. Not that I was the *femme fatale*. I was the good girl you'd fall in love with forever so I had to play it like the girl lost and lonely and if you don't phone me, etc. I knew he'd asked a few questions so I wasn't going on nothing. But it was a very exciting Romantic picture for me. But J. is ten years younger than me and I don't have any picture of falling in love with someone who's ten years younger. I was about 29 'cause Spicer had just moved into a Co-op house since he'd fallen in love with a boy there.

Anyway, I'd just hitchhiked across country on twenty dollars during which time I'd developed this blinding pain in my head which was the result of four impacted wisdom teeth. The pain was so severe I had to use my last dollar for a room so I could sweat it out 'til the pain subsided enough for an operation. The operation was successful except for a torn arterial connection not satisfactorily cauterized so if my blood pressure went up at all, I was just choking with blood. Well, J. turned me on and I remember staggering down the street to a phone booth. I was just *streaming* blood, which leads me to this poem. You see there's nothing in Duncan's poetry that is not solidly implanted in things really going on.

SHURIN: In these early poems when you're first beginning to find a language...

DUNCAN: I'm drawn to Pound because of the hypnagogic sort of thing. In Pound I found those nymphs and maenads with the same charge as I felt them. I found an identification with trees which is very strong for me. Trees are not phallic for me. They're beings and that's very different. I see roots and branches in trees. And a stream of water is a power or force and I wanted to become water very much. I wanted to become tree and talk with trees and water with a lot of confidence. They seem to be talking back to me.

SHURIN: When you begin to find this language to express your sexuality, which you did very early, *did* you have a sense or *what* was your sense?

DUNCAN: I was finding my sexuality through these figures. It wasn't as if I was expressing it. I was realizing it, making it real through these things. Very early my family read me these stories and myths which they believed revealed deep secret mysteries about spiritual nature. And so I was told "You'll understand this when you come into it." Even Cinderella wasn't viewed as just a fairytale. I was told there's a lot here, as in your dreams, which you'll eventually know.

SHURIN: What I was trying to get at in terms of language was what was the sense you had that it was a taboo area in language that you were entering in beginning to speak about your homosexuality. I know that you were one of the first people to publicly use cock in a poem.

DUNCAN: Yes. I was the first person ever to write publicly that I was homosexual, that essay "Homosexual

and Society." Well, you couldn't miss that the area was taboo but in my family it was not excluded from their thought. The scoutmaster who was arrested—well, wasn't exactly arrested because my parents had recommended him and didn't want to be discredited. The leading people in Bakersfield met at our house so we little kids knew what was going on. Everyone was suddenly aroused because he'd been caught right out bugging little boys at the summer camp. My parents saw to it he went without bad reference but without good reference either. What they felt was not moral outrage but a concern for their own reputation.

Then there was a county official who'd been in remote circles of our family. He had a Correction Camp. He was charged and brought up because he was sexually, ritually whipping the boys there. That they didn't try to cover. But the anger of my family was *not* that he was doing something homosexual but that, again, it was a misuse of children. My father wouldn't let sex jokes be told that involved children.

SHURIN: So it was permission from your family rather than negation from society.

DUNCAN: They made it clear that other people thought otherwise. They had to in relation to their religion. It's just like money in our household. If money was out on the plate it was family money to pay the paperboy or take a streetcar. If it was in the purse it was mother's money. So if you needed money you'd take from the plate but you didn't do that if you were in somebody else's house. That was strongly emphasized. And the same held true as to how people should behave.



Robert Duncan
Summer 1942, Berkeley

ABBOTT: You often have birds singing in your poems and songs in your poems. Is singing a part of the feminine in you that's coming out?

DUNCAN: Yes, but predominantly I think the songs—do you have my Medea?

SHURIN: Sure wish I did.

DUNCAN: Well Medea's song upon seeing Jason is at the point when I'm at Black Mountain. Medea is really seeing the way I saw N., seeing "the man." The feeling was so strong, by the way, that I don't have that feeling again. It's not that feeling I had when I met Jess. I was reading Lady Murasaki when I was living with N., when it was breaking up.

Genji has a mistress and cannot fulfill the relationship so he makes a reincarnation promise to give her a life that he will consummate. With N. I very strongly felt—I was shattered really. I mean I was breaking up, but then, intense as it was, during the last year I got engaged to marry Virginia Admiral. I was hitchhiking to New York all the time from Indianapolis. I had torrid affairs, I mean I was picking up people as frequently as any little 19 or 20 year old. I wasn't figuring the arithmetic of this at all. I'd demolish the whole place if the least straying came on his part but I wasn't straying. My diaries at Cal are in the aftermath of all this. Still, when I first met Marjorie I'm so wrapped up in the fact that I have been, that N. had to rescue himself and that I've been sexually disowned.

He got what he deserved in a way though. He *loved* contexts in which I'd be scared. One time he had me on the floor of his office while the secretary of the French Dept. is trying to get in and he's holding the door shut with his foot. He's got me fucking like a scared rabbit (laughs). They just love that. Oh, I mean yes (rolls his eyes) the panic I'd be in.

I'm circling around to your question of how come I had a sense of the social punishment that could come down. You couldn't miss it. In the 30's we had friends who at fifty were back on a scene they'd been off thirty years because they'd been in prison. You didn't miss *that* heavy ticket. Being in closets was serious business, not frivolous coppin' out in those days. And when I had no inner reserve about it everybody was warning me over and over again about my outrageous behavior because there were not a lot of people who were gonna be visibly queer. Then we went to Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and, in the balcony, he went down on me. That was the *most*. He had me more terrified than I'd dreamed. It wasn't like I had him out of his mind there. He was being wicked. He had me out of my mind and he knew it.

ABBOTT: So you liked to scare each other.

DUNCAN: Oh, I know one marvelous moment four or five years ago (laughs). Jess said at the breakfast table: "But I was scared of you the first couple years." And I was *appalled*. I thought I could have given the account that at last I'd found somebody who wasn't scared of me and my intensity and my coming on like a local whirlwind when I got carried away. Somebody who took me *au naturel*. But he didn't go into some game with this scare. I didn't say "What do you mean?" I said "I've begun to realize when I meet young poets that they're scared of me and I can kind of see what it would be. I come on so heavy and there seems no way in which this thing is not just hitting you."

SHURIN: Do you like to scare young poets?

DUNCAN: Well probably. Right, if it can make you succumb baby. But obviously I like to scare in my poetry. I love my poetry being scary. We come back to the element of rapture. Rapture for me goes back to that (Persephone) moment and I feel the poem coming up in me as something terrifically scary. I feel, more and more, everything in language is potentially scary and it's not that I'm going to disclose a secret or something that I know. I'm at that point the language is about to tell me something I don't wanna know. A place beyond where *we* are fucking there's another kind of fucking I don't want to find out about.

To go back earlier, after my rape scene I was in a play and an Italian kid in the play gave me a ride home on his bike and stopped in the same park 'cause he'd heard the story of this thing. Now I was still in the context where you jump into bed yet you're still not registering eyes, hands, or even penis touching penis. I'm in dreamland where you swoon. You don't pass out, you swoon. So the next step was this kid I didn't like. I guess there was something going on. Well, we start necking, I'll go along with that, but he takes out his prick and says "suck it, suck it." And I'm offended because for all the time I've been in bed naked with T. there's been no pricks in my world. Just like when my cousin pointed out my hard on. I worried, does it look like it ought to look? "Hello cock, what are you doing?"

There's a difference between sweet young cock and the "cock" cock. Yet also in highschool I was just *dying* for the disclosure you've got to feel and see the cock. They were just separated for me. One of the great things in the gym locker room was were you going to get a grope. But the grope is not yet really—'cause masturbation is where the hand is sexual and the cock is sexual. No wonder the Egyptians ritually masturbated. But I was unwilling to admit I masturbated. Probably I did what was masturbation by pressing and coming. And where I was in the Mount Hotel where they put me after the rape, I mean, I must have looked as queer as a kid could look at 17. There was a guy in the kitchen who got me to his room and then as soon as he shows me that he has a hard cock, that wasn't anything I wanted. But that was after this beating.

What I wanted was love, not lust. Lots had to be aroused, lots of romantic foreplay, before I was actually sucking a cock. I mean I've done lots of cocksucking but I remember coming to Sanders Russell where they had just picked up a soldier and he had one of those hard ones you couldn't get off no matter what. They were lined up in a row to suck it and I was just disgusted. The whole thing looked like a deformity. Not on your life (laughs).

ABBOTT: It looks to me like the energies were coming from different chakras. The lower chakra is simply the physical sensation but your sexual fantasy was coming from a higher, more magical plane.

DUNCAN: We've got a struggle in which the two are uniting. Rightly it starts from the higher chakra if it's ever going to get there because the society doesn't ever want it to be there. It doesn't want a connection between the higher chakras and the lower chakras. It wants to believe the lower chakra is not a chakra at all.

SHURIN: Even in terms of homosexuality, they don't want a connection between the imaginative and the actual. They like to keep that separation.

DUNCAN: You see me constantly going towards naturalization and the spirit of realization. You find me, over and over again, *realizing* things. One of the most important things for me in poems is realizing. If this poem will not be a root *back* to the place where the hand knows the cock, the mouth knows the cock. No matter what is in it (the poem), that it go there and know and find what it is. If that isn't what it is then what is language doing? And we can talk about that with everything.

Olson in *Maximus* has an imaginary body yet with his own body, he didn't exercise it. He misused it. To him it was a broken down automobile, the opposite of what he announces thruout the poem. Meanwhile he's galloping toward advanced emphysema and announcing the breath is the thing it's coming from. He does *not* say breath is holy or he wouldn't be smoking. Both of 'em did it which left them up in their heads. The whole struggle was felt between their lungs and their heads. You're *never* gonna get past your lungs when your lungs are squeezed down to that.

If my poems are repeatedly making announcements about the blood and so forth, they're certainly not the foreground of a masochistic, sadistic actuality because that would be so redundant, what's vividly on my mind as an experience, but when we talk about higher chakras, they're announcing "recognize what all your fantasies are and what they say up here" (gestures to heart).

When I was living with the commercial artist in New York for two years, Lou Harrison (see interview with composer Lou Harrison in *Gay Sunshine* No. 23) had a black boyfriend who was a preacher uptown. Lou had a

great cult with Blacks and they were great fun to be around. It was the original cast of Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints*. It was heaven really, being with such famous people. And he had 'em all up there and there was a time I read my poems aloud and I read my African Elegy aloud.

It was the first time it actually dawned on me that the African Elegy was simply a projection of certain things going on. And when I come to the "Negroes, negroes, all those princes" and I finish this whole thing and I'm in rapture, all those faces beaming at me, and then this great big gorgeous hunk of a black stud says "Do you have any par-ti-cu-lar black gentleman in mind" (laughs) and I thought, God! I didn't have any particular fellow in mind. I'd made it with slight black guys who were interesting because their skin coloring was different than mine but they didn't belong to the hairy, scarey land of the "Princes, princes." Again, we've got blood in that scene. It was Othello that was on my mind but it was a dream scene and I was moving it and going forward to what I was seeing. In fact, in that one, I find I am that figure. So I'm the one who has that jealousy and princely domination and I'm finding myself restricted by the way I dominate a scene.

ABBOTT: What was the homosexual scene like in your college years?

DUNCAN: I'd joined a frat house and during Rush I thought gee, I'm not going to have any trouble getting new boyfriends because by the time I'd gone through all the frat houses, when I'd finally pledged, I'm getting telephone calls from all the other frat houses. So I started going to the opera with a very attractive, intelligent substitute for T. and I thought, gee, that's nice. So your drawers were wet when you got home and all.

I remember the sophistication of the frat house 'cause they said: "Well, we know why that guy's taking you to the opera all the time and when he stops taking you to the opera we'll know ya came across so he better take ya to the opera for the whole season." (laughs) This was at the end of the Depression and I knew they needed my money. My family wanted me to pledge a frat house and I'd pledged the poorest looking one because I could see I'd have command of the situation. But also I could see they wouldn't care if I was queer or not. And I got to be a sort of pet 'cause I was out front whereas Boggs was just absolutely treated as, well, they took him to a whore house once and then had him describe—they knew he was queer but wouldn't come out of the closet so they just tortured him.

I began to see this wasn't like high school. There's a very busy circle of things going on. We'd go to a place where you could dance, where they'd drink quite a bit, and I began to be aware. All frat houses took their pledges to Finocchio's just to give 'em this shock of what they'd never seen before so I do remember another Wow. This was 1936. Finocchio's had imported from Japan this great youth, he was probably 18, and they also had another 20 year old gorgeous, bewildering male presence in women's clothes yet. Well, I saw there were pleasure boys. So that was hovering in my mind but I was also harried because I could see I was not going to make the scene that they had. First place, I couldn't imagine "where do they put it?" They did this strip down to the size of a postage stamp. They looked like Khalil Gibran, like there was nothing there (laughter). But if I strip I'm going to be revealed as a hairy male right?

ABBOTT: You didn't think of shaving your body?

DUNCAN: Not at all! Let's go back to body images. I'd seen these Greek statues but of course they never had any hair on them. Which I didn't either then. And I already had a strong image I wanted hair on my body, not shaggy, but enough to define what was going on. And I was very worried...

ABBOTT: Would this be a compensation for coming out? I mean I used to have this feeling, growing up, of wanting hair to prove I was a man.

DUNCAN: My father wasn't hairy. But remember, this was a period when we did not see males. They wore uppers on their bathing suits and at no time did you see chest display, ever, in the 30's. You did working men I guess but this was a middle class world and you just did not see men who were not of your class. There were Chicanos, I guess, but you read them out. It wasn't polite to be looking at people who were working so all the people you were actually ripping off you didn't connect with.

ABBOTT: Gore Vidal did. He talked in an earlier *Gay Sunshine* interview about how randy the working class men were.

DUNCAN: Well, once we looked, there they were. But avoidance must have been very common because it certainly was where I was at. So looking was first a breaking the barrier of the stranger. The whole homosexual community was fascinated by two things: youth, of course, bringing people out was a very important thing. But of all absurdities, bringing someone out when they've been out since they were six and ready to build mantraps (laughing). At that age I would have jumped into a meat chopper. And yet bringing out was a very definite occupation. Did you bring him out, etc. But that's the male business of did you have the maidenhead. Remember, that's only the first time.

Then there was the great business about the one night stand. Always you're talking about the disappointment, a wolf getting you for a one night stand, okay? But it wasn't a wolf. We talked about a one night stand when we knew they weren't going to be coming back, when you knew this wasn't the beginning of a sexual friendship.

This is something we ought to talk about when we come to *Gay Sunshine*. We've got lots of phrases about our

disappointment in relationships but *nothing* in our society opens sexual friendships for us. When we come to Duncan's formula, it's so centered in having to have a household that it will sacrifice whole areas, because I experience falling in love and adultery and so forth. I've come to realize it's the ground of something more intense and more meaningful and in time you come to realize what it is. I don't think our eyes are wrong or our bodies are wrong. One feels hopeless because it's your whole life you share. So unless you're willing to move in with somebody for a week, whatever it is, that wholly, that sexuality—that's where I saw you, okay? But then I know also you mustn't share your whole life. When I'm sitting here talking to you I'm sharing my whole life with you. So you find the ground. But we don't provide sexual ground for a conversation. So let's make this sentence number one: We have never treated sexuality as language so we do not have sexual conversation and when we say "sexual intercourse" we think we are being horrible or clinical when actually intercourse is talking together, communicating. Our society *nowhere, nowhere* permits this information that we might have been talking when we were first playing because very soon we come to the place where "that kind of talk is for the one person."

What are we as writers and poets? When you bring the news to lives that are forming themselves, then they suddenly see, gee, we're not trying to be liberated or something. We're trying to find how do you have an actual parenting sexual communication. Not promiscuity. That was only a word for it. Everybody experienced me, by the way, as promiscuous. This was usually women around and they lectured me I was psychotic. Sanders Russell who had an absolute cult of the stranger; that meant only once and they had to be strangers. And I know the excitement. I had a kind of mystique of the stranger, very much since I was picking up my room every night. I was really rather afraid of the stranger. I'd pick up the Daddyman who'd let me sleep at night and also they were nice and cuddly sex and didn't involve anything. I guess that's a form of hustling isn't it. But the stranger was a very significant person. Remember I couldn't say "I love you." You could have sex providing it is *not* like communication.

ABBOTT: You can communicate fantasies sometimes easier with a stranger.

DUNCAN: Yes, but you're both fantasizing.

ABBOTT: But when you actually get to know the person—see, a lot of my sexual fantasy came from books, reading Dostoevski, etc. Very intense. But in real life you can't be intense all the time. Then I feel bored or burdened by the other's demands and I don't have freedom to expand.

DUNCAN: Well, you need to return to certain psychodramas. I'm sure I needed those psychodramas as long as I was in them but certainly at the point of Jess, my poetry increasingly develops upon the unanswered yearning for someone. That seems to be the most significant part of my poetry. I'm 60 now, and between 50 and 60 I've had a lot of propositions, but since I practiced it when I was 15 or 16 I know it's not a matter of age. This would be your sense of Dostoevski and violent scene.

ABBOTT: Not necessarily violent. It could be intense ecstasy. I'd bottled up my emotions for several months and then went to Atlanta last summer. This fellow I met had seen and liked my poetry so it was a spiritual thing too. So I immediately moved in and it was total ecstasy. Writing poems was part of our sexuality. But then it got just too crazy too fast. I stepped back and saw that this person was depressed all the time...

DUNCAN: One thing about a stranger: you don't have to figure out when you're in phase 'cause you are in phase when you're out looking. When you come to a constant relationship you have to have a whole range of interchanges about phases, confidence that you'll return to the very specific thing you want. So your fantasies, if they're excluded—If I want to do something and the other person doesn't that's not in question. But if I began to exclude a sexual act, then I blow up, am absolutely unhandled, because no matter what I do you have a scrap present. If you have an exclusion of something, then you have something worse than the fantasy because all your fantasies are nervously surrounding this one thing that's on your mind.

Oh. In my marriage, the most important thing, because I didn't really have an image of cunt, I had to do a lot of cunt licking and smelling but especially seeing. So sexuality was very centered there. In relation to buggering it was never really centering until after that, with J., there was some anal licking and seeing. We're talking about organs really being present, present to the eye. Your chakras makes sense to me. I'm not going to worry if they're chakras or not. We're talking about it is present thruout. Do they have the imprint? Is it in your consciousness or not? You have one thing in reference to asshole and anus and returned with your interior feelings of it. And with your peristolic feeling and omitting of turds, all this is your interior feeling. You can't look at your rectum. Of course now with movies, etc., you have a lot more pictures but could I hold it in place if I saw it, smelled it, tasted it. So in these early phases, the first thing when I sucked my first cock was I had to decide how did I feel about this taste. And there was no difficulty.

SHURIN: *Caesar's Gate* was ripe for explorations around your sexuality; the preface in which you really make some public statements about it. You start off talking about when M.L. Rosenthal chided you for being "girlish" in tone as opposed to being "manly", and then when you're talking about Lorca's vision of the faggots in New York

you say "the denizens of this despised shadow world have almost a new poetry or courage in the mind, as if there were a heroism in being outcast." I have this feeling that your exploration of homosexuality is connected to your exploration of finding a language in rhetoric.

DUNCAN: Ah because it's outcast too, is that it?

SHURIN: Yes, but also the sense of heroism, of pushing defiantly for an articulation of something higher.

DUNCAN: O.K. We have to reread that outcast thing again. We've got a proposition in which that shadow world that seems at first to be alien, those we see as outcasts from out male attitudes—the outcasts are what we fear we might be. In the preface *Caesar's Gate* I began to see I must take my stand with, stand up for what I was afraid to be thought to be. My own distaste for what Anais Nin and M.L. Rosenthal saw in me and found repulsive was so extreme that I wanted to disown what they saw—to disown myself—that's not the true me.

Yet thinking of how both of these found me effeminate, it may be a very important insight. I had better take my stand for the feminine I have over the years censored myself in myself. In "The Museum" written recently, I think there is evidence of a classical Jungian anima "uprising"—a protesting of all that feminine potentially in me against my dominating personality. This is just for the feminine, it's for the woman. Remember they're seeing me as whorish. But I also delighted in that period, and I don't think the preface even gets into that does it? Actually delighted in playing this whorish role. In my twenties, in the city of New York, the period between 1941 and 1945, but predominantly up to about 1943 so about two years, I was scoring all the time. And in that scoring I was frequently hustling and whorish, in other words really exploring any range for what would be the seductive thing at the time, right. And lots of that range was inhabiting all the forms of seduction you'd see in movie queens, in movie women. And what Anais Nin describes is of course when I do get into that; she's seeing me as—I monkey her. And she called me her monkey. So she's seeing something she dislikes that actually her monkey is doing.

SHURIN: So do you see then an interpenetration?

DUNCAN: And the things I'm looking at, yes. Let's go back to that preface. What I'm doing is looking across there at a place where I never dreamed myself being when I was doing those street scenes, because they were an extension of the mythic power you have of sexuality straight-on. But I see that I wasn't looking at a lot. Remember the main thing in that preface of *Caesar's Gate* is that I finally come to the place and say with the lines drawn I've got to get over there. To what extent was I on the other side of the line in my own mind or on the side of any line when I was in the streets myself. I'm talking in the broadest sense of that point when you have to defend somebody's existence and respect their life. So that's some of the margins of *Caesar's Gate*. When I come to their lives, human life in itself, Aaron, seems to me paramount, and as a poet I stand by that. That is not the same as a person trying out my own things. I would be already violating the mere human boundaries of my nature to go outside of it. This is just my own nature, the things I could and couldn't do. That I found out decisively. It was a matter of body feel and reading vibes. I never in my life encountered the golden shower scene, where pissing or shitting is involved, but since I piss and shit I can understand the entire thing. I very particularly don't separate these areas. You can find areas in my poetry where sexualizing of images comes forward with golden shower scenes and with sadistic and masochistic fantasies. These must be reservoir imaginations—a background always of my actual sexual life I know. I've never been in an actual whipping scene. Yet at the point when I would have fainted dead away if someone had told me about such a scene, although I'd read it in Kraft-Ebbing where I thought it was in a lunatic asylum, you would be convinced if you read "African Elegy" that I must be way into a sado-masochistic scene. I understand entirely through and through that the psychic content and the imagination in the mind not only comprehends but includes as essential every area we can think of.

So what is the area of experience; it itself is already carving out a being or a person. The person, me. I'm amazed that I only made one wrong pick-up in all the time when I was in New York and that was where I found a foot fetishist and discovered that foot fetishism was not my thing. That was done by reading vibes, and I don't read vibes from some prejudice in my mind. I read them because my body feely alarmed or feels "time to go body". If I felt a strong attraction to something, a lead towards something, whatever rides there I know is mine. After that, by the way, I did read correctly that some very strong vibes should get their no-nos. If I went on a walk and felt four blocks away a shadow of what I felt that night in 1935 when I had my chin torn open I was off the scene in two seconds. And so it was really almost strangeness, in a way, I was going to turn away from. The business of dressing up, mask, and painting face and so forth that would also be those shadows, that life in that shadow. Where did I come nearest to it? We used to go and meet at midnight or 1 A.M. in an all night cafeteria around 6th avenue, very near the park, uptown, and it was where the male whores and female impersonators of the time went in between for their coffees, before they went back on the street and returned to the regular business of the early morning hours. And there, as a matter of fact, we were surrounded all the time by painted men. But I wore paint on my face and eye shadow. I wore clothes that went much further than people in that period went, outside of ones that were in drag. And wore them also in Berkeley. I liked to go to dance halls and I



Robert Duncan (right) with Jess & portrait, S.F. 1957

Photo by Harry Redl

would dress in the dyke end of it, like lumber jackets and so forth, but with my hair cut in bangs, and earrings, and my face painted. And I got successfully tossed out of a bar and told not to bring my trade in there.

SHURIN: So are you taking the same kind of stand in language?

DUNCAN: Yes, that is what I do in language. In the rhetoric end of it, in the 30's that was already highly frowned upon. Observably a very purist group is the Black Mountain group in its allegiance to the main drives of William Carlos Williams and Pound and so forth. And in relation to Williams, when I sent him *Medieval Scenes* it was like a challenge because he was the poet who meant most to me. But in poetry long before I tuned into the *Cantos*, which have a commanding rhetoric, in the *H.D. Book* I talk about rhetoric and Pound's commanding rhetoric and so did Williams have a lot of rhetoric. I was already being told I shouldn't have a rhetoric in the very beginning when I was fifteen or sixteen; you shouldn't have a rhetoric and it shouldn't be merely rhetorical, you shouldn't pour out emotions you don't have. So I had guilt back and forth. In *Roots And Branches* I'm very sensitive to the fact that the rhetorical Duncan is out of bounds. In *Caesar's Gate*, the poem in which I actually put a mask on, which is by the way the mask of an old queen, "H M S Bearskin", that one was at the time very distressing to me, it's a poem of a distress. It was painful to me and I had to be heroic to keep it. Many years later, when Creeley wanted to do a book in 1956 (that's how come we went to Mallorca in 1955, Creeley was urging us to come to Mallorca but he was also going to do a book with Divers Press) by that time my identification with the Black Mountain school was quite strong. They knew my current work and that's what in a way they would have assumed, and my decision then was that I was going to print those poems of that very painful period. "Bearskin" has self-pity, it has affect that I still find humiliating, but mostly it wears a mask. Now in *Medieval Scenes* I don't think of it as mask at all. No mask all the way through "The Venice Poem"; that's a poem of process. It's followed by a poem of the art, a poem which is in direct correspondence with Pound, letters going back and forth, and that poem I've never brought into print. It almost comes to a high, a statement of *arête*, of refining and directing all one's forces, what would be called noble speech. But in the aftermath of the break-up with J., in rage and self-humiliation—my male pride offended, he had left me—the other side of the moon came round. There's a tremendous rage and desolation moving through *Caesar's Gate*, so that it plunges me back where I'd never been before. And that's O.K. I had no trouble with those poems, they're austere.

We've got something very different between the vibes on the street when you're hunting for sex as such, and hard up. You still go by body vibes and you lose; there are none out there, no vibes. When you cross over into just picking-up people, you're going into an area which no longer has the quality of being aggressive. I see this as what is sexuality in a sense saying to us, what is sexuality the speech of, what is its revelation; and when we depart from the revelation, we're really talking about the shadows that I'm seeing there are revelations, the painted faces we saw were revelations. But it is a revelation that you come to mere survival and find yourself in another life. These are parts of a life I was in. I could remember places where those painted faces were. Where I was in the same milieu. And the milieu is the one world you find yourself in, as you find yourself in a

world in a dream. I still see it as revelation, and should be read through, and find ways to experience it so you discover its language. Well we only have to think of children; I dressed up as a child; my poem *H M S Bearskin* touches on that, but you find me very disturbed about it.

And you find me with very marked reactions to cash money. In the period when I was a gigolo in Florida, I was very much not myself; I was in a schizy state, but I could explore it providing I stuffed money back. I would be given \$300 at the beginning of the evening and it was taken for granted that I would keep it, but she would be so drunk I'd stuff it back in her purse. So that was all right in my middle class mind. And if I didn't sleep with her then the chaperone was handing me money; I had no place to put that money. So that got me caught out in my wasp middle class hypocrisy, that while I could be in this play, even while it was in actual life, it wasn't play money so And yet I didn't mind having clothes bought for me, that was that other one. The pleasure boy of Ancient Greece was doing fine, but cash was something that blew that whole scene. And in New York actually one thing that did shift my sexual life was when I got a job for \$15 a week, because the thing I wanted most was to have my economic life back in my own hands: getting a job and getting work and getting it into my head that I could be self-supporting.

We're back, really, at a question of rhetoric. You see, really, how quickly I answer to almost any suggestion you come up with the poetry. Patently I'm not afraid that my poetry is filled with leak-throughs, almost as promiscuous as I was in my twenties; from almost every line of poetry that I came around, I succumb to it and then overcome it with a line. And as ever in such occasions authenticity doesn't interest me at all. Oh, back to those painted, those shadow figures. What Anais Nin brought me into was the business of how quickly you can be what the other person is looking for if you're a blank check. You don't have to be much, but you tune in entirely on what it is that's being uncovered in their lives.

SHURIN: You talk also in *Caesar's Gate* at one point very specifically of the ideal reader as being "her". Now is that just a muse myth for you; is that directly related to your female masters Sitwell, Stein, H.D.; or is there some other great attention that you imagine?

DUNCAN: There are two angles about my use of the hermetic brotherhood: that my grandmother was an elder in and that my family had as their general religion. One is that it was fascinating as a child, so I carried that over. And certainly the fact that there were no fairy-tales that to them were not hermetic secret legends, and that's how I experienced fairy-tales, that they were revelations. But the other part of it is that in a way I wanted to be marvelous as they valued the marvelous and to be a medium as they valued their mediums. My grandmother died when I was ten; my grandmother who was the most entranced person I ever saw reading. She also worked with languages, trying to learn Greek, probably not any further than my one year grammar with dictionary in hand, and also trying to learn the stars completely and learning Egyptian, because that was the context of their religion. But it meant that books are the deepest revelation, that look of what a book meant. The family had a general superstition that poetry was of this order but I don't remember that there were poems. Oh, *Leaves of Grass* I do remember. My father had a sister who was probably twenty or twenty-five years older than I am. She was in various cults, she never went to college. In this period she had as a master a woman for whom *Leaves of*

Grass was her Bible, so that was always considered from the standpoint of the cosmic consciousness. Let's re-direct your question.

SHURIN: O.K. Was there a mythic level on which this ideal reader was operating?

DUNCAN: Yes, there was a mythic level, but I think it's not purely mythic. The ideal reader is the grandmother who in a sense reads you. When the ideal reader first appeared in my series of drawings it's not actually my grandmother at all. But the one I've got on my mind will go along with everything. There was a lot of that possibly in my mother, although I didn't have full confidence. So I've invented a mother, and now we don't have to be a myth, do we? My ideal reader is a mother to whom you don't confess anything because everything gets to be told, everything is related and flows. And she is Life, Life is a woman to me completely. When we finished our sessions last time we'd been talking about Eros and Amor. The series of poems that came out of it are called the Eros/Amor/Love Cycle, and I thought but how excluded is this absolute period. Remember that not only is the ideal reader a woman, but there's another reader who's way back in the centuries; it's Helen Adam but it's also centuries before, and she's reading me afterwards so the tolerance goes through all time.

SHURIN: Because of your upbringing was there a real easy identification on your part with heretical sects of the middle ages?

Some people I know have begun to retrieve this kind of identification with people who were called heretics in earlier times: the Albigensians, the Cathars, St. Joan, even Gilles de Rais, because of an integral part that sexuality played in some of these modes. Do you see this connection. Is it part of your connections?

DUNCAN: Yes, well first place of course the hermetic itself has propositions in which you have the possibilities. Since gods appear a male would also be related. We're back at the Amor/Eros business. If there were cults of Osiris, the male's relation to Osiris was an epiphany for both men and women in the Egyptian world, a life-changing one. Isis has said she is all the colors of the rainbow, or the peacock's tail, and she's everywhere. But Osiris only arrives once, and he's white in which all colors are present. Not dispersed at all, the color white. And then you either say yes or not. If you don't it's not going to arrive again. In that life. In each life there's one arrival point of Osiris. I feel a poem like that by the way, in which in the poem going toward a threshold of a very high terror or fear there arrives the actual beauty of the poem, and yet it's been present throughout. But its arrival is sort of a peak in the composition of the poem. and later I saw it as a fulcrum around which all of its weights are organized. It's fairly late that I come to that. It's in Plutarch's text of the nature of Osiris, and so I'm working on *The H.D. Book* by the time I come to the text. We had access to the hermetic texts that my family had in their mysteries because they had been translated by Mead at the turn of the century, and I couldn't read them. I was searching them all the time but they only began to mean things when they began to speak to me, although I'm searching all the time until this becomes eloquent. But the feeling that there was a momentous moment that would be like the mysteries; and certainly even if you go back to where I'm walking along the river bottom waiting for an experience to occur, a Pan-like figure to materialize out of the winter—a winter Pan would be a hobo—where is this solitary man who is the landscape, where is he? These are cults that made you aware when you came across cults what they were; in addition to my parent's cults, it would be back and forth, it made it *au naturel*. I know by the time I came to the book of *Letters* I had a strong search for an identity in which—as in the "Arcadia", by that time it becomes quite formulated—in which there is a homo-eros who is identical with Christ, in which there is a cult of Christ that is a homo-eros. And I'm sure there must have been Christian gnostic groups in which this would be present. So I still search gnosticism for this. I find gnosticism is one of the most fierce repositories for hatred of the body. As in Blake wanting another body, a spiritual body, a radiant Blakean body, which when he draws it—we're back at the Greek one—either has very small genitals or no genitals at all.

ABBOTT: You mentioned to Thom Gunn once about the gnostic heresy of God creating Hell by looking into his own face.

DUNCAN: Yes, the gnostic idea of who Narcissus is. I did meet an authority recently on gnosticism so I have to chase this down. Did I read it or is it a myth that I'm so sure was there I can tell it. Christ and Satan are twin brothers and Christ loves Satan throughout, eternally. Unremitting absolute Christ love. And Satan falls in love with Christ. He's jealous of him, all the things that cluster around falling in love as distinguished from loving things; and the distance of his fall is the distance in which the universe appears. So this goes along with another gnostic one, but now not Jewish or Christian: in the gnostic Greek account of Narcissus he looks into where the universe would be and there he sees his face which is the universe and falls. The fall of his gaze into the depths where he finds his image and the actual Narcissus there, the Narcissus image, is the universe. So there he's identical with the Creator of the universe. In the other one there's a thing between Christ and Satan which causes the area in which the creation is the return of Satan to love, his redemption from falling in love to where he accepts being loved and the "to love". It's very related to that thing in Plato that one falls in love and the other loves.

SHURIN: So when you move to this level of the mystery, then sexuality is an integral part of that in an almost pagan sense.

DUNCAN: As a matter of fact you see very early I talk about the bardo state. "H M S Bearskin", actually when I read it I see I didn't get very far, the things I thought were there. Maybe I better get with it and collect these appalling poems that follow because I don't want to be guiltless of bathos. I don't ever destroy any poems I write but I do want to show—as I was working preceding this with Pound writing this long poem in which I was proposing the arête, the nobility—in Duncan's world nobility co-exists as but part, or movement or tension with every other possible thing. Although I've never been able to get back as I did in *Faust Fouton* in which we have a full range in which there's burlesque in all sorts of things. For instance I'm not capable, just emotionally not capable of very much dirty writing. O.K., so I've got disgust. No matter what you go into you find you have your own very telling take on it. It isn't that you haven't been over there, but over there you suddenly are doing whatever you do, sweating or scared; all that is a real register a poem is, whereas philosophy is not, it rules out that I'm not going to register that I'm ecstatic or scared or disgusted or giggling. So Art has to do a very different thing, it tells us what happens to an individual when he's in the realm of an idea. Back to Plato, the idea was the first beloved, that there's someone, that there is a spiritual power that every person falling in love has addressed in the ritual relationship with the other person if they're falling in love. And the Eros, I propose that desire is also addressed to the primal power of Eros, but that primal power of Eros has always been described as murderous, destructive, terrifying, and so it's identified in my mind with that one I briefly...

SHURIN: And so it becomes Eros/Oberon then, and darkness becomes eroticised constantly in your poetry.

DUNCAN: And now of course, though, darkness is thought of as love. The reason—I gave my middle class one—the one I don't leave my bed at night and carry on an affair—but the return at night to sleep with death, and gestures and ceremonies of our bed customs, our night customs, are a very great center from which everything moves, and the night, the dark, the total dark, is very important.

SHURIN: You say "into the infancy of a darkening bliss/love sets me free." ("coda—17th Cen. suite")

DUNCAN: Right. But that whole thing is touch and so forth, that's very clear there, and ceremonialized, giving me keel.

ABBOTT: You were quoted in the magazine *Christopher Street*: "We have yet to begin to create the psychological and mythological tradition to build the gay culture and gay arts movement that would be needed." We've been talking about how do we recover, is it possible to have an understanding of gay culture. Arthur Evans' book, *Witchcraft And The Gay Counterculture*, is an attempt as I see it to do that, reaching back to our culture being erased; what existed before or what was going on that was being erased. Do you want to expand on that?

DUNCAN: Oh, yes, let's go first, did we ever have such a culture? I've written on this, when I discussed chapter three of *The H.D. Book in Tri-Quarterly* review, and it is the chapter specifically on the Eros. I traced through there how inadequate it seems to me are the tracings even in the few areas where our Homo-Eros appears. We already made some remarks about the formulation about the Lover and Beloved. Remember Plato is emerging in a culture in which homosexuality had been really instituted as being an initiation of the adolescent boy into the mens' house by older men, so it's the real place where the father takes over. So it's a man of the father's age that's initiating the boy. But this is in a society in which, for instance, heterosexual relations were solid—the wife was at home and the raising of children was quite intact. There's no indication at all of what in the world was the relation of girls to their fathers. And all the images are images of rapes of young just pubescent girls on the foyer of sexuality. And both of those by fathers, Pluto and Jupiter, and they take place over and over again. Or Apollo. Apollo has both male and female, so does Jupiter. I don't know of Pluto right now as having a male rape. So there was rape on the foyer, the forcing across the foyer of sexuality in which you take a captive, and that may be an earlier custom. But when Plato comes he wants to close the whole area of significant sexuality and love in this relationship of the older man, now the teacher, and the younger man who is to enter the mens' house when he in turn will be a teacher, a worthy teacher. Now what was already there the *Symposium* shows us. There were the symposia: men met together in parties where they drank, that was the most important thing in the symposia, and they talked about love, music, and so forth. These would be like bull sessions when you're in college, and as a matter of fact Plato reads like bull sessions and that's why it's so real, it still is real, it's lasted forever. But they drank and they also made love. We know they certainly made love the same way we know there was homosexuality among the Jews. Socrates is read out in this as an old man. He lectures Alcibiades that he is old and ugly and Alcibiades is young and is entirely entranced by him and so he gives him a great argument opposing him. However he doesn't pose himself as old and ugly; he poses himself as really being like Cernunnos, the other wine/sex god which appears, you've got to be really drunk to get there and that's the end of the party. Plato in his laws comes down and says that these symposia have got to be banned because improper things

are done, things that cause the loss of manhood.

"The Homosexual In Society" article of 1944 arose from my reaction to a fashionable gay party and seeing a young poet, seeing what I feared I might be too, in his affected voice. Hadn't he lost his own natured voice, having lost his manhood essentially. And if you think about the term manly today it's a very forceful and troublesome word, it's avoided a great deal, what are you if you're a man? So we're full into the center of what is my picture. I think we're discovering a homosexual manhood in a more solid ground than was provided in the Greek world. In the Greek world they were thought of as a very special cult; Plato doesn't propose anything other than that. Higher thought: by being removed from women they were removed in their minds from triviality, and among the trivialities were daily life, how you cook. We don't any longer believe that knowing the nature of food and nutrition is demeaning to a mind; it's the center of our idea of what mind properly is. So when you're talking about manly and manhood it goes along with our new ideas of nutrition, of food good versus food bad. We've got a charged politics today, Nader would represent that, that people are putting out false food as well as false fronts. So when we list the goods we're in the actual territory of manliness. When Plato lists the goods he knows nothing about the goods of food and the bads of food. We don't even find that data when we move back to the Greek world; it doesn't seem to be as complete a picture as ours. And your poem (Steve's "Night on Amoeba Mountain") for instance, addressing the green at the end and an alliance with the plant world and its natures and what is in it, this is also central to us in what the mind and the manhood is realized in. And in Plato's day, the whole classical period is so far apart from it that when it attempts to give a description of the plant world it's got very little picture of it, very little observation.

So if we go back just to the place where we're talking about the homosexual world, first I can't separate that from finding our manhood. Women's Liberation and what it says today—I do not hear more than very clear evidence that they've been so deprived and closed away that they're giving expressions of acute pain that they can't locate what womanhood is. So that we're very far away from finding out what manhood is. Now we come to why and how I see the homosexual is closer to that. A man in love with a man not only finds himself in the presence of his manhood but also in the presence of the other's manhood, and so he cannot but know the agony and the separation from nature. And his formula can't be as simple—although it certainly is—we hear it on the stage, it's done over and over again—yes, the formula can be we both flunked out from manhood. A man can scream at a man like a woman can scream at a man that he's not a man. Or a man will scream at a woman that she's not a woman, the contempt goes two ways doesn't it. And a woman can scream at a man that he is a man, you can do both. The accusation can be that you're not a woman, and that's when you're angry, or the accusation can be that you are a woman, that's when you're angry. It can be you are a man or you're not a man.

Just think of our social class, we all have got a thing of what this is. Now I'm not talking about roleplaying, but about something very central to the field. Again like the one you talked about when you talked about a cult. The weak place in Marx is not at all in the economic description of the society, not at all in the sense of the things that are being made, but in psychological penetration—society not only consists of what we make. And he's pretty solid if we take him through about what the goods are of the society. This is a place where we begin to think about the actual goods of a society, it's the beginning of socialism, and in Marx they become fairly solid. Except of course he's so attracted by the fact that class division gives him a political lever, one class against the other, that he loses entirely that there's profoundly evil labor to be done, and the laborers who are working in profoundly evil labor are profoundly evil. And you get the present day Marxists who can't account for the fact that the strongest thing in back of Nixon was the working class, not the labor bosses. There were millions of votes out there because they didn't want to end the war industries where they were making their rip-off. And they do not want socialism because all the people in unions have guaranteed medical benefits, for instance, and if all of us had it the unions wouldn't have even a lever anywhere. If we had socialized medicine and if we had guaranteed what any working class person has who's in a union, the union wouldn't be able to charge them their dues. So this is something Marx didn't even look at. But he also didn't look at the most fundamental thing of all, and that is no matter where we put it in class, that's just tops and dressing to what you feel a man is and what is a woman. And that's the mystery, we come into the mystery then because it's always been there and I can't believe it isn't.

Plato places it within an archetype. I follow Plato all the way through on the archetype as I do Jung, but I cannot believe the archetype is unconscious at all. I believe the archetype is the mind, that's the one that Plato is interested in, or the soul, that's the one Jung is interested in, that's why they come out different. They're created projection from an imprint that's come from real human being, real plants, real stars. In Plato I find preposterous this picture that when a man makes this chair he makes it according to a model that exists in the mind. Chairs are made from models that exist in our sitting down! They come from our entire physical world. So that the first prime and full statement of this—and I hold to it all the way through—is Williams' "no ideas but in things". It does not say what Olson twisted it to say "not in ideas but in things"; it doesn't say that at all, but all ideas come from our actual physical real world. Ideas are real too, they're things to us; but the prime source of all ideas, the prime source of our

mental, spiritual and every other—if heaven is born out of anything it is born of the world we live in. So we're projecting heaven throughout, in that term.

Now let's turn back; yes, we do have pictures. Last time we met, I started to write pictures of what do we feel are the potentialities of Amor, Eros, Love in relation to the three of us. The three of us here talking are already in various ways homoerotic and homosexual in our predominant experience and subscription. But let's add to our company Michael Palmer, and let's add to our company in our minds Denise (Levertov). Now we're coming into our human condition; we can't picture the manhood of our homosexuality in a cult that isn't lunatic if we haven't found in imagination how actually to co-exist and be part of;—this is why it's agony, this is why we experience anger, desertion, all sorts of things. Like for instance it's very strong here, you can even see the shadow of it, but with Michael Palmer my closeness—or Michael Davidson—is how close and continuous I am with their male sexuality. Their heterosexuality doesn't make any difference; it is direct choice, because I think their choice lay somewhere else. So we have a mystery constantly—why do we fall in love with men, why are we drawn towards men. And I do not accept the mere Freudian level for that, the mere Jungian level, I think they're dealing with part of the story, but the story to me—and I put it usually as Romance—is the same one my parents would have believed: We have something we are meant to do in our lives and we have also something that is to be revealed to us; so the life is both the text we write in living and is also a text we read which is written for us and we constantly read. But we must always remember that while that text is quite specific we have got to write—my poetry is not cornered to be for the gay community. I'm as widely misunderstood in the gay community as far as I can judge, more widely. I think M.L. Rosenthal has a problem with homosexuality, that's why it's been in there, but Michael Palmer and Michael Davidson do not have that trouble, they draw on their emotional lives from my poetry. The first person I met who was right there was Creeley, who said you don't know what "The Venice Poem" means, nothing has shown me so much what I'm going through; and for whom my poetry from that point on was trusted in every dimension, and read not as a text of a homosexual but again as a revelation of what manliness is.

When I think of Jess (Duncan's lover) his reality is very like my own for me. It must be the nature of living together for years, the sense of manliness and womanliness is ongoing; the range of roles shared and exchanged—child and parent, and so on. Roles are so mere, you turn around and want Jess to fix your tinker-toy and discover he's not going to be Daddy that day and you've got to go and figure it out yourself, and you say "but I thought you were going to fix the whole mechanical thing for me." All of those dimensions we've got set in our minds are really trivial in relation to the underlying thing we're asking. But when we come to the level in which we don't get to choose—we really do or do not desire, and we don't do that all the time, and we also have attractions, we have to answer what do they mean finally. And that thing is total and social; we come up against it at every turn no matter how we define it. I talk in that NET television thing about how much space was earned for my generation by the next generation who actually comes out in public. I was never not out in that sense. Anybody who knew me at all couldn't even read me after "The Venice Poem" without knowing. And after I'd made the declaration in 1944. But that's nothing to demanding a way of living. Jess and I have a great sigh of relief that we didn't take a place 12 years ago in the middle of the gay ghetto. Our neighborhood is happy, it doesn't plunge us into a very special environment. That's like would you like to check out on being Jewish by living in the Jewish ghetto. But remember they're not forced to live in this ghetto so it's not a ghetto like in Europe. We forget that the ghetto in Europe was a place where people were forced to live, consequently we've got a very different kind of Jewish experience than we do if we went—the freedom to be or not be in a synagogue for instance. Aaron can dwell upon his Jewish name and go voluntarily to a synagogue, but in a Jewish world he wouldn't. Actually I know contexts, Jewish contexts, in which Aaron would be called to order, could be a Jew no matter what. Now it's a different thing than when he's in the area in which I go towards Jewish too, because it tells us something essential about our human nature that isn't anywhere else. O.K., now we're getting towards that manhood.

There's something essential about human nature. When I talk about god who certainly comes in my poetry, and I certainly talk about creation and about an intent in creation—every single individual in that creation is part of its revelation. This counter-culture erases how complex this is. When we've got appearing groups and continuous intent through human history, and there has been a continuous intent to formulate what man's sexuality is, the prohibition of it formulates it. And the cultivation, there's two things you do, all of which point to it, show it, this is significant, this is part of the dream, this is part of the revelation. If this part of the revelation were known we wouldn't just be Jews because we'd be like the Phoenicians. That's all that's being said in the Jewish law when it prohibited that you wear women's clothes; thou shall not be like those other semites who are exactly like you except they go before Ishtar dressed in women's clothes. They're not yet in the place the classical world reaches when under Cybele they cut off their genitals. That's male hysteria and the most terrifying thing in the world, although it's suspected that the mother goddess always asks it. In Ishtar and in Astarte they simply were whores of the temple, male and female. Those were Phoenicians right next door. In the period when the racism begins among the Jews, Ezra's the

main racist text, they no longer marry outside of their tribe, and they couldn't tell themselves physically apart from the people who only live over there in Gaza; the Phoenicians are right on the coast. They're still fighting their war by the way; it's just that hopeless, when they're fighting Northern Lebanon and fighting Syria; they're fighting everything the Old Testament rants about, which is those other gods and their ways. So we've got a long time shaping this.

Yet if you didn't have any purification and withdrawals you'd be back only having orgies; orgies seem to be the earliest form of a sexuality and we're talking about the development out of an orgasmic, an orgy space, into the place where it becomes united with ideas of love and united with long lifetime intent so they aren't sudden seizures. Sudden seizures will still remain, I don't mean they'll be erased. And in the new community I don't think we're going to have just one thing, clearly we're not going to be just one thing, to be homosexual any more than one thing is Jewish, or one thing is the black movement. But if you think about the Jewish religion—there *IS* a kind of homosexual religion—so I've got your question plus your first question about cult. The place I went to dance and you meet—the lambs meet the wolves—this is ritualizing on a religious level of meeting, this is a folkway that has gone on for a long time, its terms were folkways some of them very traceable. I'm not going back to witch cults in this but going back to males, cults of males, cultivating what specific roles they're going to have when they meet. And they're already new to learn; you learn certain new things about a community that's already there. I think I mentioned how important it was for males of about 30—40 or so to be bringing people out. With great pride that they could see that they were homosexual and then bring them out, show them that they were homosexual. This is what is usually not understood. Bringing someone out was not putting someone where they weren't but seeing that they were homosexual and bringing them out, so it was kind of missionary work. Remember our present missionary work was that you go in and bend the heads of a bunch of savages and convert them. But these were not conversions, they were seeing that they were members of a group and revealing to them that they were. So they have a very different missionary role. And they would be like Paul and the early Christians where you say—I think in a moment not having to do with sexuality, what this same power was when at the Ross in Washington I said “this dinner, I've got to go thank the cook” and I go the door of the kitchen and a black woman comes towards me and says “you are a lover of Jesus too, aren't you?” and I swallow and as painfully as I ever couldn't say I love you say “yes.” She said “there are not many of us.” Now that is the power that has to do with bringing people out.

Today there are mass persuasions and you don't know, I mean maybe they're bringing out, there's nothing about this yea or nay. But we moved into a period in which bringing out—yeah, what is falling in love but bringing something out, now we're getting around to it, falling in love is bringing something out at a deeper and deeper level. So that scoring is bringing out who's there. Scoring—when you're just checking-in, are you going to make it—even that brings something out. But scoring is where actually you've caught just the eye and each becomes the initiator of the other in to what, for an amazing percentage is proper to both. Remember I only once got caught in something not proper. Even it was a terrible revelation. And when I fall in love each one must—not only does it enter my nature and shape it, like I spoke scorn of E. but I don't dream that he wasn't a revelation. I mean you don't hang around someone for years, no, you like argue yourself out of it, you can be embarrassed—all sorts of other layers, but you can be embarrassed by how silly the preacher is at church when you have to go to church. So there is a level in which I think we can identify a kind of religion in the homosexual and the homoerotic. Also in art, that somebody can be a poet—it was so important to Robin (Blaser) and Spicer and me that we find poets; we didn't succeed—the grain of a poet, that there could be a poet—because actually when I speak of poetry it's exactly like this. And I don't always understand why it's a poet, but in my terms as a poet it's very rare. It's amusing, it's some kind of absolute, and it's being in love with language and not knowing it all the way through, but the only ones who knew it all the way through were poets. I didn't doubt Zukofsky was a poet when I first read him. And then I've seen poets adrift who've never been brought out at all. When you hear James Wright read, you realize he's a poet who's never been brought out.

SHURIN: Falling in love with a man is bringing the man out, and bringing into hu-man-ness a hidden nature of man.

DUNCAN: As a matter of fact love is a primary intent, now, not just a nature. Nature's ahead now and we're talking about intent. Up to Darwin God's design and intent would be presumed to be like making men out of little clay things and a model—like we take the Bible saying we were made in his image. It's like over in Plato-land, I've got a little model here and I make a little man. As a matter of fact there is such an image but now we know it's really fundamental, it's through the whole universe, the DNA. The chemical works lawful throughout are the image, if there's an image at all, but there's not an image it's a process, and it's got laws consequently, an image doesn't have laws. But image is ahead all the time because once you have Darwin you see My god there's a mysterious intent that no one can see. Now it looks like god looks in the most grand gnostic pictures of god; the whole universe must take place in order for him to find himself. Because he doesn't exist except through the universe and the universe is absolutely the field in which he is taking place. As a matter

of fact, when we look at Jewish history, we see that it has to take place in order for something to happen. That must be god happening, so we can show its intent in the same way, but the Jews don't know what it is that has happened. They know when they go through terrible experiences in this, in mystic Jewry, then Belsen-Buchenwald are not meaningless they're revelations, and they're revelations in a distance; they're appalling revelations no matter what they are, of greater and greater more and more appalling nature of god. So you either fall out, not want it at all, or you're going to hold it together in your head.

But the intent I see is really the largest intent, so my poetry becomes more and more confidently filled with the fact that there's a creation as I get deeper and deeper into Darwin, which is absolute material creation. I do not accept at all ideas as anything other than the flowers, the fluvia, odors and everything else of the world of material—the material world—back there when I called things, because things can be anything in Plato-land; it's materialism, utter natural materialism all the way through. And spirit is material, unless you think you're breathing anything other than material as you're breathing in and out, oxygen and so forth. And the whole material world is spiritual, that plant over there is as—do we want more spirit than that is. I mean that Matisse draws heaven out of taking one deep look for about five weeks at that plant, so we're all feeding, language all the way through. And the ideas of manhood then, you're right, we fall in love with man, really we're reaching toward the manhood we see possible in that person. And the answer goes: and that manhood is not something that's there but is only there the way we then make love. So our phrase making love is the same as making poems. (*applause*) and some people just make poems. And we're talking about no, that's not what you do with a poem, not only do you feel a shapeliness the requirement with a poem, but you can't anymore make that poem without—any further than you are that deeply in love with it.

(*The tape ends here and resumes at a later point during a discussion about anarchism.*)

DUNCAN: And so we go back to what we volunteer. The difficulty about sexual compulsion and the reason we struggle with it is because we don't yet get to volunteer. The important, essential thing about two people falling in love is that, because of your love for the other person, you volunteer and imagine what the sexual acts will be, which is very different from your own sexual compulsions. While it's going on reciprocally, you really arrive at a social area of sexual acts. That sounds great doesn't it? I mean the word socialism is very helpful here. The socialism of it is your sexual acts responding to the sexual co-existence of the other person. The “communism” of it would mean all sexual acts are common property. Now you don't despise the social act and need of another person no matter what it is and you don't get to have your own sexual act as a private privilege. You don't get to have secret powers. There's a reciprocity that must be explored. As I've explained what it means to me, the time you're really in rapture in love, it really is communal so you can't tell whose body is whose body, who's inside and outside, and so on. The anarchism though I would let go. But absolutely the order comes from one's own dedication to order and order is not individual, it is in relationship.

I mistrust a term like ecology because while it's used out front for people beginning to relate to things, we don't yet have enough relation to *things* to begin ripping off ecology. I think it's such a large mystery happening in the whole that we can't merely garden it. The figure of the garden is very important in my poetry by the way. I have a strong feeling we may garden, be guardians of, care and take care. These are all social feelings and pictures that stream and go forward from each. Not from the individual but from each. It struck me in reading Whitman that in the poetry and in some prose he *insists* that it be all and each. I probably copped the same formula directly from him that there's no individual commune that is not falsified if it's not a commune of individuals. The ground of our individuality can go no deeper and no wider than our recognition of and devotion to the commune. Our communism can go no further than we put our entire eachness of our individuality forward into it as an active force.

Well, that would hold in homosexuality. We rightly tell males throughout you have this potentiality within you. We also remember since they have this potentiality within them, within us, that they must have had another appointment with life or *that*, the homosexuality, would have been the one that was fulfilling. And we have potentiality within us that we can be accused of heterosexuality. But that makes it all the more important that we have *one* thing to do. Like I'm not a plumber, I'm a poet.

ABBOTT: In discussing the idea of a homosexual culture we have to make allowance for all the number of individuals and all the different manifestations of that. I'm thinking of the recent discussion of sexual conformity in the Castro area. When I first came out in Atlanta it was very fixed what you were supposed to do: wear certain clothes, go to certain kinds of parties, and so on. Then the Gay Liberation Front came up and there was a new little bubble I got into and these warring factions. We have to have a broader understanding of culture that can encompass all these different things that people relate to and be flexible. Most people coming into the homosexual community encounter these dogmas that if you want to be a “real” homosexual you have to act such and such a way.

DUNCAN: That's only the counterpart of the ones that do the same thing with their heterosexuality or their no sexuality. Everybody's going to come forward with a

dogma. When we pass the other question, though: “Where do we see the community in relation to the larger community”, it becomes truer in my mind in the defining of manhood and manly. By the way, “machismo” comes from “machise”. I suddenly saw it's the word for shaman in aztec. It means “the power”, that's all it means. What a trashing of a term. It's the women that have the machise. It's in the current Rothenberg newsletter. But when the word is not informed in its real meaning we get mere machismo which means I've got my male power, don't take my penis away from me.

I remember you said there were no principles out there, wherever you were in the world of poetry, but Pound found one and that is that it's “Language charged to its utmost,” charged with meaning. And since we can demonstrate whether or not words are charged with meaning or their utmost, we can actually see whether that's going on. My comment is that language is already charged; we don't charge it. What we see is the poet works with the charges that language already has. So that work on the meaning of language that you were into is exactly what poetry presumes and poetic lore always was. We have begun to rehearse here a few of the gods, just a touch of them, and you were rehearsing the names of the gods. When we get into the lore of the gods we get there to charge them with their meanings. It's because we're dealing with their meanings, we're meaning their meanings, their meanings are their commune. Anyone in the world can go to the OED and see all the layers laid out there, of the word “light” say, so they're absolutely communistic property. You don't have to be in a special cult to go through that. You have only to love the word “light” and be seeing it. And that isn't something I privately hand you; we've all been there in those words that we have. We recognize it as it's moving in a form and we recognize it 'cause it *happens*, it's charged when the poet recognizes it.

The third session of the interview began with a reading of poems including Steve Abbott's sestina “Hit by a Space Station.” It continued with a general discussion of structure in poetry in which Aaron Shurin proposed three R's for Duncan's poetry: Rhetoric, Romance and Rhyme. The major portion of this session will be published next Fall in Soup magazine.

SHURIN: What about melody? You were talking before about John Cage not believing that you were ever going to really get it off. Do melody and rhyme equal song? Is singing then part of that concept of what a Romantic poet does?

DUNCAN: Melody and rhyme are very much connected with me with flow of feeling. It's like is foreplay really foreplay. We went back to the realist picture of an orgasm or coming. It separates it from its entire context which is really felt, as a matter of fact, belonging to a much, a very different dance figure, a dance in which it's only part of what happens. It has its place in which there are a series of acrobats and foregrounds, if it were conceived as the center. So in melodic feeling everything, all of these moments appear as significant. There's a melody of figures in a life. Robert Kelly, in an early article, proposed there must be a melody of images too then. They're related by resonance and rhyme; the recognition not just of meaning, everything's meaningful, but the meanings harmonize. They belong to sets and the sets are how we feel that this is significantly you or significantly—they sign. They're formulations. You feel them as definitely as you would when you're working in mathematics, for instance, and your formulation begins to become eloquent. Then there's not the separation that I was observing in Steve's poem where elements are separated so one comes forward very strongly, simple in its statement, and then an other area is much more interesting since we are thinking. So we have a heart statement and a mind statement and they seem to separate one from the other. Yeah. We know they're both—the brain doesn't get to go any further than the heart beats and the heart doesn't get to go any further than the brain, not in the whole thing, in the dance. So our dance, our harmonization and our coming into a melody is the co-existence.

It's not just the heart, there's no melody, the melody takes place because of the variety of things that enter in to participate in the dance. And mine clearly had that hand (gestures) because as my poetry goes more and more towards its melodic centeredness, then my hand had to start moving and direct me. But that hand's moving out from the pivot so my arms and my torso get into the movement. And remember too, in the movement of the poem—that's how I see the question of a melody. The key to the melody was Stravinsky's in saying that the meaning of melody is from the melos and the melos is the parts. The Greeks had a theory of music identical with a theory of physiogony. Melos was the part used for the joint of the finger or the joints of the hands, and they said that melody, when they taught their music the ancient Greeks said, they taught melody by being that you, once you recognized that the note sounded was a joint and was no more a thing in itself than the joint in a hand, and in dance, that this all moves as a series. The minute you waken it up and realize that you're co-ordinating parts and that now they're co-existing, the movement becomes very different and very characteristically breaking our WASP American not moving.

As I learn French and my mouth has to move somewhat, and my mask has to break up and move—the most painful thing when we move toward expression is that all those areas that are—we're non melodic. We're taught not to get carried away in a melody. Each note is not supposed to belong to other notes joined like the fingers of a hand, that

each one is supposed to have its intention the hands tied, and you are not thinking about its joints. It moves very differently now. It has intention. So the melodic centered poem is non-intended. If it produces messages they're non-intentional, they're not driving toward a point, they're not reminding us about the war or they're not telling us about—in the course of the thing they move like we would in the dance and we can't explain why. They're not sitting at the typewriter as you said. There is mechanism present and that's what I value in finding that in Stravinsky; it's the mechanism that the parts—and the melody is the feeling of all the parts. But he also says that he felt only certain temperaments, and this is a very early genetic level so that it was rare even in music, he thought even Beethoven didn't have a sense of melody. I see what he's talking about in a way but this is projecting the not-interesting. What was interesting in this was suddenly I saw, my goodness, if it is the movement of parts literally; but poetry is parts, poetry is the movement of the vowels and consonants and the movement of syllables and they're the joints and as they move through words, words happen. But that's not where the movement is. Always in my mind, in composing, it's always there. But isn't this also when we've made our little gesture toward touch or movement and even now to speak of the body, it means movement. And that one is very intent.

All right. I said there was a melody in which, let's say, orgasm can take place. But we're really taught to get there fast, a couple of quick exciting rub-ups and see if we can't get it off quick. This is the Protestant efficient Saturday night let's get it off man. Much fear about foreplay and all the other exploration of total sexuality of the body is that it won't be efficient, that you're gonna waste time. Since you have an observable goal that you're arriving at you could do that in a few minutes couldn't you. I mean would you really want to and what if there were pleasure along the way. Well, maybe pleasure's the goal then. Now we'll prolong it, we can sell it now. I'd rather have four hours of pleasure, if that's what it is, then I'd hate to have an orgasm because that would interrupt the pleasure and pleasure's the goal. What if you had an orgasm? You just copped out they'd say. Yes, I have that right, you copped out instead of having flow of parts. In the melody you don't name what it is. Nothing is there as a goal as such. You know the melody when this is the way it goes. You know the feel of it, musically you know. You know that the feeling is not repetitive, it re-arranges in its likeness. (*Here ensues a discussion of Piaget's theory of child development*). Well, we're back at rhetoric, rhyme and...

SHURIN: Romance.

DUNCAN: Romance. Romance I write large simply

because my idea of love is not only falling in love which is mythological, it's not romantic at that level, we're gonna talk about the primal eros. But it's also romance like reading a romance. As for what it means at the level of an individual person, I write out of any romantic movie you ever saw. Love Story. Right, just plain ol' Love Story. And that one I don't despise, it has its absolute place. But I'm not even answering to that as an ideal. It's simply there isn't it. Don't you behave that way. In the romance tradition itself, remember how much has to do with adultery and so it's highly significant that I have a household and then I fall in love and experience it as adultery.

The absolute discovery of romantic poetry, of the school of romance—an absolute prescription like Dante's having Beatrice as the object, the unattainable object—is that you can't reach it, you're in love with the unreachable goal. So I see Piaget as a romantic because he says yes, the universe isn't reachable. Even out in the universe. There isn't a scientist who doesn't agree that you can't come to the universe, you can't get there. So love will never die on you. Your yearning lasts for a whole lifetime, it lasts throughout eternity. And so it begins to resemble God's yearning if God is conceived of as yearning for the completion of the universe.

SHURIN: Yes, in the poem I read ("A River, then") my heart has an erection pointing your way."

DUNCAN: When we go back to Love Story, I believe that is my local yearning of exactly that kind. Then one of the things I have to do all day is—if there's terror, it must be here in my household. You find early poems where I acknowledge that it has to be here because it's not going to be somewhere over there. All of it must actually be here and we must have a way in which we have made a *domus*, we have domesticated. The *domus* I practice and very fiercely, but at the same time I have many, many rueful reflections upon domestication as repression, as loss of—as denial; force upon all domestication admission of painful outerness to that domestic scene, of being the local scene's domestic treasure.

ABBOTT: What happened to Spicer's Romanticism? He had lots of idealism but lost.

DUNCAN: He's got a hopeless Romanticism. He's got the whole full thing because he wouldn't grow up at all. He's entirely in the Romantic tradition. He'd fall in love with an unattainable object and then cursed it out when he reached it. The very first and highest level, as unattainable as that, is a pure romance.

My yearning's always for sexuality and orgasm so in that sense I'm not a troubador. I'm not able to build that picture. They're very powerful returns. The experience of

loving him (Jess) is intense, and the experience of the yearning you have towards a sexual object when you haven't arrived at the sexual object, which is always of course just before you arrive though they're right next to you on the couch, is intensified and comes in waves. But it doesn't make what it meant for the romantics.

The Romantics had a very high, their first love was pure and it had to be with a married woman. They didn't even conceive of girls as pure, they were just sex objects. Our idea of a pure young girl is a reaction against the medieval disposition of what the girl was. Their concept of the girl was simply that she hadn't been made yet and she didn't even get to be a woman until she was made. So the unattainable object was a woman married to the king, married above human station. Essentially it's the Virgin Mary. Her honor creates your honor and the honor is that you don't arrive at it. And this is the highest figure in love.

The second picture in love was the one of courting. You have lots of physical favors. You could at the top too have many physical favors but you also could possibly arrive at *le fait*, the making it. The lowest of all would be marriage and procreating. That's utilitarian sex and this came out of Greek concept.

When the Albigensians were condemned then, for fifty years the Church fights the Romantic tradition of poetry itself straight on. All this is rewritten and it puts procreative sex at the top and the love of parents for their children next. No, the love of God at the top, the love of parents for their children, and marital love when it's for the reason of begetting children. And then it puts in Hell and condemns all sexualities that are for pleasure. And that, of course, would be the second highest one of the Romantic level which was the exquisite pleasure of the foreground. Goethe's Faust is in the condition of not being satisfied so he's in endless quest and endless quest is very much my life figure so that one I understand. I'm thinking of the life wisdom that a person has but I also have begun to wonder, because it becomes a transforming—oh, and the other part of Romance. I was raised in reincarnation belief and...

SHURIN: It's the other "R".

DUNCAN: Right! And the other feeling I had with Jess was when I said yes, and I have a strong—that while I made promises with myself for other people, for other reincarnations, that I would really only have *this* lifetime with Jess. So I would not ever, I mean I would never want to leave him. If you really want to be with a person just this once, just these years, then that's the character of those years. And I do then, in reincarnation terms, I find *that* is real to me. This is something I have to know, is teaching me, is bringing me to know something that only love, that love brings me to know. And that I have faith in. Yes.

THINKING ABOUT FEELING

No miracle is in order
to be able to feel
it is so abandoned,

but to know the body
of another river
can take your brain cells away.

The casualness of a vivid star
beyond yourself and other nights
leaves only quiet words.

It is so hard to know
what love is: ultimately
it takes a miracle

to take a breath away intimately.

Robert D. Zmuda

MEASURING FOR THE KAFTAN

(for Neal)

tapestries of sun
violet, lemon gold
ices in colored glass:
Karen's paintings
hang on her narrow walls

we sit on her couch
drink wine
kiss without kissing
touch without touching
as she talks
of people in Rome

& when she measures
you for the kaftan
you stretch out like Christ
& I want to measure your
arms, hands, chest, cock
want to rub & love you
there on the floor

I want worlds to see you
in the kaftan
Nijinsky's
smile on your lips

R. Daniel Evans

READ THIS!

In Summer 1980 *Gay Sunshine* will be celebrating 10 years of publishing with a special 10th anniversary issue. We would like to invite you, our readers, to contribute to this issue: in 100 to 300 words write what you feel the impact of the paper has been in your own life and/or in the movement for gay liberation, and/or your opinion of the editor and the direction he has taken *Gay Sunshine* in the past few years. We are eager especially to hear from readers who have been with us for the entire 10 years, but more recent readers are also invited to contribute. We will try to print as many of these "mini-essays" as possible in the anniversary issue. Deadline for submitting your manuscript (typed, double spaced, please) is March 1, 1980, but you can send it in much earlier if you wish. Send all manuscripts to: Gay Sunshine, attn: Winston Leyland, editor, P.O. Box 40397, San Francisco, Calif. 94140 and enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

BOY

A boy in my bed, arche-
type of smooth-
bodied
youth, all
eager-
eyed, and shaggy-
haired.

In the morning, he smiled awake, stood up, tucked his morning hardon into his pants, and went to work. I never saw him again. A moment of sweet transience to alleviate the sorrows, a gift time cast aside while running away.

Krag Rjirdal

GAY SUNSHINE No. 40/41

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Deadline for submission of material for the next issue (No. 42) is October 15. Please send all manuscripts/art work to Gay Sunshine, P.O. Box 40397, San Francisco, CA. 94140. Please type and double space all manuscripts and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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CHICKEN

THE POEM IS A COLLAGE OF THE REAL

Chicken Boy love poems by Dennis Kelly. 80 pp., \$4.50 paperback. Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco 1979.

Reviewed by Charley Shively

Shameful and peculiar to have to begin this review by praising the courage of the poet and the publisher. After all, they are only doing exactly what they should: the one writing the other editing and disseminating news for lack of which the world is dying. But the wacko attacks on homosexuals (Birch, Bryant, Briggs, etc.) has concentrated on saving so-called children from the queers. In the future the Save Our Children Crusade will surely be as humorous as the Temperance Crusades against alcohol. Imagine trying to destroy every book or poem or painting or other expression that had any hint of alcohol (or other intoxication). That's what's happening now with every kind of boy love literature.

The response within the gay community has not been very reassuring: collaborators instead of joining battle surrender without a fight, saying "we don't do that!" Even before Dennis Kelly's *Chicken* was published, an advertisement for the book was rejected by *Blueboy* with the prim note: "It is the policy of our publication to avoid any connotation of sex with minors—or promote/encourage pederasty." They wanted the word "boy" taken out of the ad. (Odd that the magazine uses the word "boy" in its title.) Remarkably, Dennis Kelly writes beyond such censorship; he neither apologizes for, romanticizes or "defends" his love. Kelly just presents it direct, concrete, totally fresh. His rejection of the morality (or anti-morality) combines with his understanding of the politics in a poem for publisher Winston Leyland, "Good Fortune/No Blame:"

down thru the centuries
the same old scam to keep boyforce in closet—

...
yes i cld say (as a fool) i recall
harsher times my dear
but now it seems clear—
idaho bigots & mormon utah creeps
are leaving town

...
westcoast is 21st century as of now.
they've had their chance
as julian sd.

now the unwobbling pivot
asserts itself, boypower & good fortune follow.

Come the 21st century, "boy love" won't even be an issue. *Chicken* is in fact an instance used to generate poetry in a manner explained by Jack Spicer. Spicer himself had a taste for chicken; during the 1950's he resigned in protest from the San Francisco chapter of the Mattachine Society because people under twenty-one were excluded. For Spicer as for Kelly, boys are simply phenomenon like lemons or seaweed or vegetables at Pike District Market. "How difficult to take a boy in a blue bathing suit that I have watched as casually as a tree and to make him visible in a poem as a tree is visible," Spicer wrote to Lorca, "not as an image or a picture but as something alive—caught forever in the structure of words. Live moons, live lemons, live boys in bathing suits. The poem is a collage of the real."

In eighty pages, Seattle poet Kelly writes poems for, from and/or after Jack Spicer, Frank O'Hara, Harold Norse, Charles Henri Ford, Ed Dorn, Ezra Pound, Catullus, Walt Whitman, William Burroughs, Melville, Crane, Mann, Hesse, Genet, Gide, Ginsberg, Li Po and doubtless other Chinese poets who escape me. Kelly's writing is not copied or derivative in any academic sense. Instead, the poem is written, shaped, formed directly from corresponding experiences of the past and the present to illuminate boy love. As Spicer explains in addressing Lorca: "They correspond with something (I don't know what) that you have written (perhaps as apparently as that lemon corresponds to this piece of seaweed) and, in turn, some future poet will write something which corresponds to them. That is how we dead men write to each other."

In his own correspondence, Kelly depends heavily on water to carry him through. Again and again the water appears. Sometimes inland:

up the skykomish river

getting out of the car to
take a piss—

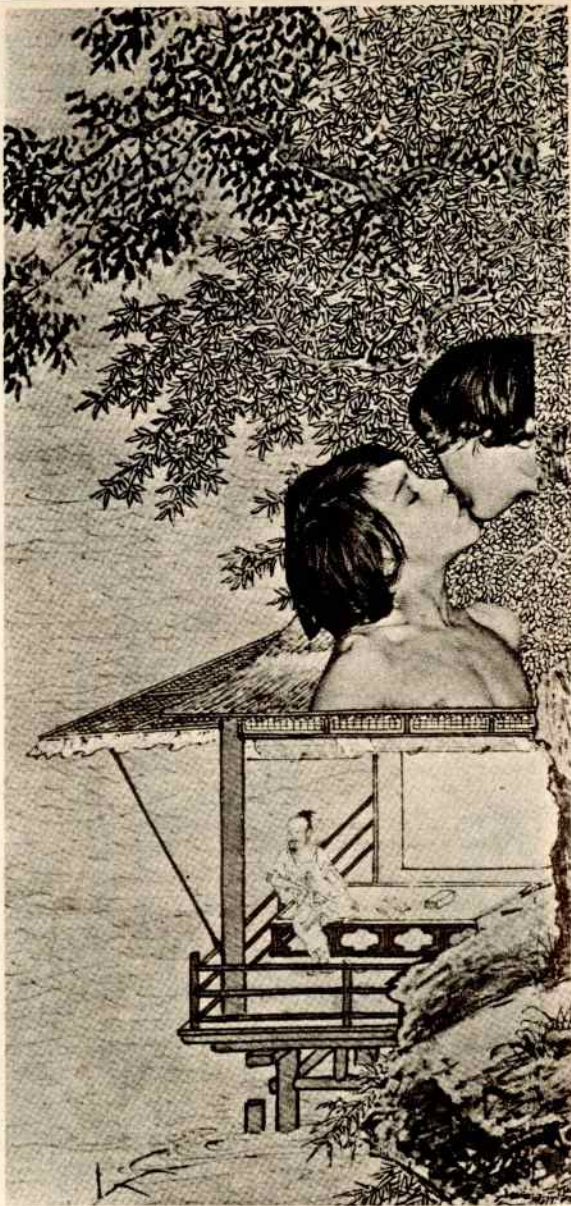
your pale lilywhite boycock

& furious stream of yellow gold—

steam rising from forest floor

more often coastal as in "Handsome Sailorboy:"

Hart Crane cruises hunky dockscene
Of Melville's hndsm seaport—
The same yng sailors come ashore
On leave & liberty, to free their cocks.



Collage by Dennis Kelly from *Chicken*

The ten "Cantos Northwest" correspond directly to the ocean, the water and storms that Ulysses embarked upon; Pound's *cantos* or Olson's *Maximus*. The Princess Marguerite churns up Juan da Fuca Strait from Seattle bound for Victoria, B.C. The water trident, sailorboy, shore and departure come and go like tides through Kelly's poems. As in "Lily-White, Lily-White, Poseidon's Thighs:"

Lily-white, lily-white, Poseidon's thighs.
Pale-green his veynes beneath the seasurge.
Wave-glitter over trident. Couch-shell roaring.
Urchin-lips, eyes of Adonis...

While Kelly can be grand, even grandiloquent, he's never without a sharp rapier gay wit, which saves him from the pomposity of too many "serious" poets. His poem after Frank O'Hara's already wonderful response to the ordeal of Lana Turner's collapse: "Fay Wray has Collapsed:"

Fay Wray has collapsed as she was
cruising down Hollywood & Vine it
was so g o r g e o u s she sd my
dear you wouldnt believe the gdlding
chicken & she sees this headline...

His camp irreverence never forsakes Kelly, even when he gets heavily into the most sacred objects of his love:

everything is big in the pacific northwest,
trees grow big, king crabs grow big,
octopus grow big, everything gets big—
including boycock

My major misgiving with the poet is in his worship of maleness; men/boys are too often celebrated for being tough and heterosexual. Somehow he seems to overlook the most erotic part of the boy, his anus—this dark, secret powerful urge every male has, to have their prostate tickled by tongue, cock, finger—even though they might be loathe to admit it. Too often, Kelly seems to buy into the superficial mythology of maleness presented in something like "Leave it to Beaver." And while he recognizes the deficiencies of male supremacy:

chicken is set free from pimp/power.
dykes assume rightful role in movement,
wonder woman's invisible plane
saves us all.

Little of this vision gets communicated to the stud, such as Doug of Kelly's incredible "Afterwards." The annoying part of this last poem is its honest recognition of how alluring straight trade can be, so sought after, so inviting, and yet so cruelly disappointing:

I suck you off thru yr twenties.
You have lots of girlfriends.
It's everygirl for herself.

Now you're thirty & married.
I don't get to see you much anymore.

I appreciate yr goodlooking face tho.
And the memory of how white yr dick was in bed.

Despite all this, hope is offered. As Kelly notes, "Whitman, Crane & Ginsberg... The first two lived & died in the shadow of the panther. The third went further: was invited to the feast." In this respect, the "Confessions of a Shower Queen" is quite important because it portrays the boycock as boyqueen/faggot—as subject not as object, as the center of attention and care and concern rather than the straight playing stud. From the fifth grade "Hndsm yng stud in the locker room" to 6th grade "the two minister's sons." 7th grade "hints of big male charisma wafting across the street from the high school" 10th grade "Rim job High School!" 11th grade "falls in love with a hndsm yng sophomore..." Twenty blow-jobs later, many hidden talents have been discovered." 12th grade "Not one 'letter' in her whole career..." Instead of training his yng tricks the gym teacher wld suck them off, only he was jealous of her similar tastes & butt-fucked her the last day beneath the cascading spray of the shower-room there at Rim job High....

Whatever school he graduated from, Kelly has mastered a delicious eroticism. The nine erotic collages throughout the book (all by the author) illuminate a wonderful landscape of bodies, beauties and symbols—as in the poems—something of a tossed salad. Kelly's eroticism is especially oral (butt-fucking evidently not his forte). Whether the more elegant "Chicken goes Hawaiian" with its continental cuisine references:

"Coq a Vin de Pomerol? or perhaps
Chicken a la Queen of Houdan?"
Aschenbach simply couldn't make-up
his mind. He stood there in the
doorway, sipping his morning gin-
and tonic, waiting for Tadzio.

...
Tadzio smiled at the dragon, hiding
there in the garden. Something deep
in the azaleas, something deep in
the roses slowly opened up. Perhaps
it was a century plant opening up for
the first time. Or perhaps it was
some kind of deep-sea oyster letting
go of a young naked diver held captive
beneath the sea for a thousand years.
Perhaps it was nothing. But Aschenbach
did notice the Pearl. The Pearl—
glistening in the ivory stillness.
The Pearl—hidden and sequestered between
the boy's teeth. The Pearl—growing
larger and larger, even glowing in the
dark. Smell of ocean. Faint taste of
oyster...

or more American junk food in "the Groceryboy"

so I can run a
mission of mercy to the grocerystore.

My orders are not something crunchy &
salty, although I like salty things too,
but rather I must get something sweet
which means ding/dongs, twinkies & the
famous fruit/pies. Actually I kind of
like the twinkies—the way the smooth
cream oozes out of the tip of the twinkie,
the prepucial tip puckered & persistently
demanding in its desire to be sucked off,
left limp in its wrapper for all to see.

Finally, love itself—boycock, come, picture all blend
into one succulent collage waiting to be eaten:

There are no holds on a cock. It looks
Like a ripe banana peeling back its skin
because I touched it. Naturally
It cannot stop growing larger
I cannot stop it either. Within seconds
The big cock.

...
Nothing. His cock says nothing.
The cock empty as a champagne glass.
Demands to be filled with come.

This book is available by mail directly from Gay Sunshine Press, PO Box 40397, San Francisco, Calif. 94140 for \$4.50 paperback; \$10 signed edition plus 75 cents per copy postage/handling. There is also a specially bound hard-cover edition of 26 lettered copies, with an additional handwritten boylove poem by the author. Price on request. (Calif. residents add 6% sales tax).

TENDER MORNINGS: Progress of a Faggot Father

by
Jack Purdom Latham

Four years ago *Gay Sunshine* published an article by Jack Latham on his experiences as a faggot father. Favorable response to the article moved Latham to produce a book-length autobiographical manuscript on this and other themes of his experience as a gay man. Some of Latham's characters and events are composites or have been altered to clarify the episodes and themes of the work. The excerpts which follow represent a portion of the work and its central subjects.

1976

January. I write this on the Mexican train in the same berth with my son, John, nearly six, who lives with me in San Francisco, his raspberry mouth now pressed against my ribs as he burrows closer into my scent. Above us sleeps my third-grader "our sister" Teri, who lives in Arizona with her mother, boots and denim shirt by her pillow in contrast to her generous cheeks and Bardot pout. As the train pulls into Guaymas, scene of my honeymoon almost twelve years ago, I remember loving Laura until I ached; I remember crickets in the deep night, sunlight from the balconies refracted through French doors, and the rippling texture of cool terracotta tile in a venerable but declining hotel.

But I also think of the early mornings when Laura would sleep late and I would go for long walks by the Sea of Cortez. There, on our first morning, at the hotel's private dock, I passed the boatman's cabana: wooden walls on two sides, wooden counters on the other two, thatched roof of palm fronds, piles of life vests. Going out on the pier I passed without seeing the boatman, but returning, I noticed him, a Mexican of about forty, a hefty little man with an ample tough belly, a high wide chest, leathery dark skin; his eyes looked spent, totally empty. I could have passed, but he spoke, "You wanna boat ride, maybe go fishing?"

"Not now," I answered and stepped a few paces closer to ask about boat services.

He was sitting on the counter top, leaning against an adjacent wall. His far foot dangled; his nearer foot rested on the counter, pressing his thigh against his belly. We talked briefly; my eyes descended cautiously to his faded maroon silk boxer trunks. Casually his fingers lifted the leg of his trunks and allowed his flaccid brown penis and testicles to drop free into sunlight.

As we talked, I put my hand on the counter, and when he simply smiled, I touched his growing cock. Thirty minutes later, flushed by haste and muddled in guilt, I joined Laura for breakfast on the terrace.

Each morning I went for a long walk before breakfast. One of those mornings the local paper included a large photo of Laura and me playing shuffleboard, and gradually, as I relaxed to the role I, an English teacher, would have for seven years as husband, the inexplicable depression of our wedding dinner left me. Our last morning in Guaymas, the boatman, in whose eyes I had come to see some life, asked me out beyond the reef, beyond the islands, so I could swim far out at sea, the horizon a thread of gray in an otherwise unmarked field of azure.

Tonight, just now, the train lolls and churns out of the same port on the Sea of Cortez. My children sleep restlessly, joggled by the arthritic hand-me-down train, disturbed by the lamplight by which I write.

1969

"There's something I want to tell you," she began.

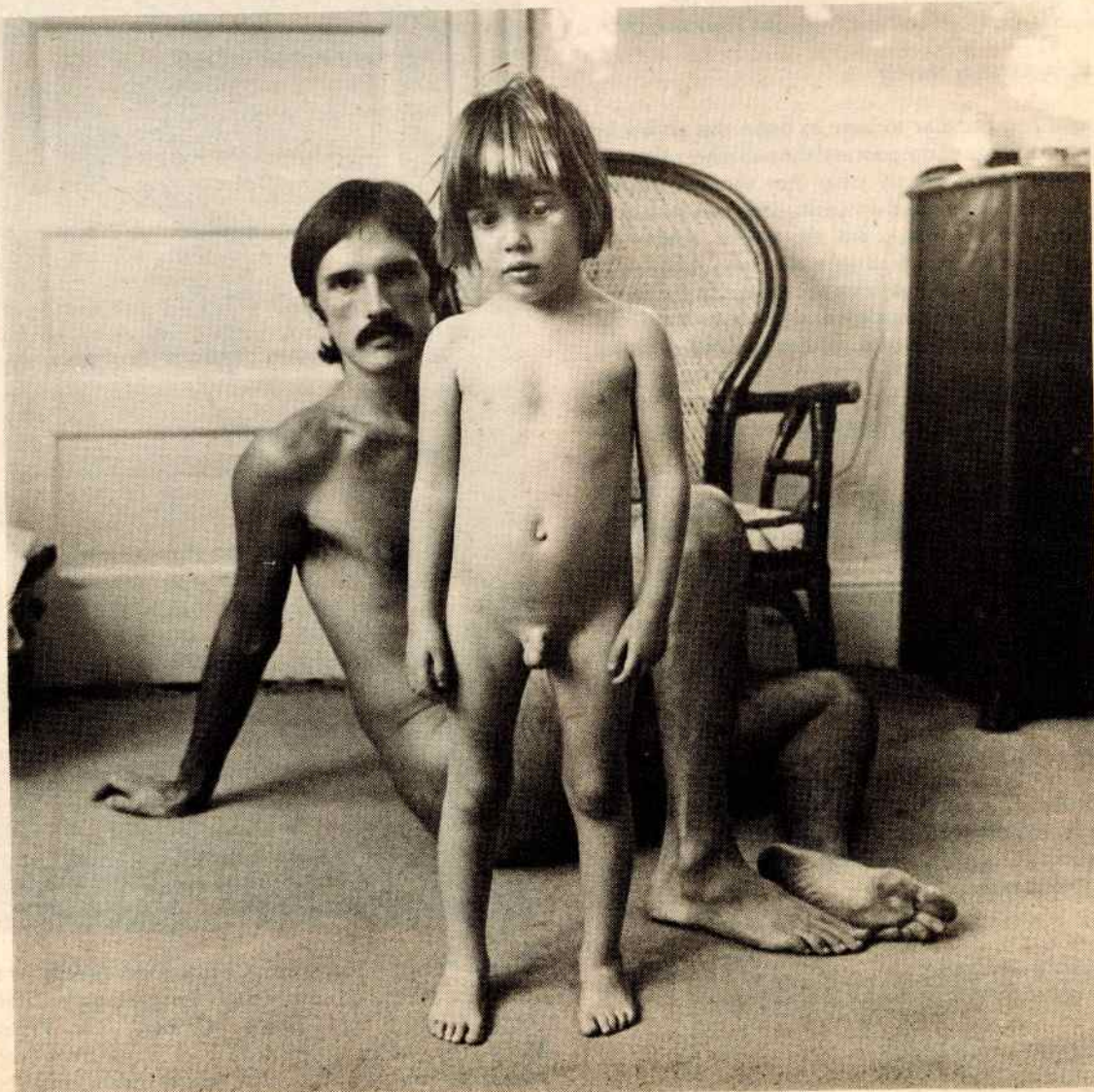
"I'm just on my way to the kitchen," I answered, clearing up details after our dinner guests had left. I continued into the rustic kitchen, just adjacent to our bedroom in the railroad adobe, one of the oldest houses in Tucson. I washed the tiny goblet. "I can hear you from in here." But she said nothing. When I came into the bedroom, she was sitting on the edge of the bed, her long white gown draping generously over her. I went to my side of the bed. Twisting toward me, pushing her long fine hair behind her shoulder, she said, casually enough, "Well, I just wanted to tell you that I don't know what happened to you in Los Angeles last week . . ."—in my chest, heat, and in my head, tension, distracted me, dizzied me—"and I'm not asking." Now I relaxed some. "I just like the change in you."

Wordless thoughts rushed through me: My god, she'd noticed! I'd been so careful! I looked at her. "What change?" I took off my slippers.

"There's tension gone. Tension you've always had maybe, but especially lately, the last months."

"Really?" I put my slippers by the hearth so they'd be warm in the night if I got up with our daughter, Teri, who'd turned a year old only that week. As I moved across the room, I pictured him, just ten days ago in L.A., blond, fair, muscled. A weightlifter, an illustrator of life sciences, a professor: ten years my senior: Derek.

"Don't you think you're more relaxed?" She put her feet under the covers and lay propped against pillows.



Jack Latham and Son, 1975
Photo by Floyd Robins

As I adjusted the logs with the poker, I pictured him, leaving a Hollywood apartment building and talking with his friends on the curb as they left a dinner party. They'd made a bet to see if one of them could pick me up, thinking I was straight. I, too, thought I was straight; for two years, not one slip. Then Bam! Not just sex: Love.

"I can't tell, Laura, but I'm glad I'm easier to be around. Thanks for telling me." Naked, I joined her under the covers. I slipped my right arm under her neck and kissed her, holding her head easily in the crook of my elbow. Her ample breasts pressed the cool fabric of her gown against my chest; I slipped my left leg between hers, as we lay on our sides. She sighed as I caressed her gently, and within seconds she slept.

I lay for a few moments in the pleasure and warmth of her acceptance. Then again I pictured Derek, clear and proud of himself, pictured him, impeccably groomed, in his Silverlake apartment, in the semi-circular dining alcove of glass brick, surrounded by plants, walls of framed botanical prints; in his British accent, offering me grapefruit, offering me Wheaties. Socialist, British subject, painter, gay. Ten days ago those words had all fit together—even the last one—for the first time. I smiled.

The smile left as easily as it came: How would I explain to Laura my plan, already promised to Derek, to join him for the Fourth of July weekend. What reason? What excuse? How little of the truth? Sooner or later, she would intercept envelopes bearing his letters to me. Already she had nearly beat me to the mailbox once.

"Come then," he'd said; "promise me. We can have your holiday on Saturday and go see fireworks. Then Sunday—did you know the next day is the Queen of England's birthday—we can have dinner with some of my friends and go to the ballet. Would you like that?"

I hesitated. "I'd like it, yes." I looked out across wooded Silverlake. "I'll try."

He looked at me with amusement. "Didn't you hear me? I didn't ask you to try. I said, 'Promise me'."

I smiled at him. I would do anything short of deserting Laura. In my own mind I was already clear: Laura, Teri, and I would move to L.A. Step one.

"I promise."

"Great," he confirmed, picking up my hand and looking at it, passing it over his shoulder, placing it behind his neck. He looked into my eyes, slowly adding, "You've great eyes. I'm awfully glad you weren't as straight as you looked." After a pause, he added, "You know, I've given you the chance to burn me a little already, just by liking you." He stopped again, then resumed, "And since now you've promised to come, don't burn me."

"I won't," I whispered, in spite of Laura's presence. I repeated, "I won't," adding, "Derek." Smiling inwardly at the outrage of saying a man's name, I fell asleep.

. . . Grayness, movement, already stirring, crying. Oh, yes, Teri. "Would you?" Laura mumbled.

"Yeah." Warm slippers now, me rousing from my dream. I put Teri into bed with her mother. The two moved

closer, snuggling like angels in the warm heaven of milky sleep. I walked outside beneath the single massive pine. through the window I watched them sleeping, nursing. Well before the cooing of Inca doves began the desert day, I fell asleep on the lounge outside, an afghan over me, and I dreamed of suicide with my grandfather's elegant silver pistol.



In the morning sunshine, Teri and I had breakfast at the weathered wooden table in the vegetable garden while Laura slept and most good citizens went to work. Then, as Teri played in the sand, I weeded the squash, the cucumbers, and the scarlet runner beans; I trimmed the queen's wreath where it spilled over the lattice, blocking the door.

By ten the heat required our moving to the north side of the house to work in the shade. For all the perfection and simplicity, beneath the surface of my labor, my liberty, and my pleasure, I felt brittle and desolate, in the pitch of battle between my lives as husband and lover. Here with Teri, gardening and eating by our insular little forested desert house of adobe terraces and oasis mornings, I avoided thoughts of tonight's flight to Los Angeles, for they made me dizzy and weak; my only power, my only control seemed in keeping the two areas of my life as separate as possible.

Feeling really at home, I fried the dozen handmade tortillas from Tucson. Derek and I sat on the floor with our feet to the fire, drank our wine and snacked. Occasionally we talked, but mostly we stared into the fire, fingers interlocked. Eventually we lay in one another's arms; in real peace I watched the flames reflect in the brown of Derek's eyes and cast dark shadows into his blond hair.

Sensing that I was about to say something, then, Derek raised up on one elbow; my hand on his belly felt his cultivated muscles amass and hold firm. Glimmering city lights below Silverlake reflected dimly on his round massive shoulders and his high forehead. "What is it?" he asked, as though perhaps I'd heard a disturbing sound.

My heart lurched and stopped; my breath caught. For the first time I sensed the avoided impact of Laura's news. "Derek," I began and halted, unable to find introduction, "Laura is pregnant."

For a few seconds he remained still; then he lay back into the shadows. His abdominal muscles relaxed. My eyes searched the darkness for something more to say or for evidence of his response. Two grown men, we were tiny, isolated objects in the voluminous night. In silence, he eventually rolled toward me slowly, onto his side, slipping one arm under my ribs, one around me so he held me facing him.

I found myself vagrant in my mind, trying to interpret this response; apparently it had no anger, no rejection. Instead, it seemed quiet and warm; I felt pleasure in me,

hope. Then he trembled; then again. He buried his face in my neck and shoulder and sobbed. Tears melted down my shoulder; his diaphragm convulsed against my belly, and my hands on his back felt the heaving of his lungs. Shame and regret rose like shadows in me; I lay passive and isolated in confusion.

Later in the night, as we both lay awake, now cool and reserved, he asked, "How could you, how could you get her pregnant? I mean, did you give any thought to it at all, or was it just some *habit*?"

"I don't really know, Derek, how she got pregnant. I mean: It's just a cloud of confusion. She had an IUD, and we knew it wasn't quite okay. And she had been going onto pills again, since the IUD was out. In between, I guess, nothing was working. Or else she got pregnant around birth control. That happens."

"Not often."

"I don't understand how. I sensed sometimes that I wasn't clear; she wasn't either, I think. And it doesn't matter now that she is pregnant. I mean, of course it must matter to you about whether I make any sense or not." He remained quiet. "I just want you to know, Derek, that this won't get in the way of our being together, the two of us. I've decided that."

"That's hard to believe, Jack; it makes no sense."

"Well, a pregnancy only last a matter of months. And if I get a job out here, we can still move."

"Pregnancy takes months; children take years. It's just one more tie to your marriage."

"Laura and I went all through that. She wanted another baby, and I said definitely not. We've already discussed that this doesn't reduce one iota my determination to be near you, to share my life with you. I know it probably looks like her way to tie me closer to our marriage, but . . ."

Derek interrupted, "Her reasons don't matter to me. She's not stupid, and she didn't get pregnant alone! You got her pregnant; to me your reasons matter—or your lack of them—your obligations, your guilt. Those matter. Don't drag her into this. We've never discussed her in the past, and I'm not starting now. I've nothing against her and no responsibility for her. That's all yours; I assume that's why you got married, wanting that responsibility."

"But I can still move out here; I plan to very soon. Months, not even a year any more. I've nearly got this daycare job in West Covina." I could hear the strain in my argument; it sounded hollow, even being all true. I tried again, "Besides, Derek, Laura and I have incompatible blood; this child may miscarry. There's a real chance of that." I heard myself and knew I had to stop, hearing the death in my thought, even in my voice.

1975

Tucson. Watching *Tommy* again at this juncture of my life. Initially I saw it in the beginning of my love with Alan, in my very first visit to San Francisco, Jesse dancing it for us with his company. I have listened to it as a symbolic act when I have felt too jaded and desolate to venture out of the house.

Tommy on acid. *Tommy* on downs. *Tommy* has recurred again and again, collecting associations. Yes, it always brings me something of Alan, whom I know I love beyond and above duty, beyond words, even; Alan, whose presence in my life, characterized by his absence, has been almost always almost enough. But *The I Ching* advises: "All thinking that goes beyond (the immediate situation) only makes the heart sore." (52. Ken/Keeping Still, Mountain)

Two hours ago John and I said goodbye on this Gemini night to Laura and Teri in the parking lot of the movie, where, after Laura's birthday dinner, we'd seen *Tommy*. An irresistible flood of tears from Laura and me, more searing in me because of my resistance. Teri, reserved at first, finally gave in to crying, "Daddy, don't go, don't go!" John embarrassed. Tearing our human fabric with my bare hands.

As he and I walked to catch our city bus to the Continental Trailways station, John spoke quickly and frankly about "both feelings": excitement and sadness. Then I carried him for my own comfort as I walked, my feelings a whirlpool; we hugged together in twilight as cars whizzed by like lightning, dashing at my spinning soul. I felt very strong holding my son and self-conscious, soft and very ephemeral.

After most of twelve years with Tucson as home, six on the Devil's Slide of downward mobility, I am on the bus out of town to a new home: San Francisco. Now we're on the highway, barreling in darkness. John is lying by me, hugging his bunny, feeling his back pocket for his goodbye gift from Laura and Teri, a leather pouch for allowance, tooled with small flowers. "The first time I rode on Continental Trailways I was frightened, but now I'm not; now I'm brave." He is so precious in his delights and their punctuations of under-current fears. I look back: Tucson is gone.

Departure has intensified so much; I have felt stable, capable, raw, seared. So we will see what this is like, going, after so much staying. It seems like a permanent, irretrievable thing, but it is only the moment. In my own pocket is my little Persian pill box, my goodbye gift from Laura and Teri, to carry my "emergency" valium. Well, this is an emergency.



Island of Samui, Gulf of Siam. After dark Alan and I walked out the pier to where the fishermen had docked.

Like the set for a vast, hypnotic opera, six boats lined up in a way that I could see across all at once, bobbing constantly and chaotically about. Five or seven workers on each boat, mostly men between twenty and fifty. Baskets full of fish, great piles of fish and ice. In the intense gas light, on the blue, red, aqua, and black boats, bare-torsoed men in spirited shouting and laughter occasionally threw fish and ice at one another as they worked. The whole vision of bronze bodies and silvery ice and fish, gleaming in the light, lolling on the waves, was entrancing. Alan and I, on the docks with a substantial portion of the villagers, ate bananas and coconut cakes. I can never again doubt the drama, proportion, and elegance of daily, mundane life, only my ability to perceive it in my own.

We came back to the crude guest house and made love; the proprietress was just on the other side of our fiberboard wall. Even in our consequent silence I had the feeling of my whole ass, groin, and thighs being a center of a great, arid, furnace-like heat. Alan on his knees, between my legs, in the shadows and the glow of our green room, shutters opened onto silhouetted bougainvillea. Our intense love cracked his arrogant pride; stifled cries a braille on his lips; giving himself up through his eyes in fucking me. Irony is addicting.

Later, whispering in the darkness, he asked if I would come to Cairo with him. To live. "I'm tired of our vacationing together," he wooed me; "let's be together, for once, until we need to vacation apart." I did not consider work or children; instead, I smiled and slept, then, decorated to my ears in my own dried semen.

I dreamed that in some haunting way Teri and John needed help, and I was not there. Finally I arrived and took them on a perilous motorcycle ride down a rocky hillside dotted with Italian cypresses. In an arid, airless expanse, I hurtled us down surrealistic slopes, barely missing big boulders, skidding, skipping, careening.

I awoke in the night upset and agitated. Alan, surprisingly, was still awake, had been watching my turbulent sleep; he listened silently. Then he just sat in bed, leaning on the wall, smoking, his right hand stroking my chest as I lay cradled in our sufficient silence.



San Francisco. Tomorrow John and I leave for Christmas in Arizona and vacation in Mexico. After our going to a dance version of Castaneda's *Separate Reality*, I asked a friend to come sleep with me. I explained that because of my ailing prostate I couldn't have orgasm now, but that I was feeling miserably lonely. He couldn't come.

As John and I got off the bus and walked up Sutter Street, he said softly, "Daddy, you don't have to be lonely, 'cause I'm going home with you." I told him how warm it felt to hear him say that and how I love him.

I explained how I feel that he is closer to me than any other person right now, and that I feel him to be my best friend. I said that it is also very important for me to have other friends, grown-up ones, so that I can feel okay about sharing the weight of my body and the strength of my sexuality as I cannot with him. And very importantly so that as he gets older and separates more and more from me, I will not be left lonely then. He did not understand that last part.

I told him as he grows up he will need and want more independence from me. At first he insisted he would never leave me; then he agreed that adults do not usually live with their parents and that his cousin, at fifteen, has already left Uncle Len's house. John said maybe some day he would live next door to me so I could tie his shoes and things like that and so he could spend the night at my house easily. By the end of our walk, he thought he might live a bit further than that.

I tried to explain that it is important for me to have other relationships so that I can help rather than resist his growing more independent. Over pumpkin bread and milk in our kitchen, way beyond his bedtime, we continued: He made a list of things I do for him: Help him clean the birds' cages, help him on buses which don't pull next to the curb, read. I told him I felt it was not so much my job to do those things as to help him learn to do them well for himself. He agreed.

I continued that when he knows how to do all those things, if he is my only close friend, I would be lonely. I was standing at the sink momentarily and, returning to the table, I saw his face puffing up and his eyes looking down as he looks when he is homesick for his mom. The heavy Victorian chair's straight back protruded far above his head. Small and tender, John said, "It makes me so sad, too sad to talk about it," and he buried his face in my lap. I held him and rubbed his back until my khaki pants were soaked at the thigh from his tears. Then he said he was too sad to finish even his snack.

Sitting more upright, more alert, John said, "Sad came when we talked about not living together always, even when I am a big person and not a kid. I've even heard of kids who don't live with a parent. It made me sad to think about it, not even to do it." As he finished his sentence, he put both arms outstretched on the dark oak table; they lay relaxed, tiny, plump, conclusive.

I told him we would try not to force it if possible, but live together as long as we both are happy with it, and that usually when kids grow up they are eager to move away from parents. I said the sadness he felt about it was perhaps like my own would be if he left me all alone; that that is why I give adults love and time even when John is with me and such a wonderful friend. The intense look in his brown eyes, his comprehension and maturity were so profound, I

think I was with him at the first moment he ever comprehended without infantile fears the possibility of our separation, a moment he might remember all his life.

1976

January, Mexico. After Teri and John were safely on the tiny island dock from the motor launch we had ridden, I helped an elderly Mexicana unload numerous boxes of staples and groceries before her husband arrived with their cart. Before our long walk across the island, the children and I sat on a log and ate marijuana cookies. As we finished, the man and woman in their cart pulled up and offered us a ride. The white nag pulled so slowly that every stone jolted us into panic; we were frail white porcelain figures in a rugged adobe landscape.

At the end of the ride the children and I walked farther along the beach than ever before, toward the southern part of the island, seeing flocks of tanagers, passing the Australian woman who lives on the beach with her Latin lover. Beyond them, I realized I was very stoned, for the sand was shimmering dizzily and fragments of poetry floated through my head. As I walked slowly down the beach, John literally rolled along in the sand with abandoned giggles, and Teri stopped all too often to marvel at the shells. For a long time after dropping on the sand, I lay on my stomach and absorbed the heat I miss so much in San Francisco. After a nap, I sat up and looked down the beach; far in the distance I saw two people dancing a miraculous dance. They were so far away as to be very tiny but near enough that I could see the arch of each arm, the lift of the leg, the stretch of the torso in a dance of symmetry and synchrony. How odd, I thought, on this deserted beach, to see dancers. I sat, observing, absorbed.

The dance broke and there was running in the surf, and with the associations growing in waves, I realized that the dancers were my own children; that the symmetry was my own visual satisfaction, an agreement in space; that the synchrony was one moment, an agreement in time. Completely passive with joy, rather than calling to the children to share my pleasure, I faced the sun in silence to see the early glow of sunset, consciously grateful for a moment of total disassociation from and observation of my own children such as most parents never once enjoy, grateful too that it was a spell of such beauty.

As we made our way back up the beach among maroon and rose colored shells with turquoise sky and mauve thunderclouds in the distance, John observed: "Boy, those cookies sure make this a long beach, don't they, Daddy?"



February, Arizona. Weeks ago I casually opened the subject that when asked things about his friends, John would nearly always relate stories about his friends in Tucson instantly and relate things about San Francisco friends only if the questioner specified "your friends in San Francisco." It seemed quite natural, in a way, having been in San Francisco only six months, that it be so; it seemed to me inevitable that if he stayed in San Francisco another year that it would change, both because of the diminishing of Tucson's reality and the deepening of San Francisco's. On the other hand, if he really had choice about where to live, then I felt he should know we'd respect his choice.

A few weeks ago Laura really felt like such musings were John's way of missing Tucson and nothing more. But after this long visit, she heard John's preference to live here. Last night she announced that she had really looked at her resources and felt that she was ready to live with both children. A big factor was her long-standing desire that Teri and John live in the same place and develop their relationship. Certainly the move of John to San Francisco has made Teri and John each more conscious of their mutual affection, more clear of their desire to be together.

Following bedtime consultations with each child, Laura and I made last night a decision that John could remain with me through summer, returning to Tucson for school in September to live with Laura and Teri.

Laura asked me how I felt about the proposal, and I said that I knew it would make a dramatic difference in my life, some good, some bad. (For one, without the welfare to dependent children, I must find work), but basically I felt okay. She went upstairs to bed. I unrolled my bedroll, turned out the light, and lay down in Hell.

In the darkness streams of panicky loneliness crawled out my ears and marched up the walls like trails of ants. I felt my eyes bulging practically out of their sockets, straining to see and knowing there was nothing I wanted to see. My throat was dry like desert rock, and I was hot and feverish. I lay there alone for the first time in my life. Nothing had changed, of course; nothing would change for months; but inside me already, I was totally alone and the ants of my mad loneliness returned to sting my arms and legs and crawl inside my bowels and make them burn. Lines of ants marching over my bedroll and in and over my body, I wanted to cry but was far too desperate for tears.

As though tripping I saw on the screen of my mind how dependent I have been on John for my definition and validation. Without him I would be "just another faggot" with nothing to distinguish me, purposeless and wasted. I saw myself in Buena Vista Park, where all the men had beautiful pedigreed dogs on leashes, and I no longer had John, the Ultimate Pet, the Final Credential.

In the early morning hours, more rational, I saw how I have used my life with John to forestall my own accomplishment and my own choices. How I have structured routines and commitments around providing a good home

and kindergarten to exclude my writing or working.

At last I slept—perhaps it was the caress of a valium from the Persian box—but I slept. And I woke this morning, raw from too much vision, worn from hysteria, but calm, willing to see what is coming.



May, San Francisco. When Tamal and I, lying on his bed, tired of reading, I looked through the doorway to the adjoining room where I'd put John to bed. I asked Tamal as he took off his clothes on that side of the room if John were sleeping. "Yes," he said. So we turned off even the small light that school night, sleeping at Tamal's house as we'd done before in recent weeks.

When our bodies touched under the heavy covers, our flesh was vital and pungent in the cold bed; we pressed our hips together and wrapped our arms closely around one another's shoulders and began kissing. Light from the street streamed in Tamal's second storey windows and gave a blue tint to the outlines in the room. Above us the large antlers draped with Tamal's collection of exotic jewelry glimmered like an extinguished chandelier. We talked softly and then began teasing and laughing quietly.

I raised myself up on one elbow and gave an innocent, spunky kiss on his lips. I stroked his forehead and chest. Then, more energetic, I straddled his belly on my knees, the covers over my shoulders, and sang a favorite cowboy song: "I'm back in the saddle again, / Out where a friend is a friend . . ." As I swayed gently from side to side, my buttocks touched his cock. He was grinning mischievously.

*Ridin' the range once more,
Totin' my old forty-four,
where you sleep out every night
And the only law is right . . .*

(Autrey and Whitley, © Western Music Publ. Co., 1940, '67, '71)

When I finished, he was smiling warmly, amused, and I collapsed on his chest. His hands were stroking my back and he was moving sensuously under me, brushing the head of his cock against my butt. We rolled over on our sides, facing each other, my knees around his waist.

We began kissing again, and gently, protective of my healing prostate, he pushed his cock in. Now uncovered in the cold room, moving in complete accord and luxury, my back to the streetlights, his body glistening blue and white, little beads of sweat glittering on his forehead, we slowly brought him to warm, sighing orgasm inside me.

We lay a few minutes, nuzzling and caressing. I began exploring his back and buttocks with my hands. We separated and he rolled over invitingly, his back to me. After I was inside him, I turned us over faces down and, stretching his hands and arms in mine as far beyond his head as they would reach, I began thrusting into him. As I fucked him, I bit his neck and shoulders fiercely, and he stretched and squirmed and moved under me. Enthusiastically, we reared strongly upon our knees, and I stroked his chest, him moaning, "Mmmm, yes, yes . . .", me thrusting and stroking, pressing my forehead into his back. Feeling my orgasm approach, I rose up on my feet behind him, who was now on hands and knees, and between us there was fierce conviction and force, collapsing together in sweet spasms and contractions, groaning.

Well, that is what John's eyes, now glimmering through the doorway, had seen. I realized that as I raised up on one elbow, facing him. I was a bit perturbed, embarrassed, but most of all I wondered how he felt, remembering against my will psychology's grim warnings that children think fucking is fighting. "Come on in, John," I said softly. "Want to climb in bed with us?" Tamal's closed eyes opened in surprise to hear that John was awake.

"Uh-huh," answered John as he came around the bed to crawl in on my side. There I lay with this big man in one arm and this little child in the other: the best of two worlds.

"How did you feel when you saw that?"

"Okay." He paused, thoroughly awake and alert. "Part of it looked like fun!"

"Part of it was fun. Did you know what we were doing?"

"Making love, weren't you?"

"Yes, we were. Have you ever seen or heard your mommie make love with anyone?"

"No, but I know she does."

When John had nothing else to say or ask, he checked for sure that we'd have breakfast downtown on the way to kindergarten; I promised. As he climbed in his bed, he turned back: "Just one more song?"

With Tamal's head tucked beneath my chin, against my chest, I lay on the pillow and watched John settle into bed and sang one last song:

*See them tumbling down,
Pledging their love to the ground,
Long be the days I'll be found
Drifting along with the tumbling tumbleweed . . .*

(Bob Nolan, © 1934).



August, San Francisco. Everything is delicate in the cold damp air of this first morning. I have slept as long and luxuriously as possible, had a quiet meditation, have exercised with leisure and watched the graceful new leanness of trunk and chest, frowned at the relentlessly tight knees.

Light on my green plate, crenshaw melon sprinkled with lime, toast. Peruvian songs are playing. I am having breakfast with myself. Perhaps I will come to call it "alone."

Certainly others are near: At my side photos of Laura, Teri, and John documenting yesterday's re-sorting of our family; photo of Alan on the balcony of his Cairo apartment; Jesse's recent note; at my right a blurb for tonight's movies at the Hot Blue Roxie.

My windows are open to the chilly air, and I am naked. Sometimes my nipples erupt in the cold. I consider how my living room will look with a blue ceiling and cream walls. Shall I put mirrors here or there? Will I go out tonight? How much of me can go for how long to Alan?

On the air are little mysteries: a caterpillar on my potted palm. Inviting breezes from the telephone. The typewriter like a tuber in the dark closet; will it sprout?

I realize I have not opened shop yet today; I have not used my voice. So I take this minute to voice what does not matter about my first day living alone, my summer with Teri over, three years with John ended. A tender morning in a daddy's life.

1977

September. Barrelling over the mountain passes in the brilliant green and yellow Mexican bus, Teri, John, and I are deliriously happy with the ride, having splendid views of the Pacific hundreds of feet below, miles and miles to the horizon. Careening on the newly opened highway headed north from Manzanillo, we descend from the mountain pines through the papaya groves of lower savannahs. Gradually there are signs of village life, and then, suddenly, over one last rise of hills, smooth in the valley below lies Acaponeta. Its red tiles and white walls, the spires of the central church could be not only Mexican, but Mediterranean as well.

But Acaponeta is uniquely Mexican, the closest town most tourists can reach to the Huichicol Indians, famous for their peyote rituals, their determined, enduring way of life. Knowing that as Anglos we are altogether suspect, I hope we can glimpse by chance some of the Indians as they come to this Mexican town to shop, and tomorrow is local market.

At the bus terminal Teri and John each hike up their brilliant green knapsacks and I my blue one, and we walk a few blocks looking for a cheap hotel. We spot one; in the terracotta-floored hallway, I negotiate for a room opening onto the street as well as to the interior court where a few caged cardinals, canaries, and parrots liven the otherwise quiet air.

Just as we settle into our clean, inelegant room, there is increasing noise coming from the street. Below the windows we see noisy children anticipating an approaching crowd. Immediately I recognize the black horse-drawn wagon as a funeral hearse. For blocks a large crowd straggles. A band of drums and brass plays lamenting marches. Before and after the band are carried large placards picturing a man in a suit.

When the funeral passes, I leave the window open and draw a jug of water. Teri adds the purification tabs, caps the jug, and begins to shake it. John, who has been on the interior balcony of the hotel looking at the birds, returns to the room just as I, on impulse, look in the dictionary for traces of "Acaponeta." "Acaponado," I find, "effeminate, beardless, like a capon."

John plops himself on the bed, big now at seven, having been a tiny toddler. "Daddy," he begins slowly. I wonder if the name refers to shamans, perhaps to the almost beardless Huichicols.

"Huh." I begin unpacking our pumpkin seeds and the hand puppets which we are making of sox as we travel. I prick myself with an exposed needle: "Damn!"

"Daddy," John begins again, "when you die, what's gonna' happen to you? are we gonna' give a parade, a funeral, or what?"

"How 'bout a circus, Johnnie?"

"Come on, Dad. What are we supposed to do?"

So he is serious. "Well, John, usually in North America they take a body and drain the liquids out and put new liquids in to keep the body from going into dust, but I don't like that much because it makes becoming part of the earth again take as long as possible.

"What I would like is to have my body put in an oven so that it goes to dust and ashes right away. Then I want the people who love me and think they might miss me to put parts of my ashes in special places we've been together, like Sabino Canyon or the mountains around Taos or beaches and put some of me each place so they can go there anytime and find me and be with me, because I will right away become part of the plants through being part of the earth. How does that sound?"

"Better than getting worms, which this boy at school says happens. Does it?"

"It can. It's part of how the body changes back to soil. Not a part I mind skipping though." We laugh.

Teri soon suggests looking for a restaurant and seeing if I can show her people of the Huichicols. As we leave, the other three guests of the hotel, poor local farmers in town or business, give us "Buenas tardes" and "Que tal?". Teri answers with more confidence than she'd have had even last week.

At brunch the next morning we sit in a cafe on a corner, closed on two sides and open on two others to the sidewalk. A friendly woman is taking our order.

"Daddy," John invites my attention when the waitress leaves, "I've been thinking about funerals."

Just then, Teri interrupts: "Look over there. Are those

Huichicols?" She nods across the street. Two men in baggy white pants and shirts trimmed in red embroidery are crossing toward us.

"Yes, I think so, Teri." The Indians pass just as the waitress brings us our fresh orange juice. Teri's eyes are full of celebration, both, I know, from her interest in the people and their weaving and in breakfast.

She turns to me. "Tell us about when you ate that stuff they eat—what'cha call it—off cactus?"

"Peyote, mescalito. Okay, but after we hear what John has been thinking about funerals." Teri looks to him with interest now.

"I want to tell you what I want. I want to put some of you at Bobaquivari Mountain, he says, referring to the sacred Papago mountain where John and I first went camping, "because when I die, I want all of my dirt put there. It's my favorite place. And then we could . . ." His voice slows. He looks me right in the eyes. He starts again. "Then we could be together always."

The author of these excerpts would like feedback from readers. Write: Jack Latham c/o Gay Sunshine, Box 40397, San Francisco, CA 94140.

THREE POEMS BY GENNADY TRIFONOV

Translated by Simon Karlinsky

Gennady Trifonov is a contemporary Soviet poet who was imprisoned in Siberia, in large part because of his gay sexuality

The following poems are translated from the Russian.

1.

For three swift days
You gave me solace
And on the fourth day
Your shadow vanished.

I didn't mind
That you accidentally
Broke my wing
when you said you loved me.

You were good for me
Like snow is good for winter.
You were obedient to me
Like growing grass to springtime.

And may God forgive me
That I, lacking the strength,
Have already forgotten you
The way the earth forgot peace.

Thus, all my life,
I'm not with him I love,
About whom I'm silent all night
And keep the candle burning.

2.

Translate for me the hatred that you feel
Into a language I can also speak
And which I cannot possibly give up
Like water's depths cannot give up a cloud.

Surrender—it's so easy—to the words
That order roadside trees when they must bend,
When to incline. These are the kind of words
That spring up suddenly, like grass, and die.

Also like grass which hasn't fully lived
Out its allotted span, because the lies
Go on and will continue to exist
As long as they must justify my love.

*Do you feel good
All alone in your home?
Arseny Tarkovsky*

3.

Why must I always stay a little boy?
I've reached an age where this is really shameful.
It pains me when my words must be gulped down
And can't become a poem as they should.

My enemies? But it is dumb
To have them, when my only friends are stones.
I dare not breathe, I dare not love.
I grow my hatred drop by drop.

How homeless it is in my home!
How hopeless in my lover's house.
How freezing cold. How, like an illness,
Our loneliness makes us unfree.

The Canadian Embassy in Moscow has reported that both Sergei Paradjanov and Gennady Trifonov, the two Soviet writers imprisoned for their homosexuality, have now been released. Sergei Paradjanov was seen in public last autumn, but there is no information at present about the whereabouts of Trifonov. For more on Trifonov, see the full page article in *Gay Sunshine* No. 38/39, page 29.

Prison Sex at age 16

The following autobiographical account was written by a gay brother in prison (Dalton Loyd Williams No. 246571, Ellis Unit-J21, Huntsville, Tx. 77340). He writes:

"This is a true story of a beautiful and somewhat frightening experience that happened to me at the El Paso County Jail. I was 16 years old at the time and had lied to the cops about my age when I was busted for a crime. Therefore, I was locked in the jail for forty-eight days.

"I'm 34 years of age, an average looking guy with brown hair and blue eyes; also an avowed homosexual and proud of what I am. Presently, I'm serving a life-sentence for murder in the Texas Penitentiary and have been locked in isolation on Death Row for the past four years."

Williams is author of the novel *Bullet for Gold* (Zebra Publishing Co.).

This account presents one gay man's initiation into prison sex. Other initiations may be quite different—without any consent on the part of the person involved.

COUNTY JAIL
A TRUE INCIDENT
by
Dalton Loyd Williams

It was a chilling sound . . . a sound of finality when the steel door clanged shut.

For a flashing instant hot tears welled-up behind my blue eyes. I trembled with a wild urge to cry and beat on the door to call the jailer back. I wanted to tell the man I had lied. I was just fifteen years old, not seventeen. I should have been put in a juvenile home for boys, not the County Jail. But, my independent nature and wide streak of youthful stubbornness would not let me call for the jailer. I had run away from home, broken the law, and told my lies. Now, I would make the best of the situation.

My knees trembled weakly when I glanced around at the jail tank that was to be my new home, for days, weeks, and perhaps even months. The green painted walls and steel bars were dingy with dirt and soot. In one corner of the large room, I saw an open shower stall, a dirty commode and a wash basin. In the center of the room there was two long steel tables with benches along each side.

Four, six-man cells opened into the main room and in each cell there was a commode, wash basin and six steel bunks covered with dirty mattresses. The jail tank was dimly lit by six small bulbs; one in each cell and two in the main room. There was no windows, no television, and no radio. The bare indifference of the jail made me shiver inwardly.

Then, I turned my attention to the rugged looking men who stood in the cell doors and around the table where a poker game was set up. The men were all staring at me with cold, impassive expressions. They were measuring and judging me.

I counted twenty-one men; six Mexicans, six whites, and nine black men. They appeared to be the most hardened of criminals. I glanced from one impassive face to the next, but not a sign of kindness or friendship showed on their stony expressions.

"Hey, kid, what did they get you for?" called a young black man.

"Burglary," I replied, then stepped over to the table where I set down the two issued blankets and my paper sack of belongings.

"Pretty fish bait!" snickered a scar face man with a ugly grin.

I glanced at the man and felt a lump of fear rise in my throat at his grinning remark. At the moment I didn't know what "pretty fish bait" meant and wondered if it was a challenge to fight.

"Kid, bring your stuff in here. We have a empty bunk," said the black man.

The scar face man snorted and returned to his magazine, then the other men continued what they were doing before I entered the jail tank.

"Kid, you can have this bunk," said the black man, and patted a top bunk. He grinned and offered his hand. "My name is Frank."

"I'm Dalton Williams," I replied, then smiled at the first sign of friendship and acceptance in the jail.

I quickly learned my name didn't matter to the men. They called me "kid" and since I was the youngest and smallest one in the jail, I accepted the new name. I penned a letter home to let my mother know what happened to me, then I passed the afternoon getting to know the men in the jail; especially the four men I was to share the cell with.

Frank, the tall, muscular black man who invited me into the cell, was awaiting trial for raping a white woman. Ray, a huge, muscular Mexican, was in for murder. Butch, a short, stocky black man, was in for burglary and rape. And Larry, a lanky white man, was in for robbery.

After a skimpy supper of red bean, bologna, corn bread, and black coffee, I was invited to play poker. It was a gambling game I knew how to play well and I won several packs of cigarettes before we were locked down in the cells for the night.



Prison Corridor
Lino print by S.N. Reese, 1970

I sat on the bunk and watched when the jailers passed in the corridor outside the cell counting us and was surprised when the cell lights were turned off. One nightlight was left on in the big room and there was barely enough light in the cell to see each other.

"Hey, Frank, what's the deal with the lights?" I asked.

"They go out at nine o'clock every night," he replied.

"But, how can we read or write letters?"

Larry chuckled softly.

"We don't," Frank said, grinning. "Usually, we just sit around and talk until we get tired, then go to bed."

"Oh!" I replied, beginning to understand the jail routine.

I watched with mild interest when the four men stripped down to just their boxer shorts. Then, in a partial state of nudity, they moved around the cell; brushing their teeth, combing their hair, and using the toilet. The men were all muscular, completely masculine, and individually handsome in a rugged way.

I hopped down off the bunk, stripped down to my jockey briefs, and spread one of the thin blankets over the dirty mattress. I heard one of the men give a low wolf whistle at the sight of body in the panty-like briefs. I grinned but didn't make any comment. Compared to the men, I looked like a mere child. My body was slim, supplely curved with youthful muscles, and almost hairless.

After lighting a cigarette and taking a leak, I got back on the bunk and sat with my knees drawn up under my chin. I thought of the trouble I was in and wondered what procedures I would have to go through to get out of jail. I needed some advice.

"Say, Frank, how would I go about getting out of jail?" I asked.

He crossed the cell and leaned against my bunk. "How much is your bond?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"No problem. Get three hundred dollars and you can walk out."

"Three hundred! What do you mean?"

"Have you ever been in jail before?"

"Sure, when I was eleven years old. I was sent to Reform School at Gatesville."

He chuckled. "Hey, guys, the kid needs a run down on the jail and court system," he said to the other men, then looked up at me. "You mind if we sit on your bunk where we can talk?"

"No, come on up," I said, and moved over where he could sit beside me.

When Frank jumped up on the bunk, his long flaccid penis flopped out the front opening of his shorts. I stared at the black circumcised column of manflesh and felt a tingling thrill of excitement. He left his dick hanging out, as though he had not noticed it, and settled beside me with his back against the steel wall.

A moment later, Ray jumped up on the opposite side of me and I saw his brown lance of manflesh flop out the front of his shorts. He too ignored his exposed dick and left it hanging out the front of his shorts.

I stole a lingering look at Ray's thick column of manflesh and saw the foreskin was peeled back to reveal the slick-looking crown of his dick. It was an enchanting sight to gaze upon; long and round. I glanced away and took a nervous puff on my cigarette.

I experienced an urge to feel the men's flaccid columns of manflesh and make them grow long and hard. My anus muscle twitched with a craving to feel the rounded shafts sliding deep within the tight channel of my bowels. I wanted to touch my lips to the pulsating crowns of their cocks and suck their hard flesh deep in my throat.

Yet, I didn't want the men to know about the strange and exciting urges I experienced and suppressed every time I saw a man's dick. And too, I didn't want them to know about what the older boys had forced me to do in Reform School. After the first time, the boys never had to use force again because I willingly sucked their dicks and let them take turns fucking me in the butt.

I didn't understand the oestrous excitement that would course through my veins when I gazed at men's cocks or the thrilling sensations I experienced from the mere touch of man's hand on my body. And since I didn't understand this strange and exciting part of me, I kept the feelings a secret from everybody and suppressed the desires that raced through my veins.

"Kid, move over a little where Larry can have room to sit up here with us," Frank said, and pressed his muscular body against my hip and upper leg.

Electrifying thrills raced up and down my spine when the smooth crown of his dick rubbed against my skin. Then, as I crowded against Ray, Frank's hand brushed the fleshy cheeks of my butt.

It was a feather light caress, as though to test my reaction. I shuddered inwardly from the touch and felt my face and body begin to grow warm with excitement. I didn't know if the touch was accidental or intentional, but I pretended it had not happened and flipped the half smoked

cigarette through the bars. Then, Butch got up on the bunk beside Ray, and Larry sat next to Frank.

I thought it was strange that all the men wanted to sit on my bunk and that both Ray and Frank were purposely leaving their dicks hanging out of their shorts. I wondered for a moment if the men were going to try to fuck me or what. But I dismissed the thought as unlikely.

It was crowded with five of us on the bunk, so I stretched my legs out and crossed them where I could sit on one side of my hips. Ray draped his muscular arm across my naked shoulders and began to explain the court and justice system, so I partially turned my back toward Frank.

Ray's hairy arm felt warm and tingly on my naked flesh and his manly body odor filled my senses. Frank moved closer to me and the smooth warmth of his dick pressed excitingly against the back of my thigh.

I swallowed hard and smiled nervously at Ray while I pretended to ignore the pulsating column of manflesh pressing against my skin. But, I instantly realized my mistake in ignoring Frank.

He moved around, as though he were trying to get comfortable, and I felt his fingers begin to lightly brush across the back of my shorts. I wanted him to stop feeling my butt with his fingertips and move his cock away from my leg. Yet, at the same time, I wanted him to continue and even take more liberties.

It was so dark in the cell that I didn't think the other men could see what Frank was doing. Still, I thought it would be best if I stopped him before he went too far. I was afraid of what the other men might say or do. I had heard stories of how boys and young men were sometimes brutalized in jail and I didn't want the men beating on me.

I turned my face toward Frank and shook my head "no" and when I did, I saw past his shoulder. Larry's fat cock stuck out of the front of his shorts. It was long, rigid, and throbbing. Larry grinned at me and my breathing quickened when he stroked its tubular length.

Then, Frank's fingers found their way inside the elastic band of my jocky shorts and he began to slowly inch the thin cloth down the flesh cheeks of my butt.

"I... I need a cigarette," I said in a tight voice, and thought I would use the excuse to get off the bunk.

"Here's one," Butch offered quickly.

I realized I would have to accept the cigarette or have a confrontation with Frank. Since I wasn't any good at fighting, I didn't have any doubts about what the outcome would be. He was twice my size. But, I didn't think he would take more liberties than he already had until later when the other men would be asleep and figured he would stop, if I just ignored him.

When I leaned in front of Ray and accepted the cigarette and a light, I saw that Butch's dick was also sticking out the front of his shorts. It too was big and hard. He grinned at me and stroked the throbbing thickness of his engorged shaft. And, at the same time, Frank used the opportunity to ease my shorts further down my hips and squeeze the fleshy cheeks of my butt.

I quickly sat back against the wall, quaking inside, and glanced at Ray to see if he had noticed what Butch was doing and where Frank's hand now was. I didn't know what to do. I was both scared and excited! I didn't want the others to see what Frank was doing, yet I didn't want him to stop. Not now!

His hand felt warm and sensuously exciting on my skin. The tips of his fingers slid up and down the crack of my butt and teasingly tickled my anus. I turned my body a little more to face Ray and tried to concentrate on what he was saying about the courts and lawyers, but my mind was elsewhere. My eyes fastened on the flaccid length of rounded manflesh in Ray's lap. My mind swirled as I inhaled the manly odors of Ray's muscular body.

Frank was persistent in his efforts to remove my shorts and within moments he had the fleshy cheeks of my butt fully exposed. Then, he freely caressed and kneaded my fleshy demiglobe of assmeat.

I clamped my jaws together to keep from moaning with joy. Yet, even though I was thrilled at what he was doing and didn't think the other men could see what was going on, I knew I had to stop Frank.

I shyly reached behind me to push him away and to pull up my shorts, but when I did, my hand encountered the thick pole of his sex. I glanced behind me and saw Frank had his own shorts pushed down to mid-thigh and his lust-engorged lance of throbbing black manflesh was fully exposed.

My god! He's... he's so huge and hard! I thought, and excitingly squeezed his cock.

The fat knob of his dick pressed against the smooth cheek of my butt and his fingers rubbed across the taut ring of my anus. My heart pounded with excitement and fear.

After shyly caressing Frank's engorged cock, I turned back to Ray and saw him looking over the top of my head with a wide grin on his face. Then, I noticed that his cock was rigid and throbbing. I licked my dry lips at the sight of his magnificent column of brown flesh. Not only was it thicker and longer than the other men's dicks—it was gigantic, at least eleven inches in length!

I knew then that my earlier thoughts had been correct. This was the men's purpose to begin with. All four of them planned to have sex with me! My breathing quickened at the thought of letting the four men take turns sinking their hard dicks deep within the tight channel of my bowels and feeling their muscular bodies laying on mine.

I flipped the cigarette on the floor and decided to see if my assumptions were correct. Then, I shyly moved my hand against Ray's throbbing dick. He continued to speak in a low, husky voice and acted as though nothing was happening.

My fingers curled around his tubular lance of manflesh

and I gently stroked his throbbing length and squeezed the hard smoothness of his cock. After a minute, I switched hands and leaned in front of Ray and caressed Butch's thick column of hard flesh.

"Oh, yeah!" Butch moaned.

Frank quickly took advantage of the position I was in and pushed my shorts down my legs to mid-thigh. With Ray's huge dick in one hand and Butch's throbbing cock in the other hand, I squeezed my eyes shut and shuddered with ecstasy when one of Frank's thick fingers penetrated the tight ring of my anus.

He pumped his finger in and out of my clutching asshole, then I released Butch's dick and sat back in Frank's lap while I continued to stroke Ray's pulsating cock.

Suddenly, I felt the knobby crown of Frank's shaft press against my anus. He wanted entrance! He gripped the fleshy cheeks of my butt with both hands and spread them apart as his rigid column of manflesh pressed against the tight ring of anus.

Tremors of excitement raced up and down my thighs. My breath caught in my throat and my face became flushed with heat. Goosebumps covered my flesh and I shivered with anticipation. Then, I pushed back against him and felt the tight ring of my anus begin to stretch around the knobby crown of his throbbing cock.

Suddenly, he was in me! big, hard, and throbbing. My anal muscles clamped down on his lust-engorged lance of flesh. He felt huge—thrilling! Yet, I knew that only the fat crown of his dick was inside me. I wanted more!

I forced myself to relax and allow him the complete entry I yearned for. But it was nearly impossible. I was aflame and shivering with excitement! I wanted to be fucked! Relaxing was the farthest thing from my mind!

Still, I somehow managed to relax my anus muscle and he slowly shoved the rigid column of manflesh deeper into the tight channel of my ass. Yet, the position we were in kept him from thrusting his full length into me.

I moaned softly from the sensation of having the hard dick in me. My ass was stretched and filled with him! I felt every little jerk and twitch of his unyielding lance. Still, I wanted more of his dick in me to satisfy the lust that possessed me. I wanted to feel Frank pounding and ramming his engorged manflesh to the very depths of my hot bowels.

Ray slid his hand caressingly down my back and seemed to be surprised when he discovered Frank's throbbing cock already stuck in my ass. He squeezed one fleshy cheek of my butt, then pulled me against his massive chest.

"Bend down and kiss me," Ray whispered, and there was no mistaking what he wanted kissed.

I followed directions without hesitation and at the same time, I lifted my butt and pushed back against Frank—giving him greater freedom to sink his complete length of pulsating dick in my anus. My lips circled delicately around the stiff hardness of Ray's huge cock. I moved my head from side to side, squirming my mouth around the knobby crown.

Frank was now eagerly pumping his tubular hardness in and out of my clutching bowels with quick, short thrusts. His fingers tightened their grip on my hindcheeks, digging roughly into the vulnerable flesh of my rear. I squeezed my ass muscles, capturing the fruity plumpness of his dick, then I wiggled my bottom. He groaned lustfully.

I unsnapped the front of Ray's shorts and he raised himself up so I could push them down his thighs. His gigantic dick and heavy testicles were now fully exposed to my lips and fingers.

I was gentle, even loving, in my oral ministrations to him. I kissed it and licked my tongue around and around the pulsating crown of his dick and sucked away the oozing flow of preseminal juices welling from it.

I cupped and squeezed his heavy sac, then slid my lips down the outside of his rounded flesh and sucked his balls, one at a time, into my mouth. He groaned and trembled. I licked the spit-slick length of him and once again took the knobby crown into my mouth. I slid my lips as far down the succulent length of unbending flesh as I could, filling my face with him. Again and again, I worked my lips and tongue up and down the lust-swollen shaft until I thought my jaws were going to crack.

Ray moaned lustfully and pushed my face down on his gigantic dick until the pulsating crown was at the back of my throat, then Frank began to thrust harder and deeper into my hot, clutching asshole.

I choked on Ray's cock and wiggled my butt excitingly so Frank's entrenched shaft was washed around and around within my body.

Over and over, Frank rammed his swollen dick into my ass. His sweat-slick body slapped against my hindcheeks with fleshy thuds. Again and again, I accepted his offering of slick, throbbing manmeat and relished the friction of pleasure that seared through my anal channel.

My body glowed with a white-hot heat. My senses and taste buds were filled with the smell and taste of the two men.

I sucked and stroked Ray's desire-laden shaft with a fervent zeal. I wanted to taste his man-seed and knew from the sounds of his lustful moans that it would be soon in coming.

Suddenly, Ray bucked upward, ramming his huge dick to the back of my throat, then his fountain of man-fluid blasted from his loins and emptied into my mouth. I momentarily choked at the hot, creamy come filling my mouth, then I hurriedly swallowed, drinking his man-fluid. Spurt after spurt of thick sperm erupted from the rigid lance of throbbing manflesh. I sucked and swallowed until he was dry, then I licked the rounded length of him and savored his man taste.

Frank released rigid behind me. His calloused hands

brutally clenched into the fleshy handles of my rearround. His hips jerked forward, sinking every throbbing, aching inch of his hard dick into the tight, caressing pocket of my ass.

Then, he came!

It felt like pure liquid fire being poured into my ass. His dick twitched and jerked, while burst after burst of hot sperm splattered over the gripping walls of my rectum.

"Oh, hell!" Frank groaned joyously.

When the spasmodic waves of lustful pleasure stopped racking both men, I lifted my face from Ray's lap and felt Frank pull his spent column of black manflesh from my butt.

I looked up at Ray's grinning face and in a panting voice I whispered: "Let's make some room where I can take care of the other two guys, then you, me, and Frank will do this again."

"Okay, kid, but next time I want some of your pretty ass," Ray said, and hopped down from the bunk.

Frank momentarily caressed and squeezed the fleshy cheeks of my butt, and in a husky, panting voice, he said: "Kid, I'll be back for some more."

After Frank jumped down off the bunk, I looked at Butch and Larry. Both men were completely naked. I finished removing my shorts, then turned and lay on my stomach.

Butch straddled my hips and lowered himself on me. I felt the smooth, knobby crown of his thick column of manmeat excitingly touching my come-slick anus. Then, in one quick thrust, he was in me—completely.

He was brutal, almost violent in his eagerness to pack my ass with his lust-hardened dick. I gasped from the searing pain as he rammed it deep within my come-filled bowels. Again and again, he completely filled the sheathing envelope of my ass.

Then, with a sigh and a moan of joyous bliss, I began to wiggle my ass and rock backward to meet his lunging thrusts. I gasped at the brutal beating my ass was suffering from his overeagerness and the solid impact of his young body slapping against mine.

I felt Larry's hand touch my face. He was waiting for me to suck him! I reached out and curled my fingers around his rigid lance of manflesh and lowered my lips to the pulsating crown. Over and over, I sucked his throbbing cock deep into my throat. I licked away the oozing flow of man juices that welled from the slitted mouth of his plump shaft and squeezed his heavy sac as I sucked him to a shuddering climax and swallowed his tasty gushes of hot come. I drank his precious man-fluid and didn't let a single drop escape my lips.

Butch rammed his throbbing dick completely within the tight, velvety envelope of my butt and groaned lustfully as he went rigid. Then, I felt his hot come splattering over the walls of my bowels, while his stalk of manflesh jerked and twitched deep within me.

I shuddered in ecstasy and moaned with my lips still circled around Larry's pulsating column of manflesh I knew then that I wasn't fish bait, I was cock bait, and I loved every thrilling moment of it.

In my mind, I finally accepted the fact I had long kept hidden from others—I was a homosexual! I silently vowed to myself that I would never again be ashamed of what I was. I would be proud to be gay.

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ORLOVSKY/ GINSBERGIANA

Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs. Poems by Peter Orlovsky. City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1978. 144 pp., paper, \$3.95; hardcover, \$7.95

Reviewed by Charles Shively

A remarkable group of crisp, direct writings from Peter Orlovsky's garden—*Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs* is in fact two books, *Poems 1957-1963* and *Poems 1971-1977*; nothing comes from 1963-1971. The earlier crop grows out of a now legendary world: beat, hip, underground New York-San Francisco-Paris-Tangier-Benares. *On the Road* out of straightjacked U.S. Army and into many movements. And also many soft beauties, beatitudes:

*Make my grave shape of heart so like a flower be free aired
& handsome felt.*

*Grave root pillow, tung up from grave & wiggle at
blown up cloud.*

*Ear turns close to underlayer of green felt moss & sound
of rain dribble thru this layer
down to the roots that will tickle my ear.*

("Snail Poem," p. 42; spelling is by sound not dictionary.)

The anti-war movement reawoke Peter's poetry—"Love Poem to A.J. Muste" (1972), "Leper's Cry" (1971) or "15,000,000 tons of Munitions Fell on Indochina from 65 to 73..." The poems written since 1971 carry forward the underground serenity of "Snail Poem" (1958) and amplify it with compost, seeds, tools, vegetables and fruits in all their multitudinous names. *Clean Asshole Poems* is dedicated to tree crops, worms, compost, falling leaves, manure and preserving/saving the earth itself. The heart of the corruption in capitalism, imperialism, armies, government and middle class respectability is their dirty asshole, hidden shit and resulting unhappy unsmiling vegetables.

Why the lacuna, the silences 1963 thru 1971? Three possible answers (drugs, sex and Ginsberg) should be rejected because like the silence they are symptoms of something else. Ginsberg says Peter had to survive "Speed & Junk Hells;" mainlining crystals; "I almost killed myself on amphetamine." (*Gay Sunshine Interviews*, p. 245) On the farm, Orlovsky has given up nicotine, alcohol, sugar, meat and settled for clean vegetables. As for sex, he started out young, beautiful and queer, but doubt about his homosexuality lingered (remember the narrowness of the 1950's) as he wondered whether or what he was missing on the other side of the street. "Good Fuck With Denise" (1974) is both good news and bad news: learning to fuck women has eliminated anxieties about the fun of being queer, but it has not awakened much understanding of why women don't want to be "fucked" or called "girls." Finally Peter's relationship with Allen Ginsberg (does anyone not know they are lovers?) has probably generated more energy and strength (on both sides) than has been lost. To be a poet and live day by day with the most powerful, creative and prolific poetic force of the century must inevitably be awesome if not overwhelming. How do you pay him back for all his multitudinous gifts and kindnesses? Whatever the difficulties or inequalities, they have worked it out and in that process Peter has been a more active and creative agent than might at first appear.

At the heart of the silence has been another difficulty that few discuss: class. For a middle class person to become a poet presents far fewer and different problems than those for someone from below. Rimbaud for instance. Middle class language would above all else exclude shit and substitute quality. Everyone sits on edge waiting for the middle class child to speak; for a working class/lower class child to speak is to be out of place. (Likewise for all women). And even if someone makes it into a poetic voice, they then bear a guilt just for having spoken at all. Rimbaud ran away to Abyssinia; Emily Dickinson hid her poems. Peter Orlovsky likewise tried to escape the guilt at having found his own voice. Fortunately he has survived.

Like Rimbaud his strength comes from his not having been weaned in a middle class vocabulary, diction, poetics. Linguists have found that the middle class child uses a more universalistic and non-specific speech framework; whereas children of the working class are more specific and particularistic (*Linguistics at Large*, N.Y., 1971, p. 229-245). For a poet, the latter provides great strengths; the former, great liabilities. Without thinking, a child of the working class can write poetry. Thus Peter Orlovsky writes easily of shit, assholes, vegetables and everything specific—fresh as though universities and exploitation never existed. Unquestionably, Allen Ginsberg helped him along the way by listening, but Allen himself has had to overcome his father being a schoolteacher and having matriculated at Columbia University. In that struggle, Peter has offered great gifts to his lover.

Peter is no fool; those who would see him as such show their class bias—not their understanding of poetry. In "Me & Allen," he explains,



Peter Orlovsky, 1973
Photo by Rachel Homer

*Realize big difference between me & Allen—he
has such far verbal poetry image—
connecting images getting sap
realization that leads up
ladder to highness of realization—*

*I get high thru feeling
& feelings to more purer
feelings or some thing
like it. — it all takes
place in my torso stomach
& up to chest — got by
long talks with myself—
but based not on deep
realization on
emotions pull — pull of
emotion — emotional sap
juice spreading thro out
body & makes me wiggle in
joy — but the set back on
stage of my mind picture
big drips of sadness — sadness
drips — sadness comes forward
& pours buckets from
joints of connecting bone
brain drops into chest
void — chest void passes
it to it into stomach
stage void — tears
flow — blood tears
flow in to void—
void of tears of Peters
tears based on knowing
void expanding in my
family members that
I've watched over years
but only come to feel
more sharply now—
death in rage handing out
rage to each member heart
face of my family—
my family disappears cause
heart turns hard & cant
expand into universe
of all time heart — all
big time heart (everybody)
thumping — thumping sadness
into my heart sadness—
no ladder across the heart
just a needle out
of heart jabbing rib—
crying pain voice alive—
all day on all days—
(pp. 47-48)*

To Eberhart from Ginsberg, A Letter About HOWL 1956, The Penmaen Press, Lincoln, Mass. 1976 (hardcover & softcover)

Allen Ginsberg Journals, Early Fifties Early Sixties, ed. by Gordon Ball, Grove Press, NY 1977 \$10 hardcover.

Mind Breaths Poems 1972-1977 by Allen Ginsberg, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1977. \$7.50 hardcover, \$3 paperback

As Ever, The Collected Correspondence of Allen Ginsberg & Neal Cassady Ed. by Barry Gifford. Creative Arts Book Co., Berkeley, Ca. 1977 \$5.95 paperback; & hardcover edition

Reviewed by David Chura

Unlike the long withheld writings of past gay authors, whose private papers when published uncensored caused flurries of titillating literary gossip, we have always known where the Beats stood in respect to the world, compasses pointing steady directions to honest living. So it is that the recent publication of these Ginsberg letters and early journals brings no surprises of fact. For years, Ginsberg has been the poet-master and prophet of the 20th Century; his poems are powerful and insightful whether they be political invectives or precise stones plucked from a Zen garden. It is, though, through these newly released writings that we get a glimpse of the struggle that went into this quest for honesty of body and spirit.

To Eberhart from Ginsberg is a first time publication of the 1956 letter that Ginsberg wrote to Richard Eberhart when he found out that Eberhart was to write a New York Times article on the burgeoning West Coast literary scene, a scene in which the Beats were very much involved. The older poet heard Ginsberg read "Howl" in San Francisco. His comment at the time was that although he felt it was an important poem, it was too negative, that "it did not teach me to live." The young poet's response to this criticism with a concern that Eberhart understand "Howl" is the resultant letter. In many ways it reads like a Beat manifesto. Over and over Ginsberg proclaims the supremacy of the heart over the intellect and the importance of "following my own heart's instincts." Although he is writing about love almost in Franciscan terms there is a hint here of his personal struggle for acceptance of his loudly proclaimed but not so easily integrated homoerotic feelings. Ginsberg stresses the importance of freeing ourselves from false images "which make us feel like smelly shits and not the angels which we most deeply are."

The article that Eberhart eventually wrote is included and is insubstantial compared to the soulfulness of Ginsberg's letter. It is sketchy and at times sarcastic, although there are some incorporations of Ginsberg's thoughts that attest to the honesty of this Beat poet.

As Ever, the collected correspondence of Neal Cassady and Ginsberg, and the *Journals* of the early 50's and 60's give the more intimate day to day happenings and feelings of Ginsberg. They serve as an interuterine telescope that articulates the mysterious fetal development of that human spirit so apparent and so fully grown in Ginsberg's later poems.

Early on in the *Journals* (which follow Ginsberg in New York City, Mexico, California and the Mediterranean), Ginsberg writes "I would like to fit the whole world and its very solid and apparent mysteries here." And as one reads through these pages he does indeed seem to do just that. These notebooks were a deposit for all his raw materials—observations about family and friends, people on the street, dreams and drug visions, notes for poems, poems fully delivered. The styles vary from the telegraphic prose learned from Kerouac to his own long line verse.

Not surprisingly, since growing pains rack hardest in youth, Ginsberg's 50's entries are much more conflicted and self-absorbed. Although he often writes of his loneliness and isolation, there is in these entries a consistent reluctance to find a lover (frequently defined as or dreamed of as male.) In a spate of lush reminiscences, Ginsberg writes about the men and boys he has seen on the street: in Houston, a Latin from whom electricity seemed to flow; another man in New York city who seemed to wear "a beautiful animal mask"; a teen-age boy passing by, leaving Ginsberg "almost faint from the wave of dirty sexuality." He follows these men for blocks but always from a safe distance, his pen the only tool used to possess them, ink his dark dry come. These passages are infused with a Cavafian melancholy and lustfulness that almost makes one glad that the desired objects remained untouched and so tightly imagined. Yet this distance represents the value conflict central to Ginsberg at the time. He often writes about the certain death of middle class life while at the same time puzzling "What do I want to do in the world aside from 'be a poet';" he talks of finding a job and a woman to marry but simultaneously spins sensual fantasies about love with men.

The Mexican sections of the journal written in late '53 and '54 are much less personal and Ginsberg the observer is more prominent. This was not only a voyage away from the physically familiar but also a hiatus from the more pressing issues of respectability and gain. There is a more spiritual

and cosmic tone to his conflict of identity that takes him out of his former limited perspective. The haunting conflicts of New York are now more bound up in the totality of the world around him. His rich, detailed descriptions of the Mexican jungle landscape and the ruins of Chichen Itza and Uxmal become symbols of the human condition—his condition. They become, for him, those most ancient of spiritual ruins that all seeking people must first stumble upon, accept, then build up from. His words and phrases are scattered and fragmented across the page like the remains themselves, many of these passages infused with a Buddhist sense of time and space that was to mark his poetry. There is a self-assurance not present before. His observations on the people he meets, the politics of religion and government, the dire conditions that the Mexicans must endure are perceptive and compassionate, while his references to gay sexual desires are not as tortured. There is a relaxed determination that loving men is okay for him.

However, there seems at times the danger that in taking a step back from himself, Ginsberg will lose some of that vulnerability which spoke more directly of his inner, personal struggles. It is in the description of his stay with Neal Cassady and his wife and children, upon returning from Mexico, that Ginsberg erupts from this poetic distance. The relationship between the two men had been an evolving but confusing intimacy—Cassady, always the ideal lover in Ginsberg's eyes and heart, had held strongly mixed feelings towards his friend. At first, he had allowed the relationship to become sexual, almost as payment for the privilege of learning from Ginsberg. Eventually the strain of this confusion of lust and love had led to a very close friendship, essentially without sex. Ginsberg stayed with the Cassadys after his Mexican trip as a last effort to define his relationship with Neal. He writes of his sadness and anger at being an appendage to a life that already seemed to have edged him out as though he were "some nowhere evil beast intruding." The pain is personal and acute and deeply felt by the reader. Yet he doesn't seem paralyzed by this experience as before, when his loneliness left him helpless. Ginsberg seems more determined to find his heart's own precepts and then live by them.

The rest of the *Journals* is more like reading his poems than his private notebooks. He focuses more on the political milieu of the times. Ginsberg is now a renowned poet, calling attention to spiritual famine in America and proclaiming love as manna. There are accurate predictions of the social evils that besieged the 60's especially the rampant abuses of government and invasion of privacy. At times these verse jottings read like the rantings of a mad desert oracle. With this more acute and contemptuous awareness of society Ginsberg gains a defiant pride in his gayness, seeing it as a life style that challenges all pretense.

In the 1972-77 collection of poems, *Mind Breaths*, Ginsberg demonstrates this balance. The poems are mature and quietly wise. The warrior, at first glance, seems to have exchanged his sword for a reed. This is not a collection of parlor verse, however. There is the remarkable power of a poet who has matched his own limits with that of the world's horizon and who now realizes that the only territory that can be explored endlessly is that of the walled garden of the self. There is youth, loneliness, sex, death, politics—themes inescapable to this poet; yet, all are written about in the tones of a knowing heart. It would be easy to say that these are the world-weary words of a self-absorbed poet, but that is the one thing that is lacking here—self absorption. Ginsberg can now write intimately about himself without sounding tortuously self-obsessed or stridently self-important.

The poet's love for men is completely integrated in these poems. They speak of the "nameless love that everybody is" as he stated in the 1973 Gay Sunshine Interview, viewing his unashamed sexuality as a way of opening up to people "the whole spectrum of feelings" for both gays and heterosexuals. So a poem like "Come All Ye Brave Boys" is a piece not just about the seduction of macho young men but also is a call on all men for uninhibited tenderness. "Sweet Boy, Gimme Yr Ass" beats out the rhythms of lovemaking as Ginsberg describes his time with a young boy. As the poem piles up one throbbing line on another, the repetition of the phrase "Come on" reads like a rallying cry for joyous gay sex.

Death has always been present in Ginsberg's writings. He is a connoisseur of this dark bandit force, gathering insights from his drug visions and meditations, all to be used for stalking confrontations in his poems. Several poems deal with that quieter form of death, the loss of what is important in life while *in* life. One of the most moving poems is "Don't Grow Old" a meditation on aging which describes the dying of his father, Louis Ginsberg. The images of father and son become blurred, for if a father shrivels with age, so too is a son the victim of a similar cellular revolt.

Political and social concerns are just as strong. There is still rage against injustice, an eagle-eye that soars above the world arena marking with incisive images the carrion of politics. Ginsberg names names and will rant his accusations with the best of them.

Towards the journal's end, Ginsberg, talking about the strain of maintaining an equilibrium between mission and hermit spirit, both such integral parts of himself, writes:

*I would like to live here now, alone . . .
relaxed, nowhere to go, long nights . . .
Except my head on this pillow's filled
with war, revolution.*

He is no longer the frightened queen who hides in doorway shadows but stands his man love on sunlit corners.

Much of *As Ever* reflects this same development of Ginsberg. Strangely enough the letters ranging from the 40's to the 60's don't give much insight into Cassady or into their chaotic but loving relationship. Cassady destroyed Ginsberg's letters written to him in the 40's because he was afraid they would get into the wrong hands. It is not difficult to admire the painful blunderings of these two men who loved each other. Cassady's letters are, for the most part, awkwardly written, intellectual discussions that walk about the pages on stilts; he is at his best as a story teller, narrating his various railroad adventures. One 1950 letter tells about a train ride across country during which Cassady frightened some young gay practically off the train by a hyperbolic tale of "powerful Marijuana" that he was smoking, his description second only in hilarity and outrageousness to "Reefer Madness."

Ginsberg in his earlier letters narrates the same conflict he felt in the journal between his mission as a poet and a desire to be respectable. He writes insistently in the 50's letters about his search for a marriageable woman, almost as though to reassure his friend that he is going straight. The later letters become a forum for ideas, with Ginsberg narrating his spiritual, literary and geographic voyages. Ginsberg the poet/prophet gains ascendancy as the letters move into the 60's. What he has to say is set forth in a clear, driving style that, while still personal in content at times, reads more like pronouncements to an attentive world.

These collected writings of two decades encapsulate the evolution of Ginsberg as the poet and oracle of a generation, a man who has attempted to uproot and replant American lives. Through his early gropings, Ginsberg assumed the sincere and compassionate, boisterous and self-assured heroic persona of his own American model, Walt Whitman. Yet the danger of any public image is that of becoming so removed from the real person underneath that it loses the vulnerability necessary to change hearts and minds. Ginsberg in these writings doesn't always maintain that subtle and difficult balance between the public and private self. At times his self-assuredness reads as self-importance.

His dilemma is most certainly the dilemma of all of us: how to steer through the confusing waters of today's world—sometimes luminous with exotic life, other times stagnant and black with threats. Ginsberg, whatever his literary faults, has never hesitated to share with us his personal navigational secrets and for this we can only thank him.

NUKI

NUKI is a pioneer in the new school of homoerotic art only recently coming to the surface in America. With studios in New York and Washington (where he lives most of the time) the artist has worked for many years in fantasy and abstraction, but his realistic, eternal renditions of the male manifestations are now the rage of the art world. The first public showing of erotic watercolors and drawings took place this fall in Soho's Leslie-Lohman Gallery drawing the largest crowds in the gallery's history. The works have been described as "provocative," "great," and "challenging." They belong in every collection of the free and the brave. All subjects are on paper approximately 14" x 18" up to 18" x 24". Prices are from \$250.

"NON PAREIL—" James Alan Nash in *After Dark*

for more information:

SAM ROTHENSDYN, Agent
P.O. Box 9005
Washington, DC 20003

The artist, a native South Carolinian, was educated at the University there and at the Art Students League of New York. During war he became a major of infantry at age 23, leaving the service immediately after hostilities to return to art. He lives, for the most part, in a large Victorian house in Washington's Georgetown with his partner, Thomas (Nick) Snyder.

• ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST • WORKS EXHIBITED AS

DANIEL MILLSAPS

Works have been shown at:

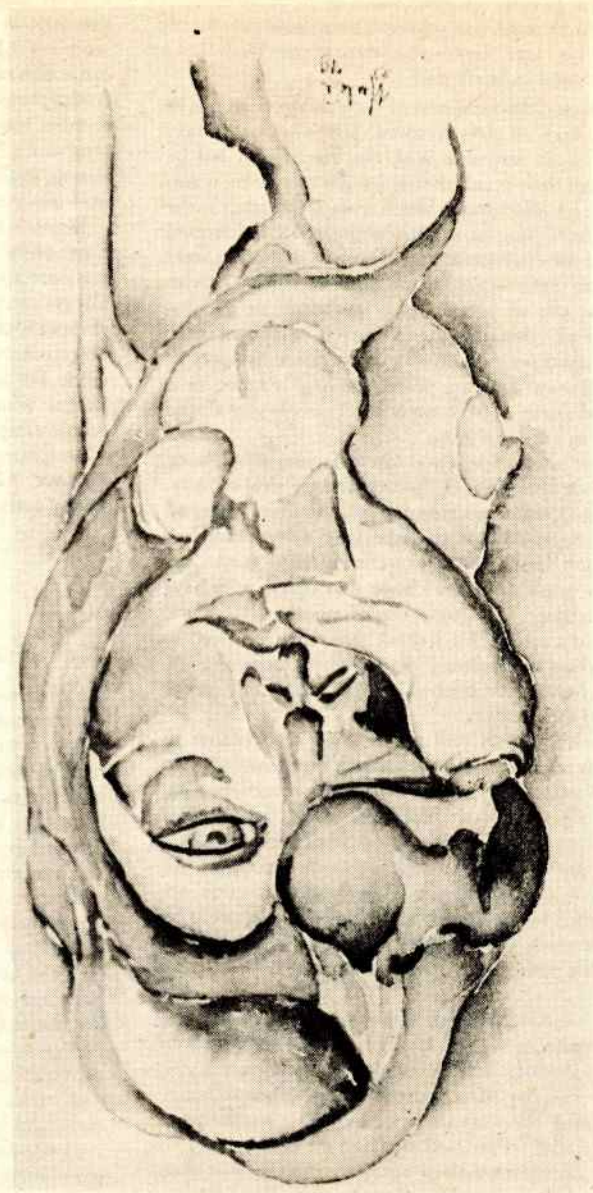
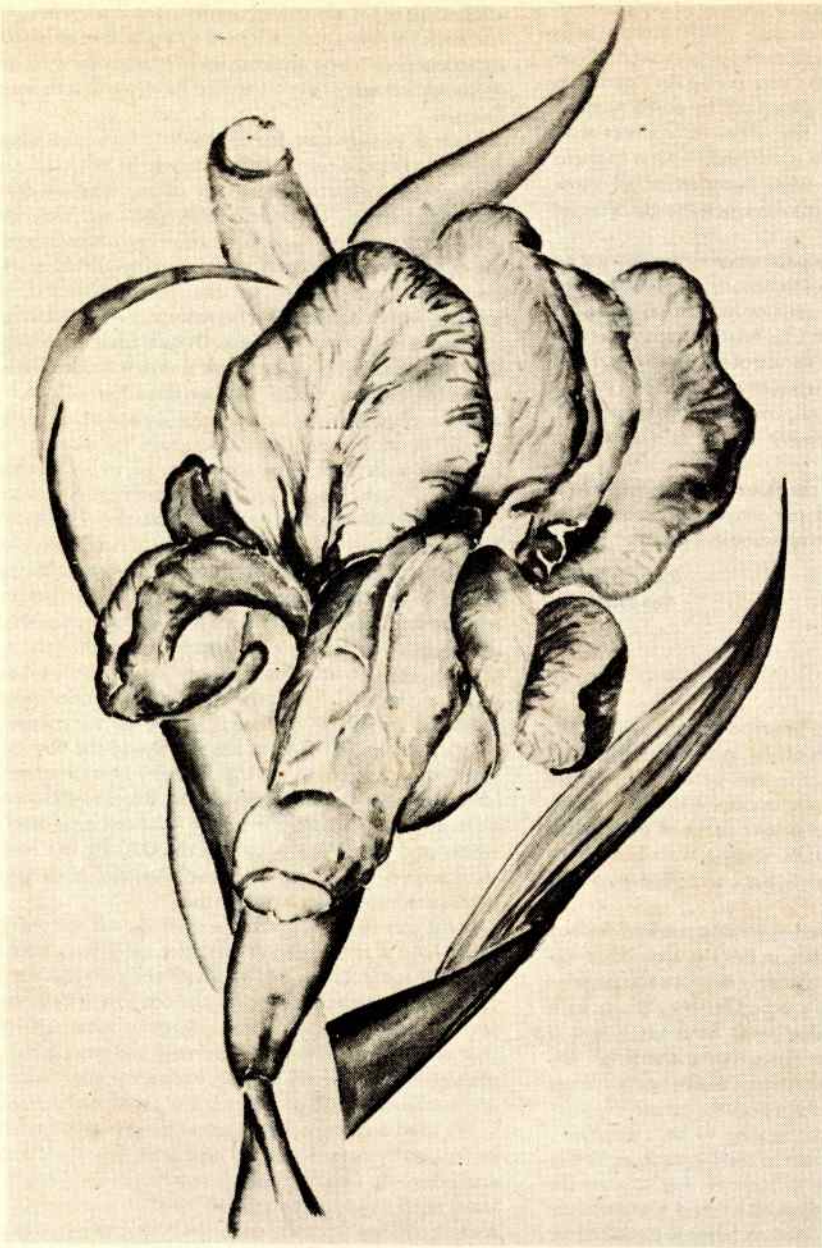
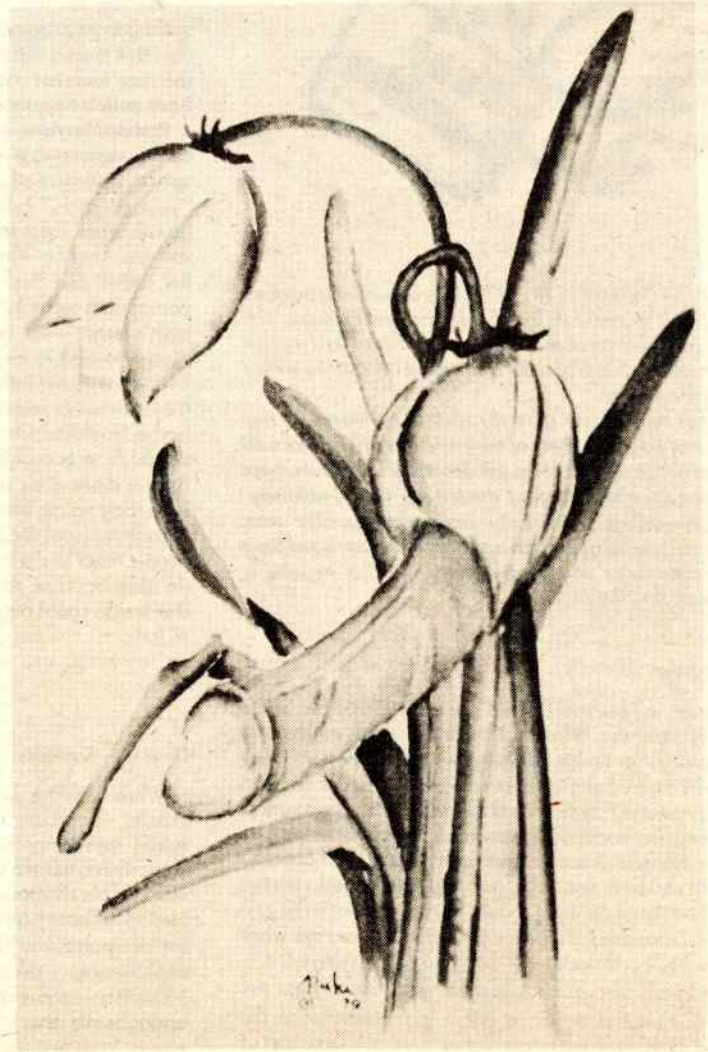
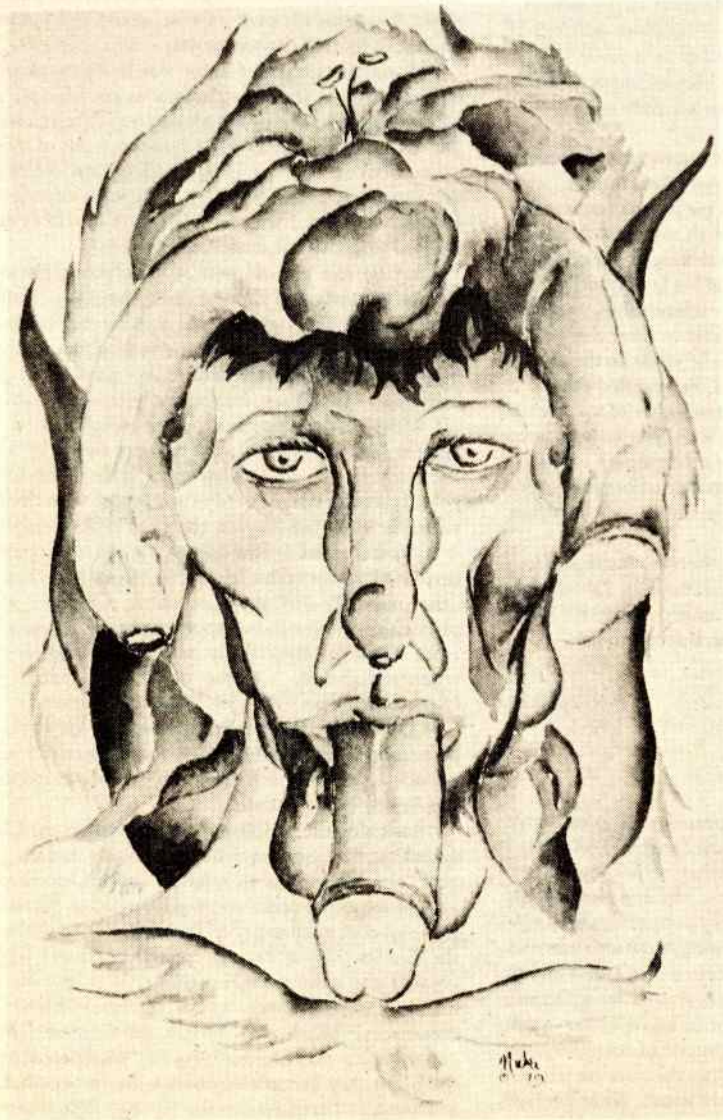
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Sioux City Art Center
Arkansas Arts Center
Joslyn Art Museum

Works in permanent collections:

Berkshire Museum
Abbott Hall (England)
Columbia Museum of Fine Art
Department of State, USA
Virginia Museum of Art
Mississippi State College/Women
N.Y. Public Library Print Collection
Library of Congress Print Collection
Oklahoma Art Center
Numerous private collections

WATERCOLORS BY NUKI:



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Editor's note:

In Issue No. 38/39 (Winter 1978/1979) *Gay Sunshine* printed an article "Boy Love in the Far East" by Jameson Donald. The controversialism of the piece drew forth a number of letters from *Gay Sunshine* readers. Some of these are printed here, along with a response from the author.

I am glad that our readers took the time to comment on this important issue of boylove. Some of the criticisms offered are well thought-out and have merit; others are debatable. However, I am disturbed by the tone of several of the letters: harsh, unloving. Instead of name-calling a basically sincere, responsible man (Jameson Donald), some of his critics should have expressed their views with a little more charity and humanity. Let he who is without fault cast the first stone.

Dear Gay Sunshine:

The last phrase in Jameson Donald's article, "Boy-Love in the Far East" (*Gay Sunshine*, Winter 1979), may help us understand why a man turns from loving someone who is his peer to using children the way a bored matron uses bon-bons: "... our desire to escape social pressures." A homosexual man in an environment where homosexuality is extremely covert and fear-provoking may try to comfort himself (his own child self) when he chooses to make love with children. Secondly, one has less physical violence to fear from the small male child should he turn out not to be gay. Thirdly, peer relationships are extremely difficult in our age when gay liberation has been declared—but not yet discovered.

I make this effort at understanding the pederast to fight my initial reaction: that this article is just a gay postscript to the portrait of *The Ugly American*; it seems to have that same sort of naive destructiveness. "Boy-Love" (the term itself "objectifies," even if it does so in a pretty and poetical-sounding way, and therefore it dehumanizes a certain group of small people) has become a very popular subject in gay periodicals.

As one human who, as a child, was the object of an adult's sexual interests, I can say that any love is better than no love at all. But it would be nice if those with pederastic habits could step back from their fantasy of children falling like plums into their hands. If the children are that available, there is clearly little parental care, and probably much poverty (as many times as the children spent the entire night with Donald, it should have been obvious—had he any empathy with his "love" boys—that these are not the children of liberality but of total indifference.)

Failure to understand the neediness of such children has got to have something to do with class divisions. Jameson Donald says the children of Asia do not sleep with him for money, but he cannot see that from their point of view a night in a clean, warm bed can be riches; an affectionate touch from some adult is the very thing they are searching for—but how that touch is delivered will also determine the direction the child goes from there—and I don't mean toward heterosexuality or homosexuality, I mean toward indifferent use of people, early cynicism, or genuine caring. The children he describes are not merely compliant; they are supplicants; a child—especially one in the circumstances of these children—knows its own powerlessness; it's not in a position to demand anything from anyone; it can only give all and accept as much or as little as is given.

In my own childhood experiences these factors of parental indifference, absence of emotional affection and physical security, and the class division between me and the adult "lover" were all operant, and so there was too much desperation determining me; it was desperation not freedom-of-choice that made me "available" to the adult's "love". I hope that others who have experienced this matter from the "boy's" point of view will respond to Donald's article, for I think that those involved in writing and publishing such material are frequently those who are, in some sense (if only in the control of what's printed), on the power class side of the equation.

Gay liberation still avoids real politics; it's much easier to construe liberation as a passive license for hedonism, instead of an active political process; poverty, class structure, racism, sexism, ageism—all of the unsolved problems affect and distort homosexual lives just as they affect and distort all other lives that live under values and systems that tolerate such conditions. All struggles, even that of gays trying to understand themselves, are somewhat controlled by those who have something to profit by the old stereotype roles, or, if they're in the top-dog half of an equation, feel little necessity to understand the bottom-dog's dilemma.

Gay males are as much in need of "male consciousness raising" as heterosexual males, if we are to step out of the roles, both top-dog and under-dog, learned under current patriarchal systems. A book like *For Men Against Sexism* (Times Change Press) can be helpful. We who are gay males have not liberated ourselves at all, I feel, if we proceed even past the ages of 30 or 40 or 50 to see the humans we sleep with as nothing more than objects in a private fantasy—and much of this "boy-love" seems a direct counterpart to the Playboy bunny of heterosexual men. It seems shallow, ageist, lacking in political, as well as personal, analysis. One of the invaluable insights in *For Men Against Sexism* is that men are taught to "objectify" their sex objects—thereby removing them from the realm of feelings; the "Greek" fantasy that thrives on "boy-love" seems a perfect vehicle for those who collect people, both tall and small, like butterfly collections. It gets very lonely trying to make love to the Master Race.

Jim Eilers
San Francisco

Dear Gay Sunshine:

I was mesmerized by this article. It's been a bit of a while since I found myself reading something with such interest as I read this article. I can't quite explain why. Perhaps I was interested because I'd never given this subject much thought before. Only recently, in an article and a series of letters-to-the-editor in Boston's *Gay Community News* has this subject come into my consciousness. I'm frankly interested to learn more about this—not because I myself would participate in a connection with a boy—but because I think most gays probably need more information on this subject.

As long as there is no coercion involved and both parties are willing to participate, I see nothing to object to in boylove. I think that this matter should be a part of the gay lib movement, while at the very moment I realize that to make this a visible issue would have quite a negative effect.

Perhaps boylove is more prevalent than I know. Maybe Donald could answer that question from his own observations. Last spring, a student of mine—he's 18—told me he was attracted to "younger men." I didn't quite know what to say. And then, last month when I was in San Francisco, I was talking to a friend who revealed that he—at age 12—had seduced his father and he and his father had had a highly satisfactory relationship until the young man went away to college. I was able to meet this young man's father—the father had a stopover in SF while on the way to Hawaii—and in a conversation with him, he revealed that he'd had sex with his father! Some years ago, two other of my friends told me that at an early age they'd had sex with their fathers, also. Is this boylove? Or is it incest—a whole other topic? I think it would be a good idea to air this whole matter of boylove more fully and also have something written about fathers who have sex with their young sons.

Judging from the Boston GCN, many otherwise intelligent gay people react to the issue of boylove quite irrationally. I think they do this because they don't know too much about it. More discussion could only aid in understanding, it seems to me.

R.E.P.
Pennsylvania

Dear Gay Sunshine:

While reading Jameson Donald's informed and informative article, "Boy-Love in The Far East" (*Gay Sunshine*, 38/39), I found myself increasingly irritated by what struck me as the compulsive nature of his sexual activities. His apparent acceptance of his relationships with all those very young boys may give him an authority on making out with the same, but it also narrows his viewpoint, and his activities—activities in which I see a hint of exploitation, a taking advantage of the boys' need for affection. Moralists—and gay moralists who ought to know better—will undoubtedly attack the article, accusing Donald of corrupting the young. Such people, I think, miss a fine irony: the boys are left free to go and grow in their own ways; Donald is not. What damage done—if we think in these terms—is done only to himself.

In neat contrast, is Felice Picano's fine poem, "Fantasy Figure" (page 35 of the same issue), which expresses an equally intense sexual passion but communicates also the barrenness of a relationship when it is conceived in only sexual terms. Picano, whose poem is more than just jerk-off stuff, wants to know his trick. In his ability to evaluate experience, the poet expresses a moral intelligence. Promiscuity and anonymous sex may be symptoms of a deep dissatisfaction with cultures that define human relationships in terms of status, power and material goods. (And one wonders if Donald's attraction to the very young isn't partly an attraction to males before they are "corrupted" by power games.) Anonymous sex is a way—and a fine way—to connect with another human being. But—and this is the hitch—what happens afterwards? And—bleak future—what becomes of all those young, available people when opportunities increasingly decrease as—inevitably—flesh falls?

Jameson Donald, however affectionate, strikes me as having no sense of the idea that sensation is not necessarily experience. The boys are treated as objects and, in spite of his gainsaying (he is always careful to give the boys an out), his relationships with them are manipulative. That, and not the nature of his proclivity, I find objectionable: such an approach to sex seems to me to be a vicious circle. For an adult. The boys, after all, are only screwing around. But at what point in our development do we ask more of a relationship?

One hopes that his essay opens the door to discussion about boylove. Children are sexual and our current phobias about sexual activity with them could do with some inspection.

John D. Dolan
San Francisco

Dear Gay Sunshine:

I'd like to offer a few comments on Jameson Donald's article. As one to whom the pleasures and perils of boy-love are no stranger, I found it to be interesting, informative and occasionally entertaining, but not a well-written composition. I don't consider myself a stickler over grammar and proper usage of the English language, but some of Mr. Donald's writing was difficult to comprehend, and I found myself going back to reread sentences and paragraphs.

Despite its faults, I was very pleased to see that you had deemed it important enough to have published it. But I'm afraid that this article and others like it will do nothing to improve the popular image of boylove and may in fact do much to further alienate both gay and straight persons unfamiliar with boylove. I find it disconcerting that some otherwise "progressive thinking" gay people actively deplore boylove and attempt to disengage it from the mainline gay experience, when it is, of course, essentially a gay experience. Donald's article, which appears to be a pederast's travel guide to the Far East, will seem to these people as further evidence of the exploitative nature of boylove. But to view the phenomenon as a man sexually exploiting a boy is too simplistic and narrow-minded. I don't deny that many boys are exploited for their sexual favors; sexual exploitation occurs in all facets of human relations. For myself and for many others, I'm sure, boylove means much more; sex is only one facet of boylove.

I would like to see your publication, and others as well, print articles and stories which will point out the positive aspects of boylove, defend it, and improve its image in the public eye. A thoughtful discussion of the subject needs to be encouraged by objective, sensitive, forthright and honest consideration.

M.S., California

Dear Gay Sunshine:

As one who was born—and grew up gayly—in Hongkong, I was appalled to read the myopic views on the Chinese expressed by Jameson Donald in his article "Boy-Love in the Far East". To be sure boy love is a taboo subject, and I applaud *Gay Sunshine's* position in support of it. But it is unfortunate that his piece—probably the first to be published on the topic of boy love in East Asia—was the one *Gay Sunshine* chose to print.

Donald's piece is best taken as a rambling account of his own fortunes and misfortunes, rather than as the definitive essay on the topic. It reveals his own narrow, sexist and indeed ethnocentric and racist level of consciousness.

The sexism is revealed in the way he treats, or writes about, the boys in various countries, merely as *sex objects*. The absence of loving feelings is typified in his comment about a teenage monk (at 18 "too old for me") whom he shoves out of a bed—the boy's saffron colored (*sic*) robes providing little cushion as his ass hit the floor." If I had had the misfortune of meeting Donald in Hongkong when I was growing up, I would definitely *not* have wanted to know this *dislikeable* man.

That he can get off with a variety of Asian boys (with the notable exception of Chinese ones) should not lead us to conclude that such a man as Donald cannot be racist. The feminist movement has alerted us to the reality that love and sex are no magic cures for sexism. Indeed, we now know that a "loving" husband can still rape. Hence just because Donald manages to get off with Malays does not *per se* indicate he is not prejudiced against Malays. For it may be his very stereotypes of Malays (and Vietnamese, etc., etc.) which give him the fantasies to allow him to get off. (I myself have tired of white men who think I should sleep with them because they say they like "Orientals".)

A typical racist or ethnocentrist tends to exaggerate or make up certain racial (or ethnic) characteristics. Hence Donald claims that "the majority (of the Cantonese Chinese) are unattractive physically... even those I spot who have not had all life smothered from them in the family retain the Chinese insularity. For whatever reason, Chinese don't want to be bothered with knowing anyone." *Anyone?* A queer comment.

Is Donald himself really interested in knowing someone? Not according to his own tale, where he is merely "longing after some particularly desirable little body." He wants to "know", it seems, only in the biblical sense.

"Basically, the problem in Hong Kong is the Chinese." And he adds that the Cantonese are particularly insular, family oriented, and "very distrustful of whites." Since Chinese people make up almost the entire population of Hongkong, his remarks are on the same level of intelligence as saying that the problem in Harlem are the Blacks. White racism created ghettos; white imperialism created the colony of Hongkong. Is it any wonder that some Chinese people there would distrust whites, who are their colonizers? Much as I disdain the Chinese family structure, I cannot agree that Chinese boys are "smothered" by the family "to the point they become virtually without personality," becoming, in Donald's incredible words, "spongy little shmooos."

May I suggest that Donald's quest for the erect cock has closed his mind; he himself admits never having been able to successfully make love with a Chinese boy: "I have yet to find a Chinese lad under 16 who will allow sex to go beyond the initial probings." Definitely a case of sour grapes.

I want to assure your readers from personal experience that there is nothing inherent in the Chinese personality that forbids adolescent sex. I am indeed dumbfounded why Donald had such bad luck finding young Chinese to make love to *with*. My own experiences as a boy growing up in Hongkong were quite erotic, although I doubt if even I would have wanted to have sex with Donald.

Several possibilities for Donald's misfortune suggest themselves: 1) Donald turns off the Chinese he met; 2) A Chinese boy may prefer longterm friendship rather than quick sex; 3) A language barrier; 4) Political differences, etc., etc. Psychologists tell us that a person caught in misfortune often blames others for the predicament. Donald has thus rationalized it as "Chinese insularity" (why didn't he say "inscrutability"? instead of looking within himself, and his culture, for the answer.

Blinded by his own prejudice, Donald finds incredible the report of a British lawyer having "half a dozen hairless lads cavorting about his flat every night." Perhaps it is a coincidence, but last year a 34-year-old British lawyer, John Richard Duffey, was sent to prison in Hongkong for three years for having "committed buggery" with three boys, ages 14 to 16, in his Kowloon flat.

Donald's article also raises a number of issues that have thus far seldom been discussed in essays on pederasty. I am indebted to Jon Schaller, formerly of Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor, for raising at the recent Boston Man Boy Love conference, the question of power and other disparities between the parties in man-boy relationship. The disparities must be attenuated when the parties are of different races, or specifically, when the man is white and the boy is third world. Furthermore, the potential for exploitation increases, I would think, when the man is an American and the boy an Asian (or other "foreigner")—for the American can always decide to split and there is less likelihood the boy can afford to come with the man to the U.S. The gay liberation movement has long been seen as a *white* movement. Recent articles on pederasty have also perpetuated the notion that the men involved are all white, and that black people in the U.S. are not considered the ideal boy partners, even if "exotic" Asians, South Americans and others are lusted after by white men.

If the gay movement ever is to shake off the charge of being racist, and if the emergent boy love movement ever is going to rebut the same charge, we boy lovers and gays had better shape up. Feminists and others have criticized boy lovers for being ageist and sexist; and unless boy lovers engage in some self-criticism and change in behavior, there will be more and more criticism that this phenomenon is merely another excuse for imperialistic whites to go around the world plundering and ravishing the young (boys).

We need fewer articles about white gays getting their rocks off in "exotic" places; I want to hear from the non-U.S. gays—men and boys—in Asia and elsewhere who are enjoying their gayness. If we must have articles written by white men on distant, foreign forays, at least let there be more self-criticism and struggle, or some recognition of the enormous privileges that white men have abroad (which is not to play down the enormous legal problems a man—white or not—faces as a result of intergenerational sex here in the U.S.)

For a fall issue of the *Gay Insurgent*, which I edit, I am seeking contributions of articles on gayness and lesbianism in Asia and among Asian Americans. (Including boy love.) Manuscripts should be sent to *Gay Insurgent*, P.O. Box 2337, Philadelphia PA

Daniel Tsang
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Gay Sunshine:

This is a response to your invitation to readers to comment on the "Boy-Love in the Far East" article in the Winter issue.

As a counselor, I am very much aware that the adolescent gay male is far more ready and eager for sexual experience than is his heterosexual peers. Liaisons with an older gay male, if loving and understanding and wholly nonexploitative, can have very rewarding effects on his sexual development. Such positive relationships characterized the account which got the editors of *Body Politic* in trouble with the law.

The writer of your article, it seemed to me, verged on being exploitative and the report of his reaction to the young monk, whom he permitted to fellate him and then shoved from his bed as being possibly 18 and therefore too old for him was crass and unfeeling. Such an act made him very much unworthy of the love of any boy.

Fred R. Methered
Honolulu, Hawaii

Dear Gay Sunshine:

I liked very much reading "Boy-Love in Asia" (GS 38/39). Of course, Donald's writing cannot match Erskine Lane's in *Game-Texts* (Gay Sunshine Press). Both writers I think, however, have come up with a new gay genre: boylove travelogues.

Boylove travelogues have a history in terms of literary criticism: see all the secondary literature on Catullus, for example, or what about Melville's *Moby Dick*, especially chapter 94 which reads like a Chickencruise on the good ship Lollipop.

Obviously, kicking a yng Buddhist monk out of bed is, I admit, a bit gauche & tacky. But then are my Chinese poems (GS 38/39) any more gauche & tacky? "River Boy," for example, to some is much more decadent than "Boy-Love in Asia" cld ever hope to be.

One last thought: we all were chickens once. Nostalgia for one's boyhood may be the single most driving force of our culture. One can only hope that the boylove *literati* will continue in being true to their art.

Peace
Dennis Kelly
Seattle

Jameson Donald responds:

There is no way to respond briefly to the letters roused by my article surveying "the boy scene" in Southeast Asia: it would require a series of essays. But let me reiterate that it was a *survey*, emphasize that it condensed 13 years of my life, and state that reasonable thoughts expressed by writers have been given meaningful thought for many years by myself.

My sexuality is not "another excuse for imperialistic whites to go around the world plundering and ravishing the young (boys)," as suggested, nor do I consider Asians as "exotic" and hence to be "lusted after."

I perhaps should not be, but am, astonished at the naivete of many writers where boys and their development is concerned. Like the law, most male adult gays seem to believe that the male springs abruptly from childhood to adulthood, from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to sexuality at some immutable marker in life.

I am here to remind you, fellow homosexuals, that it is not so. At less than eight I experimented. At nine I enjoyed the orgasms produced by being fellated by an adult. At 12 I fell in love with, and wanted sexually, a 14 year old. At 13 I fell in love with a ten year old, at 16 with a 12 year old, at 14 was having occasional relations with boys near pubescence—which has continued. No startling changes, even at the age of 13 when I found it was called homosexuality, was shameful and that I must worry.

In letters to Gay Sunshine I have been called: 1) Ageist; 2) Sexist; 3) Racist; 4) Ethnocentric; 5) Dislikeable; 6) Prejudiced; 7) Exploitative; 8) Imperialistic; 9) Bored; 10) Non-empathetic; 11) Compulsive; 12) Sensualist; 13) Manipulative; 14) Gauche and Tacky; 15) A stereotyper—among other things.

I was "gauche" in dealing with the monk, and I apologize for relating an incident that would have been no less real had I omitted it. I suspect that I am not alone in gauche acts. My wrong ultimately was allowing him to fellate me for sexual relief when I did not desire *him*.

Pederasty, for the benefit of certain readers, is *not* habit, choice or anything similar. I have no desire for sexual congress with physically mature males, much less females, and never have.

By definition of pederasty, I am ageist where physical relations are concerned and intellectualisms will not change it. After puberty (more or less) boys do not interest me sexually, though I can assure you many have remained friends insofar as my peripatetic life allows.

I live in Asia, and have for many years. Before moving to Asia I had relationships with white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Meaningful relationships. I do not differentiate by color, but should it surprise that in Asia I have Asian friends?

My empathy, sensitivity, awareness, sympathy, etc., etc., and ability to express them with boys, to their advantage, has not only been questioned, but assumed and concluded to be deficient. Friends, if you only knew, you would not assume or conclude, much less lecture me. My mind is at rest on these things.

The term exploitation troubled me long before the letters to the editor. Yes, I exploit. Many things. I exploit another human's need for love, his desire for sexual release, his desire for adventure, his need to be considered human, his curiosity, etc.

I am exploited in turn. My interest in boys, my need to love, my compassion, my empathy, even my wallet—not to buy boys, but because many boys need money, whether or not they were sex partners, etc.

I have never suggested that all boys I have "known" are homosexual. I do state that I have never coerced a boy, much less forced him. Nor do I pursue "meat" on a "meatrack," using another's body to masturbate against. I enjoy boys—the entire boy. Boys enjoy me as a friend, some of them as a lover, but I believe as a human being treating them as human beings.

If I needed proof *for myself* of my value and values I need turn only to my 19 year old foster son who has been "my son" since he was 14, a remarkably handsome boy who even now I find physically desirable because of his physical youth. We have never been lovers, yet I love this boy more than any other person I know, including my "blood" family. My homosexuality, if he knows, is a moot point. There is no question I am the single most important person in his life. His life as a heterosexual. He is neither my first nor last "adoptee."

Peace and love,
Jameson Donald

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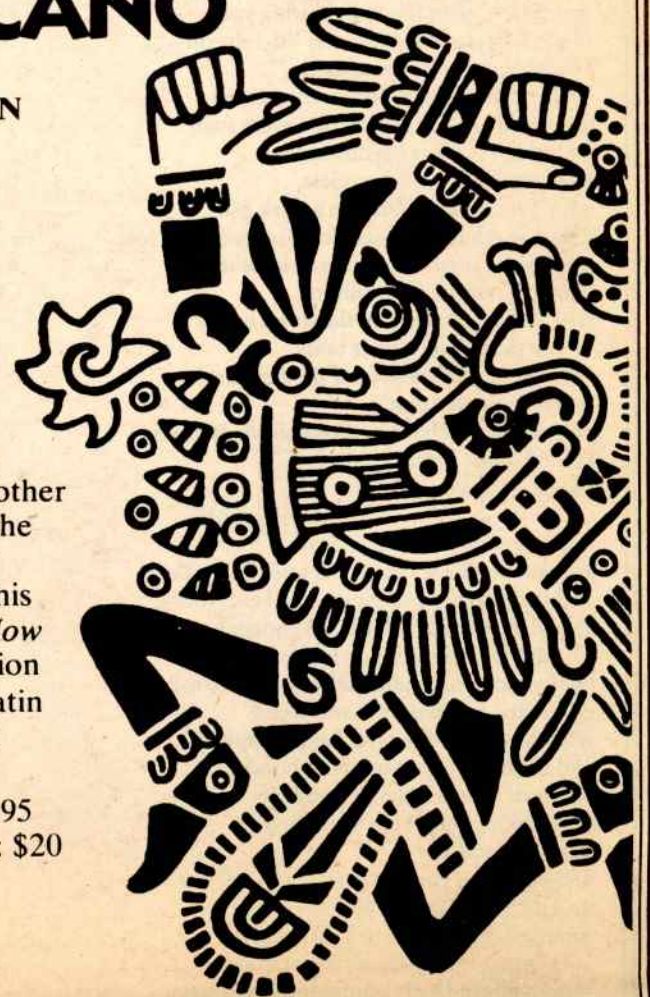
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CURING HOMOSEXUALITY

for three incurables, Frank, Stu and Richard

"There are no homosexuals, only fallen heterosexuals."
—Dr. Reuben Sebastian Wildchild

Of the many known and proven cures for homosexuality, the most familiar, perhaps, is the Catholic Church's version of "Confession-is-good-for-the-soul." According to this ritual every time you feel an unclean urge to touch yourself, you stop your hand with the mental image of the Pope staring you in the face and these words: "if-I-do-this-I-have-to-tell-the-priest-again." Then, when you go to confession you enumerate and fully describe every such forbidden act leaving out not the slightest detail and the priest, who lives anonymously in a dark box, tells you what you must do to redeem your lost soul. This usually amounts to kneeling before a statue of this virgin who has never allowed the sinful hands of any man to infest her body with the puerile desires of the flesh and mutter a prayer that you won't touch other men hail Mary as you, in a religious rapture, fondle your beads.

If this doesn't work, and one wonders about these good men whose career it is to sit in the dark and listen to the pornography of everybody else's life, the next step is psychoanalysis. The doctor sits solemnly in the dark behind you, his hands suspiciously folded in his lap, and doesn't say a word while you lie down on a long, lumpy sofa and tell him about your childhood and how much you hate yourself for thinking the things you think so uncontrollably and you wish your tongue would fall out and it almost does as you go on and on wondering what the hell this fellow is listening for as you start inventing stories about Uncle's anus and house pets. You soon find out he is interpreting the things you tell him. According to psychoanalytic theory, everything you say means something else even more sinister than what you meant. Your unknown desires live within you and control your outward behavior. For instance, if you say, "It's such a beautiful day today I wanted to leave work early," the psychiatrist will interpret this to mean you are dissatisfied with your work and this in turn means you are sexually frustrated and this goes back to your miserable childhood which means he'll probably respond with, "Do you think that this means you resented your mother when she wouldn't let you play with yourself?" If you say you had a dream about flying he'll interpret it as a dream of sexual frustration and penis envy meaning you are really sick since only women are supposed to have penis envy. He'll probably ask you, "How did you feel when you first say your father's instrument? Did you notice if it was bigger than yours? Did he seem ashamed of his? Did you want to touch it?" If you tell him you don't even recall what it looked like he'll tell you you unconsciously wanted it to fall off so you could flush it down the toilet. If you tell him you wanted to kill your father and rape your mother he'll tell you you had an Oedipus conflict. He will listen for key words like umbrella, closet, rooster, shit, nude and Judy Garland, all of which convey a large surplus of unconscious homosexual material. For instance, never say: "I put my umbrella in the closet and found my brother in the backyard beating the shit out of a rooster while looking at nude pictures of Judy Garland." To a psychiatrist this means:

umbrella=phallic symbol=womb=death=fear that it will rain at your funeral and no one will come
closet=phallic symbol=womb=mother=castration=desire to work for a fast food chain=prostitution=fear of underwear
brother=phallic symbol=sibling rival=castration=desire to stick your finger up your ass and smell it
rooster=phallic symbol=cock=flying=fear of Karen Black=crashing=fear of impotency=hatred of women=fear of oxygen
shit=phallic symbol=fear of dirt=work=puritan work ethic=father's penis=sexual frustration=deviations=fascination with dirt=bad toilet training=sexual hostility toward pilgrims
nude=phallic symbol=opposite sex=original sin=truth=fear of gardens=self-deception=poor sanitation habits=desire for death and return to Earth Mother=return to disco=hatred of mother=love of analyst but always waiting for someone to come along and say no=desire to live in a hole in the ground

Judy Garland=phallic symbol=fear of tornadoes=love/hate of sucking=confusion of identity=desire to have oral relations with a lap dog=necrophilia=fear of Easter bonnets=desire to be a woman=fear of bad breath=spiritual destitution=desire to be Dr. Kinsey=existential malfunction=fear of tubas=fear of dude ranches and desire to perform unnatural acts with MickeyRooney=fear of short people

Like a cancer, one sentence can devour your entire psyche.

If you say you had a hard time coming today and you don't have anything to say he'll call that resistance. If you say it isn't, he'll say that's more resistance. If you stop resisting, he'll call that passive-aggressive. If you tell him you've had it, you're tired of wasting time and money when you haven't even begun talking about homosexuality, he'll tell you your problems run even deeper than he initially realized and you need hospitalization.

Once you are hospitalized, the doctors will begin electric shock therapy. They call it therapy. There is no resistance. You are not sure who's getting the therapy, you or the sadistic maniacs who strap you down and wire you up and turn on the juice while they flash pictures of naked men on a screen. The idea is to associate pain and the fear of death by electrocution with naked men. Then a comforting female nurse unstraps you and wheels you, unconscious, back to your room where she slowly but surely revives you and stuffs a few pieces of stale toast and cold eggs down your gullet. This is supposed to turn you on to women.

If none of these cures work you will probably be thrown out of high school as a bad influence for all those guys who make you suck them off in the shower, then beat you up at the bus stop. If you still wish to remain homosexual, you will probably be arrested in the public library for browsing too long in the "SEXUALITY" section or during one of the periodic raids on a local gay bar or face charges for soliciting a cop who arrested you and forced you to give him a blow job while he played with his siren. In prison you will probably be gang raped by lusty straight men who are only acting out their healthy but stifled heterosexual impulses and if you are lucky one of them may even win you in a knife fight and protect you from the gang except when he trades you out for a night for a pack of cigarettes or a shot of heroin. Once you are released you will become an expert in American legal procedures as you face future charges of child molestation, murder and attempts to overthrow the common decency, whatever that is. When you have had it, and decide to hijack a jet and escape, you will discover the small but important fact that no nation under god or red offers asylum, political or otherwise, to a plane full of pansies. Your best bet is to fly over the Bermuda Triangle and click your little red pumps together whispering, "there's no place like home, there's no place like home."

In olden days the main cure for homosexuality (then often known simply as witchcraft) was to tie the suspected faggot to a tiny seat on the end of a long pole suspended over boiling water. The suspected faggot was then submerged for half an hour or until he stopped struggling, whichever happened first. If he was still alive when they lifted him from the vat, they spread an oil slick over the water, resubmerged the suspect and struck a match. If he went up in smoke, it meant he was a godless heathen faggot who deserved to go up in smoke. If a choir of angels emblazoned the sky and God, humming the Hallelujah chorus, personally pissed out the flames dancing around the suffocating faggot's body, he was allowed to return home if he promised to register four times daily with the local police and never get his hair cut in a place called a boutique.

So you see, liberalism has increased the life expectancy of fairies. That's because we've evolved into the world's wittiest, best groomed ballroom dancers. Everybody's into the Queen's vernacular, pierced ears, disco and poppers. So long as you seek your partner after dark in the mountains of Montana at least one hundred miles distant from the nearest living heterosexual and keep your meeting anonymous and under fifteen minutes with no visible body contact or non-contacting foreplay, you could not conceivably, even by the most homophobic, be considered or accused homosexual by anyone but the most adamant and intolerant straight person. Thanks to science it is now well known that homosexuality is not transmitted by tiny springing bugs or bats. We are not burned at the stake (except during ceremonial occasions of state for example only) in the larger urban centers today though we may still face a constant barrage of misdemeanors (nastier than a case of crabs) such as littering (i.e., don't drop your hankie in a city park), jay walking (i.e., no matter how cute the cop may be, don't wiggle your ass when you buzz across Connecticut Avenue during rush hour in the middle of a block waving you-whoo, you-whoo to your colorful friends) and loitering (i.e., situated under the romantic moon in an open park after dark behind willowy shade trees on your knees with a look of ecstasy on your face as he creams into your eager mouth is considered loitering among other things). Simple precautions will save you from a life of humiliation and all those long blank spots on your resume that you have to explain as time to get your head together or extended vacation or time I spent nursing my mother back to health when you were really fired for turning on a fellow office employee. In conclusion, there are no known cures for homosexuality. If something can survive Christianity, psychiatry, social ostracism, jail, earth, air, wind and fire, as well as the pink triangle and concentration camps, then there's nothing in this haven of an earth to reckon with it. To put it simply: where there are people there are faggots; where there are petunias there are pansies; where there are trolls there are fairies; where there are straights there are queers; where there are vegetables there are fruits; where you are I am by your side. I am the mirror of straightness. If the mirror breaks all images are lost. None of us know how we got here, for what reason we are here or why we are who we are. It is not obvious and a swish doesn't make me anymore obvious than the lack of one. Hatred is always self-hatred. Denial is always fear. I am made in your image. I am you.

James Everhard

AUTUMN DREAM

I love you so much I could tear the lightning apart piece by piece without knowing what love is: I do not have a father, I have a fear; I feel no guilt, I eat it: it is warm and lonely like vomit.

I have frozen my feelings, and now I want to thaw them out. After each orgasm I become cocky thinking I know everything revolves around the sun.

Torn between two worlds, I know only one can be real: it is a wild autumn night: the rain beats the heavy load of the leaves through the queer air one by one, and then it lets them go. I give you my seed.

Robert D. Zmuda

ANOTHER

It's true I was a dream like a shadow of remembrance on my

and if 'it was I will know that I that the he from

Darry

LOCATIONS

"the whole of it came
not at once"

the image
before yr body
moves
shadows in
to flesh
spreads
thickly
like a tongue
touching
a mouth

hot palms flat
against cheeks

dark hair curls moist
with sweat
on my lips
the tip of yr cock quivering
glossy solid
the hard stock thick
pulls my wet opening
mouth over it surrounding
breath sharp fast
embraces warm
to yr full tight balls

my head heavy moans
shift my tongue
between yr thighs licking
open leaves
my mouth
the gravity tugging around the rim
& in the tongue is lead

yr hands collapse
above my head returning

my lips slow silent
slip along the length
extending a
head gentle again
firm warm hands guide
solid yr cock soothing
slides back in
my mouth tight to the throat

stiff full groans rubbing
warm strokes my senses sheath
close at yr echoing thrusts
open my mouth thick
sucks hard you come

tight against numb solid
sound full

yr hands collapse above
my head returning
yr body
before the image
moves

Stephen St. James

REPEATER

delicious penis
delicious penis
delicious penis
tongues
in my mouth

delicious penis
delicious penis
delicious penis
lungs
in my mouth

I love to feel where
words come from
taste source form
force folded fresh
(with dents pits lesions
fissures, tissues)
skin socket
blush bulb
extended

I love to feel where
words come from

delicious penis
delicious penis
delicious penis
sings
in my mouth

delicious penis
delicious penis
delicious penis
comes
in my mouth

Charley Shively

MORNING SONG

My love, the heat has broken.
The birds, when they woke me, sang in a clearer heaven.
So that, before I opened my eyes even,
I knew the morning was already a changed one.

But there you lay, still angry in your sleep,
At whom, I continue to wonder, I admit,
Knotted in rage or, at the very least, discomfort,
On your side, your right hand a clamp confining the sheet.

Maybe the birdsong which called me to a new coolness
Will, when you wake and take in
That the floor will be fresh, the shadows again
Cool to your foot, cause you to step from fury into forgiveness.

Ralph Pomeroy

BLACK MARINE

We had gone to the Esplanade
where it was cool and currents
of the Charles glinted under blue
electrical advertising. You carried
flowers stolen that night from
the Victory Gardens. A thin
representation of queers prowled
the promenade. You liked the legs
of a rider on an English lightweight.
But he didn't come back. I had spotted
a black Marine. I liked the way he
seemed to have just returned from
the Asian jungle, fatigued in his
fatigues. He was practically dumb,
shell shocked I thought. You talked,
in your effortless way.

We took him to Joy Street. In the odd
little room we tried to open the convertible
sofa. He wouldn't say anything. The
mattress looked desperate. The spine
and rusted ribs underneath screamed.
He took off his shirt, his pants,
his shoes. There were no scars, no
tracks, and very little hair; his skin
was a uniform, matte black. He wore
sleek blue nylon boxers. He lay down
on the bent mattress. We were on either side.

We began to touch him as if examining an object
of great antiquity. He lay absolutely still,
frozen. There was no expression on his face.
We took off his shorts.
It was like unwrapping the Maltese falcon,
the fake one.
The sound of his breathing filled the room.

When he had gone, you marveled at his manners,
and went to sleep. I lay awake all night,
as in a billet, watching the gunfire
illuminate the sky.

Peter Barrett

for Rene

POEM

My
lover
tastes
of mountain snow
in bright
sun-
light.

Krag Rjirdal

BODYSOUNDS

My lover's body
is an ancient city
and whispers
of cypress groves
near the sea;
in a land of almost sleep
I hear in him
a distant music
of the lyre.

Krag Rjirdal

BORG
1976

LATIN AMERICA: MYTHS AND REALITIES

E.A. Lacey, the author of the following critical essay/review on Latin America and on *Now the Volcano: Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature*, is Canadian born. He is the author of three poetry collections: *The Forms of Loss* (1965), *Path of Snow* (1974) and *Later, Poems 1973-1978* (1979). His poems have also appeared in the two Gay Sunshine Press poetry anthologies and in *The Male Muse*.

E.A. Lacey has lived for many years in Latin America, particularly in Brazil where, for a while, he taught English to Juscelino Kubitschek, the Brazilian president deposed by the right-wing military putsch of 1964. He is currently travelling in North Africa.

A continent of myths. It seems difficult even for those born in Latin America to distinguish the myths concerning it from its realities. When, some two decades ago, it first began to enter my consciousness as a distinct and important region of the world and of the imagination, I became interested in the image of it conveyed by writers of the English-speaking countries, many of whom had first-hand knowledge, as residents or travellers, of the area they were describing. I do not refer to the popular image of Latin America, land of mañana, revolutions, generals, señoritas and bananas—though of course the two may overlap and share common features, and though popular stereotypes should also be carefully examined, as they often contain many elements of fact—but rather to the Latin America of Conrad, Graham Greene, Lowry, D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Hudson, Aldous Huxley, Conrad Aiken, Paul Bowles, Isherwood, etc.—right down to Joan Didion's latest. In the works of all these authors which dealt with the region, whether travel literature, fiction or autobiography, I detected a basic similarity of attitude. Latin America was seen as being—with that exasperating quality of paradox which inevitably creeps into our perception of the alien and unfamiliar—both magical and menacing, a beautiful, sinister fairyland where the usual rules of logic were suspended and anything good or bad might happen, and usually did. What happened in the end, though, had all the aura of ineluctable, predestined doom—the protagonist, whether a native or a well-intentioned foreigner, was usually destroyed. Nature, as surely as in any Thomas Hardy novel, in the form either of the green hell of the tropics and the jungle, or of human nature red in tooth and claw, or of the chaos and decay blooming, as it were sympathetically, within the hero's own mind and body, inexorably vanquished the valiant but weak individual who dared to challenge its immutable laws. Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* is probably the most perfect example and expression of this paranoid vision and of the hero's disintegration and defeat; the whiskey-priest of *The Power and The Glory* is almost as distinguished an exemplar as the doomed Consul; and others abound. I am quite aware that this kind of fiction has been set in other parts of the planet, notably Africa (where the names of Conrad, Greene and Bowles once again spring to mind), since what is sought is of course a physical environment which will correspond to the moral landscape which the author wishes to create: it is still significant that Latin America, like Africa, should be thought a suitable setting.

When I began reading Latin American fiction in the original, I realised that the Anglo-Saxon writer's image of the subcontinent did not differ substantially from the Latin American writer's own perception of the world he inhabited. From the early novels of the "green hell" school (*La Vorágine*, *Doña Barbara*) or the "gaucho school" (*Facundo*, the great narrative poem *Martín Fierro*, *Don Segundo Sombra*), through the "indigenist" literature of the 30's and early 40's (*El Mundo es Ancho y Ajeno*, *Huacapistun*, *Raza de Bronce*), to the "magic realism" of the 50's and 60's, the novels of Asturias, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Carpentier, Cortázar, Rulfo, Fuentes, Guimarães Rosa, Antonio Callado and many others (never forgetting the seminal and protean forefather, Borges), a Latin American world of magic and menace, of heroes inevitably destroyed or neutralised by an indifferent, blindly hostile, overwhelmingly luxuriant physical environment and by a cruel, oppressive socioeconomic environment, is almost monotonously reiterated.

Certainly this kind of world-view, whether expressed in Spanish, Portuguese or English, is the philosophical and literary descendant of 19th-century Darwinism and naturalism, though it is naturalism with a difference—the difference residing precisely in those "magical" qualities which distinguish the more lyrical Latin Americans such as García Márquez, Asturias and Cortázar from their grimmer European forebears. Certainly, also, this type of paranoid reaction toward the environment may well be a universal feature of literature created on the frontiers of human expansion; the "fortress mentality" often remarked on in North-American writing, the attitude toward nature of mingled delight and terror which Northrop Frye has found in Canadian literature and has baptised "cold pastoral", and similar qualities in Russian fiction and poetry all come to mind. The question is—is the Latin

America of everyday reality truly a *casa verde*, a green hell, a magical but all-corrupting, many-tentacled monster seeking, in country or city, to suck in and destroy the human individual at all costs? Is Latin America really that different from the basically Western-European Judaeo-Christian civilisation to which we belong? It is easy enough to comprehend how the vision of reality described above could arise among travellers and foreigners, in search of the exotic, attuned above all to surface impressions and observant of cultural differences rather than similarities, and just as easy to understand how it could develop among sensitive members of the intelligentsia of a region blessed or cursed with an exuberant and often uncontrollable natural environment, suffering from most known forms of poverty, misery, tyranny, injustice and economic disparity and plagued for centuries by the ruthless exploitation of both natural and human resources under a series of foreign and autochthonous imperialisms. But does this vision correspond to the Latin American reality?

It does not, at any rate, correspond to the *casa verde* which I encountered when I went to live in Latin America and which I slowly came to know and love (and sometimes hate). Much of the expected magic was there, and not a little of the menace fell to my lot, but in manageable proportions, as everywhere on this earth; and I clearly have not yet been defeated or destroyed by the subcontinent. Being by temperament much more a synthesist than an analyst, I naturally tend to emphasise the constants of humanity rather than its variables. One should never, of course, seek to minimise the differences between rich, developed, temperate-zone, Anglo-Saxon Protestant countries and poor, underdeveloped, tropical, Latin Roman Catholic ones. Clearly I discovered in Latin America not merely a host of strange shapes, colours, smells, sounds, tastes, and sensations in foods, flora, fauna, art, music, landscapes and even people (one's jaded 20th-century imagination is perhaps incompetent to grasp the enormity of the discovery of the New World for 15th- and 16th-century man; it was what the contact with a whole new populated planet would be for us today) but also a complete range of behavioural differences which I had not been able to anticipate. But the eternal human verities are pretty unchangeable, and I can truthfully state that not even in the highest Andes or in remotest backwaters of the Amazon regions did I at any time meet with a way of life or a body of customs not in some form already known or comprehensible to me. I found, moreover, amidst much that was strange, many things that were familiar: a unique mixture of what we are pleased to call primitive with what we presume to label civilised, a society, or family of societies, possessing deep Amerindian or African roots overlaid, or better intertwined, with an upper layer of European, particularly Iberian, cultural and social patterns and observances, many of these latter still or formerly practised in the basically European occidental civilisation of which I was a member. And this upper layer was, I found, not superficially imposed, found only in the large cities, melting away rapidly to reveal an utterly alien, non-Western reality beneath it, as many romantic native and foreign intellectuals liked or pretended to believe, but inextricably part of the composite Latin American personality: Latin America is simply not, except in pockets, either purely Indian or purely African (or purely European), but irremediably mestizo and mulatto, Indo- and Afro-European; and this mixed quality, this sense of inhabiting at the same time, or alternately, two different worlds, one quite modern and familiar, one ancient and rather alien, is to some of us its greatest challenge and charm (I oversimplify, perhaps; there is often in Latin America, besides a mediaeval or preColumbian Indian world, a mediaeval European world, coexisting with a modern occidental one, providing further richly rewarding opportunities for time-travel.)

The nations of Latin America are all, in intention at least, Christian occidental republics, with presidential governmental systems, US-style constitutions, laws based very often on the Napoleonic Code, an educated elite, a tripartite European class structure, large handsome cities (Latin America possesses some 25 cities with populations of over one million) and burgeoning industries. They also boast low *per capita* incomes, unchecked population growth, rural depopulation, urban overpopulation and decay, breakdown of essential social and physical services, high illiteracy rates and non-functional elitist educational systems, endemic urban and rural poverty, malnutrition and disease, inefficient transportation systems and unequal production and distribution of goods, shocking slums, rampant crime and un- or under-employment, universal political corruption, bloated bureaucracies, dictatorial military or demagogic populist governments, terrible social injustice, the use of torture and violence as an official state weapon of intimidation, lack of guarantees for basic human rights, terrorism of both right and left, frequent putsches and *coups d'état*, and, frequently, a Fascist ideology. With all these defects they are, nevertheless, in the end, part of our Western capitalist civilisation, not of

any other. Nor, despite their social problems and underdevelopment, are they particularly poor, comparatively and globally speaking; their difficulty is one of just distribution of their wealth, not of its existence; nearly all the Latin American countries are rich in mineral and agricultural resources. Despite having the world's highest rates of population growth, they are still, for their size, relatively underpopulated. National *per capita* incomes place most of them in a middle position, between the industrialised capitalist and communist economies of the world and the genuinely indigent countries of tropical Africa and Southern Asia; and the annual growth rates of their GNP are encouraging. In short, Latin America, taken as a whole, is a developing subcontinent, riddled with economic disparities but rich in resources, and not the "green hell" of the myth. The climate and ecology of Amazonia are no more inimical to human effort than are those of Siberia or Northern North America; Patagonia is fully as habitable as Scandinavia. Just as many people, proportionately, live in the upper Andes as in the Swiss and Italian Alps, and in the Chilean and Mexican deserts as in the US Southwest, or the Middle East. Latin America is no more sinister, no more uncivilised, no more dangerous to live or travel in than any other section of the underdeveloped world. Its revolutions are neither more ridiculous nor more bloody, its generals and dictatorships not more comic-opera nor more evil, than their counterparts elsewhere; most of them, in fact, profess American-style anti-communism and look to Southern European fascist and paternalist models. "Sinister" Latin America's way of life is much more familiar than unfamiliar and much closer to that of Europe and North America than is, say, that of China, Polynesia or the Arab civilisation. The temptation to falsify our vision of the subcontinent by viewing it through the lenses of conventional myths, whether popular or literary ones, should be resisted.

Another pitfall to be avoided is the generalising tendency to lump under one rubric a region of more than twenty different national communities, of surprising variety and diversity. Of course there exists in Latin America, as mentioned earlier, a certain cultural and institutional common core, as among the Latin nations of Europe; Roman Catholicism as official or majority religion; Spanish or Portuguese as official language; a Roman-Iberian pattern of city and town settlement and centralised government; a mediaeval land-holding and cultivation system; strong family structures and ties, basically patriarchal; strong regional loyalties; a certain sensuality and tolerance for sins of the flesh; a taste for *al fresco* living, etc., etc.; examples could be multiplied. But, contrary to popular legend, the nations comprising Latin America are no more similar one to another than are the nations of Europe or the Arab states, probably a good deal less so. Even the vaunted linguistic unity of Latin America is not particularly impressive; over 2000 separate non-Romance languages (snobbishly called "dialects" by the ethnocentric Iberians) are or were in the past spoken in the subcontinent. Even officially, Brazil and Haiti are linguistic islands, while some 75% of Bolivians and Paraguayans, approximately half the population of Peru, Ecuador and Guatemala, plus over five million Mexicans and sizeable minorities in most of the other countries, are speakers of a language other than Spanish. Racially, socially and culturally, the Europeanised, urbanised Argentines, Uruguayans and Chileans have much less in common with their Peruvian and Bolivian neighbours than with Spaniards and Italians. Afro-Portuguese Brazil, with half the area and population of South America, turns its back on the Latin American neighbours across its lengthy but completely unpopulated continental boundaries and recognises its closest kinship with Europe (Brazilians, in fact, disdain to be called "Latin-Americans" and reserve that designation for Hispanoamericans). Venezuela is similarly isolationist; the West Indian islands, divided by their differing past colonial regimes and by an insular mentality, have few close ties among themselves and almost none with their other Latin American neighbours; while Mexico, the most populous Spanish-speaking nation, is almost completely self-absorbed, in its distinctive mestizo and Indian cultures, and, like Brazil, eschews the appellation "Latin-American".

Though, politically speaking, the Latin American nations may put up a front of unity in international organisations such as the O.A.S. and the U.N., at home they are bitterly divided, hostile and suspicious of one another, with a legacy of four major, and many minor, post-independence wars (most involving important transfers of territory), and border disputes which complicate relations between almost all neighbours. High mountains, deserts, jungles and climatic extremes reinforce the lack of communication and the isolationism, and, aided by racial diversity, historical circumstances and varying patterns of settlement and economic development, produce, not only between but within nations, sharp cultural differences and strong local personalities, whereas in other cases the local cultures, such as the Quechua and Aymara civilisations of the Andean highlands or the various jungle Indian tribes of Western Amazonia, spill across national boundaries and render them meaningless.

Colombia, containing as it does within its limits most of the climates, landscapes and racial types of the world, may serve as a case in point. The Negro and mulatto peoples of its two tropical coasts resemble Brazilians and Antilleans, racially and culturally, more closely than they do the *cachacos*, the essentially Spanish and mestizo people of the cold Eastern Cordillera (who would doubtless feel their closest kinship to Spaniards, Argentines or Chileans). The Andean Indian people of the south are basically an ex-

tension of the Andean civilisation of Ecuador, with which they have their closest connections; the jungle and savannah Indians of the far south and east are part of the jungle and savannah cultures of Brazil and Venezuela; and the jungle Indians of the north have spilled over from Panama. Distinct from all these are the European and mulatto inhabitants of the rich tropical sugar-growing Cauca Valley, and the very individualistic *antioqueños* of the temperate, coffee-growing and industrial departments of Antioquia and Caldas, Andalusian in descent and nurtured in long isolation.

Such a diversity can be found within many of the Latin American countries, producing vigorous local cultures. Very often a keen rivalry, usually the heritage of 19th-century civil wars between centralists and federalists, exists between the official capital or major city and another large provincial city, and polarises cultural and racial differences. Thus we have, in Mexico, the decidedly white, European Guadalajara, and Monterrey, industrial and cultural capital of the white, *norteno* "cowboy" civilisation, pitted culturally, politically and economically against centralising, basically Indian Mexico City; León and Granada as the fierce rivals of Managua even in tiny Nicaragua; multi-cultural coastal liberal Guayaquil vs. Hispano-Indian conservative highland Quito in Ecuador; a somewhat similar rivalry between Lima and Arequipa in Peru; highland Aymara La Paz vs. lower-altitude Quechua Cochabamba vs. lowland Spanish Santa Cruz in Bolivia; autonomist, conservative Medellín and Cali vs. liberal Bogotá in Colombia; the vigorous opposition of Rosario and Córdoba to practically any political or economic measures of the Buenos Aires central government, in Argentina; and in Brazil, an uneasy quadrilateral of sometimes shared, sometimes conflicting power alternating among the four very dissimilar centres of Portuguese-Negro highland conservative Minas Gerais, mulatto multicultural coastal liberal Rio de Janeiro, European southern industrial liberal São Paulo and European southern agrarian conservative Rio Grande do Sul.

Across these interurban rivalries cuts a sharp cultural and behavioural division, notable in almost all Latin American countries, between lowland and highland peoples and between coastal peoples and those of the interior. For reasons ranging from a more clement climate, to easier living and working conditions, to different racial and geographic origins (the explanation often given, that the racially mixed Andalusians from warmer Southern Spain tended to settle in the warm coastal regions of Latin America, while the Castilians of the cooler central plateau settled in the more mountainous interior, though grossly oversimplified, probably has some overall validity; moreover, certain groups proved absolutely inadapted to certain conditions of climate and altitude: Andean Indians, for example, could not be acclimated by the Spaniards to the hot lowlands and coasts and so had to be left in the mountains to work mines and tend flocks; conversely, the African slaves imported could not adjust to mountain conditions and had to be placed on coastal and lowland plantations; non-Iberian European and other immigrants, meanwhile, in those countries—Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela—which experienced significant 19th- and 20th-century immigration movements, usually tended to settle near the coastal port of their arrival), to the cosmopolitan, multicultural ambience of port cities, the coastal and lowland people, particularly the former, tend to be significantly livelier and more expansive, more liberal in philosophy, more relaxed and pluralistic in their codes of behaviour, more racially mixed, and more sophisticated than people of the highlands and the interior. The highlands, in particular, seem to be bastions of conservatism in all respects. It is well, then, to keep in mind all these factors encouraging diversity among the nations and cultures of Latin America and to avoid considering it as anything resembling a monolithic whole or making blanket statements and generalisations based on any one of its cultural areas, which may not apply at all to other regions.

Gay people in our society also have their mythology concerning Latin America, a body of beliefs often quite contradictory among themselves and no less simplistic and fallacious than the misconceptions we have been examining: 1) There is, for example, the myth of machismo which sees Latin America as a continent of priapic, masklike, rock-hard Neanderthal males who beat their women, engender sons, obey a rigid code of behaviour which allows the expression of only negative emotions, terrorise queers and screw everyone, obeying, in Erskine Lane's words "the macho imperative, 'fuck'." In such societies, homosexuals will evidently be stigmatised and ostracised both legally and unofficially, and will be considered less than human, while every male, native or foreign, who shows any signs of traits at variance with those of a monolithically rigid macho will automatically be branded a queer. 2) Rather at odds with this concept is our specific version of the popular Latin-lover mystique: Latin, and hence Latin American, males are tender, romantic, ardent, sexy and well-endowed, and generally give anyone, male or female, a better time, both in bed and socially, than anyone else around. 3) Equally hard to square with the myth of machismo, and the belief, or knowledge, that Latin America is a set of puritanical, antilibertarian, rightwing military dictatorships, is the legend of Latin America, continent of sexual freedom, where sex of any kind can be had for the asking or for a nominal fee, at practically any time or place, without legal or age restrictions or the possibility of rejection, violence or other unpleasantness.

The growing popularity of Latin America as a gay vacation destination attests to the credibility and drawing power of these two latter misconceptions. 4) Finally, there is the enduring Romantic myth of the noble savage, the sexy primitive, be he Indian or Negro, whose emotions and reactions are pristine pure, and who restores the jaded Western sophisticate, weary of civilisation and seeking truth, to the wellsprings of life and feeling, usually with the aid of rather impressive sexual equipment and activity, arcane jungle lore and drug experiences and an isolated mediaeval or stone-age human community. Let us examine these four myths, or beliefs, in detail.

The macho is the product of his code. But codes, more or less rigid, govern all spheres of human activity, including the behaviour of patrons of leather bars and people who play at s. & m., and are nothing more than sets of rules of appropriate conduct, more or less strictly adhered to by those who play the game. The macho code involved here is merely that part referring to the role of the sexes of the ancient Hispanic code, derived ultimately from Arab civilisation, of "decorum", or seemingly behaviour. Only two roles are envisaged by the code, male and female; all human activity, sexual and social, must be stretched on that Procrustean bed. There is a prescribed way for both men and women to act, both sexually and socially. Sexually, man is the whole entity, and woman the incomplete one, whom it is man's duty (Latin Americans often conceive of their indiscriminate and promiscuous sexual activity as "duty") to make complete. But he makes her whole by possessing, penetrating, breaking her; and she then becomes the despised *la chingada*, the fucked one, the broken one. He is the breaker, she, the broken; he despises her precisely because she is broken and because she has allowed him to break her; to her incompleteness, as against his wholeness, she has added the quality of "brokenness". Further sociobiologically sound property rules incorporated in the code establish the macho's right to make whole and break as many women as possible and his exclusive ownership of the woman, once broken by him, as a valuable chattel which may be sexually used only by the owner, unless he chooses not to claim her, in which case she becomes an object of no value which may be used sexually by all. Socially, the qualities associated with the man emphasise hardness, invulnerability, activity and the

ability to attack or give, and those associated with the woman reflect softness, vulnerability passiveness and the capacity to accept and receive. No analysis of this infernal plan, *macho vs. la chingada*, for the war of the sexes—it is clearly seen as war—is more fruitful and perceptive than Octavio Paz's discussion of its specifically Mexican but actually universally Latin American—and perhaps universal—implications in *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, to which I refer the reader.

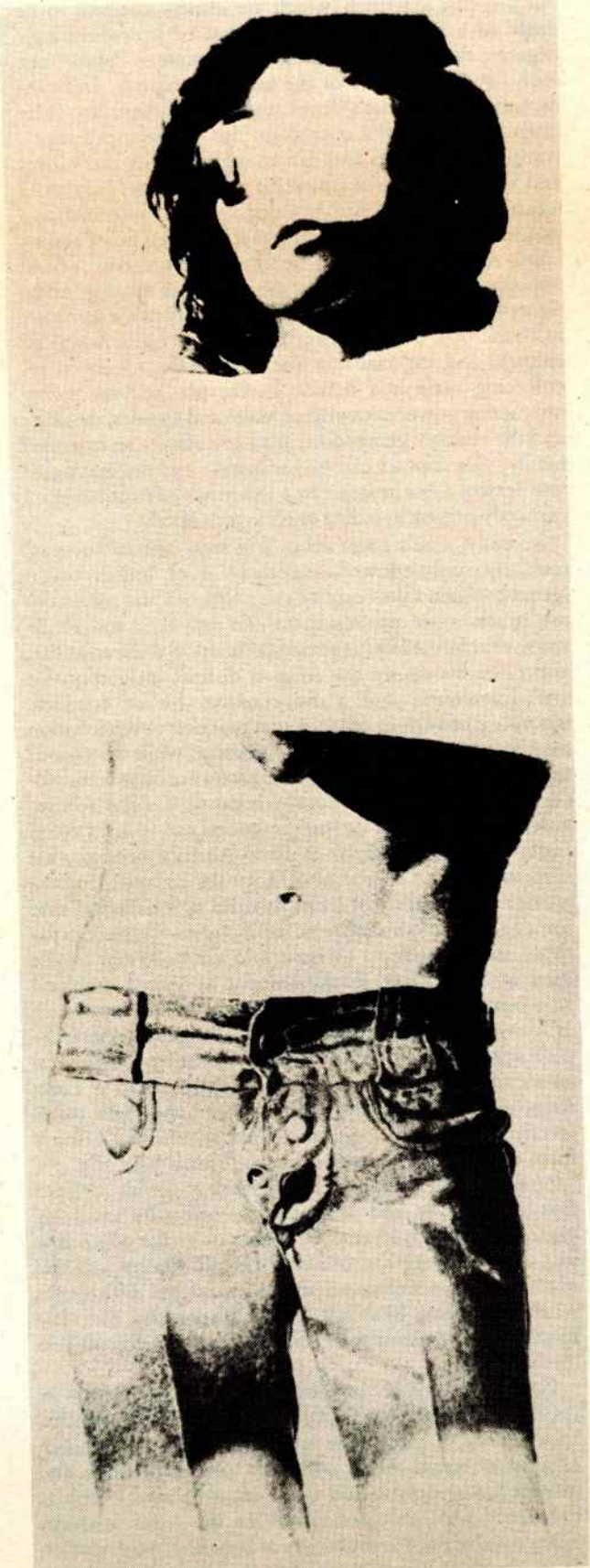
There is obviously no role for the homosexual in this code, and thus no suitable behaviour for him. Is he biologically a male? Then he must act like a man, sexually and socially. If, defying the biological evidence, he insists on considering himself a woman, then he *must* behave, sexually and socially, like a woman (hence the Latin American acceptance, and even approval, of the drag queen, and the frequent insistence, on the part of the Latin American macho in his private dealings with homosexuals, that the homosexual partner "act like a woman"); no other possibilities can be imagined, and bisexuality and "switchability" are unheard-of heresies. But—and this stipulation is very important—the proposition can be partly inverted: if the homosexual acts socially, in public, like a man, then he is a man and will be treated as such, whatever he may do sexually in private—that is his own business; similarly, if he acts socially like a woman (i.e., softly, effeminately, whatever he may do sexually), he is, and will be treated like, a woman.

For, in keeping with the importance accorded to proper behaviour, in all countries heir to the Hispano-Arabic tradition, "honour" and "dishonour" are governed, not by one's own conscience but by external public opinion (a concept alien to the inner-directed Anglo-Saxon with his individualistic Protestant conscience, but quite reconcilable with Roman Catholicism); the macho is dishonoured if he or the woman he owns, whose exclusive sexual use he enjoys, is suspected of sexual behaviour in violation of the code, *even if such behaviour has not occurred*; he is not necessarily dishonoured by the actual commission of these acts, so long as they do not come to public knowledge.

More synoptically (if less accurately, since human behaviour cannot be thus compartmentalised), we may conceive of the code of machismo as being in actuality two codes; one, public, governing social activity (man-woman); the second, private, governing sexual acts (male-female). The former will be described as having precedence over the latter; accordingly, appropriate behaviour under the public code will excuse inappropriate behaviour under the private (but not vice versa), so long as the public-private stipulation is not violated, and the inappropriate behaviour against the latter code does not become public knowledge and thus part of social activity. In other words, so long as you act a man, it's not so important to be a male, and, in truth, I think, during my years in Latin America, I've heard the words "hombre" or "homem" and "hombria" banded about more in discussions of this topic than the words "macho" or "machão" and "machismo" (which have become more an obsession of our Anglo-Saxon society than of Latin Americans of whatever sexual persuasion).

This state of affairs, at all events, gives rise to the well-known "discretion" (which we call "hypocrisy") of Latin Americans in sexual matters, (though, naturally, gossip, tale-bearing, slander, blackmail, and more-or-less innocent, more-or-less truthful peer-group boasting exist in this as in any society). If the Latin American macho is assured of one's silence and one's proper social behaviour in public in his presence, if one has become his friend and truly earned his trust, if one is a mere passing acquaintance or tourist whom he is unlikely to see again, one may be surprised by his cooperation and willingness to experiment and reciprocate in bed. He too may be relieved to be freed, if only temporarily, from the restrictions and pressures of the code. (Public exposure, however, may have dire consequences for the exposé.) A further result of the code's rigidity is that, so long as the macho is the breaker, the penetrator, the sexual enjoyer, it does not particularly matter what or whom he penetrates; he has usually no consciousness (and hence no guilt) of having participated in a homosexual act by taking the "active" role in sexual relations with another male. Homosexual, that is, female acts are by definition not acts performed with another male, but acts of being penetrated, of receiving; "male" and "female" are for the code's purposes simply roles.

Of course the code is a double standard, exploitative and distortive of human relations, encouraging social hypocrisy and the oppression of gays and women. I should like to make a few timid points in exculpation of it. First, like all Latin American institutions, it is more flexible and tolerant in practice than in theory or description. Exceptions and personal interpretations bound: Latin Americans are past masters in ignoring what they do not choose to see or comply with and in "laws that are obeyed but not enforced." Behind the roles and rules are, after all, fellow human beings. Second, the role of women is not quite so abject or brutalised as one might anticipate; certainly the treatment and status of women are far more advanced in Latin America than in the Arab nations. Islam, after all, possesses no Virgin Mary, and Latin America does not have any formally recognised institutions such as purdah and harems (though practices reminiscent of these still linger, certainly, and though unjust marital and property-holding laws discriminate against the married woman in many Latin American legal codes), or Islam's easy divorce laws (Brazil only last year recognised a limited right of divorce, Colombia only a few years ago). Hispanic nations are at best pseudo-patriarchies, and the Latin American wife and mother, operating under a somewhat different family structure from the Arab one, have at their disposal a



"Blue Jeans", Etching (1974)
by Miguel Angel Rojas (Colombia)

Photo © by Oscar Monsalve

whole set of cultural and emotional manipulative devices to control straying husbands and sons.

The Roman Catholic Church has an important role in this positive evaluation of the woman, though only the woman as mother, in line with the importance it attaches to the family as the primary institution through which it perpetuates and extends its domination. Church-approved Mariolatry and mother-worship go hand in hand, and are particularly oppressive in very Catholic Mexico, under the aegis of Tonantzín, the Virgin of Guadalupe; and many a traveller has remarked on the extraordinary and seemingly hypocritical fervour with which Latin Americans celebrate Mother's Day. Octavio Paz has rather acid comments on these observances, which he considers as being merely the reverse side of the dishonour and contumely heaped on woman in her role as *la chingada*—since every mother is by definition a *chingada*, as popular insult makes clear—and as devices for perpetuation of its power by the ruling patriarchy.

I of course do not attempt to claim that anything like equality or even a European level of emancipation exists for women in Latin America. Obviously, women of the urban upper-middle and upper classes, especially those with professional training, are freest, and I have the impression that the most liberated women are to be found in Chile and in the larger cities of Brazil. Brazilian machismo is less virulent, or at least, like most Brazilian beliefs, is more lightly held than in Spanish America. Interesting studies could be made of the seemingly much more equal status of women in many Indian communities, such as the Aymara civilisation of highland Bolivia and the well-known Zapotec matriarchy of Oaxaca; in such communities, as indeed in many Latin American peasant communities, the women completely control the markets and thus the pursestrings of the society.

A third point to be made is that the code does have some positive values; it encourages not merely aggression, competition, ruthlessness, cruelty, jealousy and insensitivity but generosity (non-sexual giving) and protection of the weak and helpless (noblesse oblige), loyalty to friends (male bonding, a definite element in Greek homosexuality; many observers have noted the intensity, the latent homosexuality in Latin American male friendship and in such typically Latin American institutions as the all-male cantina) and such useful and admirable qualities as courage and stoicism. As regards emotional expressiveness or lack of it in machos, the almost manic-depressive capacity of the Latin American male for joy and sorrow (weeping is not considered in the least unmanly, on an appropriate occasion), for celebration and mourning, are too well known to need comment. Fourth, it tends to be overlooked that, however crudely, however dualistically, the macho code does at least celebrate sex and encourage the expression of at least some manifestations of human sexuality. By proclaiming the goodness and enjoyableness, not the guilt, criminality and sinfulness of sex, by spurring the human male on to almost indiscriminate sexual activity at as early an age as possible, it practically ensures, given the watchful care with which young Latin American females are segregated, secluded and supervised and the premium placed by society on their reaching marriage in a state of virginity, that some youthful male homosexual experimentation will occur, and, at least in these early stages, does not condemn it or try to "cure" it, indeed, refuses to take it seriously at all. The basic attitude of the code toward homosexuality would, in fact, seem to be of refusing to take it seriously, considering it only a matter for joking. Not the ideal sexual education of youth, of course, but how preferable to the hellish Puritan repression of all sexual expression and its stigmatisation as dirty, sick, sinful and criminal, in the milieu in which the Anglo-Saxon child and adolescent still too often learns to define himself! I shall deal a little further on with the legal and social status of the homosexual, and of homosexuality, in a macho society.

The "Latin lover" is only the macho stood on his head, and admired for precisely those qualities for which we have heretofore condemned him, or, if you will, considered in his positive rather than his negative aspects, the principal component of the "myth" being that unmentionable in liberal circles, the unconfessable attraction he exerts, with his wholeness, his rock-like image, on the gay psyche; an attraction which—be it atavism, masochism or mere phallic worship—is as undeniable as it is disturbing, and as undiscussed as it is deserving of discussion in serious gay journals (it is a common enough theme in gay poetry and fiction, but is seldom there analysed), for what the discussion could teach us concerning our own self-image, the real reasons (not merely the political ones) for our desire to relegate to outer darkness certain embarrassing or outlaw gay types, our recent swing away from 60's androgyny to emulation of straight male fashion and dress, and a whole set of phenomena connected with s. & m. and leather. Be that as it may, yes, the Latin American lover tends to be warm, or hot, and affectionate—his culture, not his genes, predisposes him that way—and to the serious wooing of even the *maricón*, the *veado*, he transfers some of the romantic attributes traditionally associated with his courtship role and the techniques which have proved useful or irresistible in dealing with women, the conquest (and subsequent quasi-ownership) of a homosexual not being very much different, to his mentality, from that of a woman; one may accordingly expect all the pleasurable or unpleasant manifestations of jealousy, protectiveness, and territoriality (plus restrictions on public manifestations of one's gay sensibility and certainly of one's sexual proclivities), which a woman in such a situation would be the object of and would be expected to submit to. If this is what turns one on, fine, and

I should note again that the Latin American male attaches a really very high value to friendship and affection, so that, if one accepts these limitations, one is often rewarded with a firm, lasting friendship which may be much more than sexual.

It just as likely, however, that one's Latin lover's behaviour will seem irrational and inconsistent, torn as he will be between two sets of inclinations: the desire to show one off in public as his possession, especially if one is a prized "foreign" catch and one is likely to be able to advance his career and financial and social status, either locally or abroad, and the desire to protect his manly image; in such cases, of course, the homosexual partner bears the brunt of the macho's indecisiveness and his internal confusion. Considering the economic realities of Latin America, it is equally likely, indeed almost certain, that one will end up paying some financial price—in the form of "presents", travel, loans that can hardly be refused, sponsorship of the Latin American and even of members of his family in one's country of origin, etc.—which at first might not have been anticipated by the more unwary, especially since the Latin American (not the street hustler of the lower classes, of course, who is usually as immediately commercially motivated and as frank in completing the financial aspect of his dealings as a hustler anywhere) is often surprisingly delicate (i.e., hypocritical) in monetary matters, and may even prefer not to discuss them at first, above all, in public; know, however, that his macho pride will not be offended by accepting money from one (though it will always be a "gift" or a "loan"), being paid for (with his friends; it will after all give him status to be able to invite them) by one in public, though he will sometimes request that the money be deposited with him or slipped to him under the table, so that he may seem to pay the bill, etc. etc. *ad nauseam*. He will usually, unless one is flagrantly queenly—and of course it should be remembered that, in any culture, foreigners are expected to be somewhat insane and aberrant in both public and private behaviour, so that a certain amount of "oddness" will be permitted and indeed found piquant—if the "affair" is serious, insist on introducing one to what may be a very numerous extended family, and one can count then on the delights of family dinners and parties, long *têtes à tête* with his parents and uncles and brothers, embarrassingly frank and sometimes *risqué* questioning and prodding about one's sexual activities (which are always assumed to be those of a macho, even in the face of overwhelmingly negative evidence), matchmaking attempts to "place" one with female members of the family or friends, and even demands from one's lover that one submit to these attempts and feign a courtship, "for appearance's sake", complete with dates and dances together with one's lover and his *novia*—for of course he will have one. Foreigners are considered, in Latin America, to be sexually innocent and somehow harmless, whereas it is a fixed belief among Latin Americans that a macho cannot resist his sexual impulses, nor a woman, a macho, hence the ubiquity of the figure of the chaperone, and the popularity of the foreigner as chaperone. If one is really interested in Latin American culture, and especially in the role of the family in reinforcing male and female stereotypes and the subtly interacting power networks of males and females, the older and the younger generation, in a Latin American extended family, this contact can be invaluable and fascinating; if one prefers a less intimate or a less involved relationship, I earnestly suggest avoiding one's lover's family.

Sexually, one's Latin lover will tend not to be spectacularly well-endowed, especially if of Indian origin (genetics again takes care of this; Negroes and mulattoes are much more promising in this respect), and to be somewhat limited in his sexual preferences and versatility, with, like his cousin the Arab, a distinct inclination for anal intercourse and a disinclination for or complete ignorance of various other sexual practices: even fellation may be regarded as improper or amusing, while the various practices connected with s. & m. games are often unheard-of, or considered anatomically impossible. (The relative absence of both s. & m. practices and conventional commercial pornography in Latin America is somewhat surprising, but I don't think it speaks so much for the greater sexual sanity of Latin America as for the fact that some sadistic and masochistic components—I speak in the ritual sense—seem to be built into the male and female roles in this society, as the amount of almost ritualised wife-beating and general abuse of women in countries such as Mexico would surely suggest. At all events, society, the code and a Latin lover will ensure that any psychological masochistic gets his full quota of satisfaction in Latin America.) He will tend to attach more importance to his erective than to his orgasmic capacity, erection being a form of "hardness" and orgasm of "penis-breaking", or "softness", and will thus have recourse to a wide range of folk restoratives and aphrodisiacs, especially involving eggs and seafood; he may be victim of myths which link loss of semen with loss of manliness and vitality, and will accordingly practice coitus interruptus, feign difficulty in reaching orgasm, limit his number of orgasms, etc. (The Brazilians are a pleasant and un-self-conscious exception in this regard.)

He will be almost completely free of that curse of our society, ageism; this is not surprising in patriarchal societies where a premium is placed on age, parenthood, experience, social status, education and connections, and in which the younger and more disadvantaged members habitually seek an older *patrón* or *jefe*—this tendency being notable both in the society at large and in the smaller, more clandestine gay "brotherhood". Above all, one senses with relief in Latin America, age doesn't really matter: there is much more fraternising, in all circles, among people

of different ages; the macho will, within certain limits, take on anything or anybody; the young adolescent seeks love, guidance and work; the hustler needs to make a peso more urgently than his North American counterpart ever will; and, with that greater sense of realism displayed in all third-world societies, where there is neither a way nor a means to block off the truths of life by shunting the aged into rest homes and segregating the young in their ghettos and their "youth culture", everyone has sufficient experience of living with old people, and watching others grow old, and thus the process excites less fear and aversion: even the most radiant young man accepts old age as a fact of life and the common fate of mankind. The gay person who is attracted to Latin Americans soon become similarly unselective in age matters—one aspect, I truly believe, in which Latin American gay society is healthier than our own, whatever our sophistication.

The degree of sexual and social freedom enjoyed by gay Latin Americans and by the gay traveller in Latin America is not the same; the matter is further complicated by the aforementioned diversity of Latin American societies within one general cultural framework and by the difference between legal codes and social attitudes—and, often, the difference between legal codes and police and military attitudes, in a region where the police and military exercise great, if sometimes unofficial, power.

Politically, first, one should emphasise strongly, without in any way condoning or defending military regimes of force, that to the Latin American macho military mind, homosexual practices are not a threat but rather are regarded as an amusing foible, since, as I've stated early, homosexuality is not taken seriously. Gay activism, on the other hand, with its accompanying publications, its emphasis on the written word, which Latin Americans take very seriously indeed, and its usually concomitant political libertarianism, could be considered a threat and would be regarded very gravely. With few exceptions, whatever their political colour, Latin American regimes consider sexual behaviour and expression to fall in the private domain, and so long as the public requisites of "decorum" are satisfied, no government, however rightwing and authoritarian, will attempt to restrict or legislate in that sector. This does not mean that civil rights, including public behaviour and expression, are not often seriously limited, but gays are rarely singled out as an express target or for special attack during these general crackdowns on "immorality", "Communist influences" (or, in Cuba, "bourgeois Western ones"), "decadence", etc. If gays with beards, long hair and hippie-style clothing are jailed or molested, it is because everyone with similar attire is being similarly treated. If the majority of Argentine activist gays suffered persecution after the coup which overthrew Isabel Perón in 1976, for example, it is because the government was rightist and most of them were leftists, and they suffered no more, in proportion, than leftist activists in general. A similar statement could be made about events in Chile after the putsch against Salvador Allende and his Popular Front: despite allegations, no wholesale pattern of a gay pogrom can be detected, though isolated incidents of intolerance, brutality and vengeance certainly occurred in the general pattern of a bloody civil war. Episodes like the attempt by the sinister *éminence grise* of Argentine politics under Isabel Perón, López Rega, to rouse Argentine fascists against gays reported in an earlier issue of *Gay Sunshine* are very rare—and in this context it might be noted that Peronism, like its parent, Mussolini-style fascism, was always identified with anti-gay postures, and that, toward the end of his first dictatorship, in 1954-55 Juan Perón had already inveighed and discriminated against homosexuality. The deplorable Cuban situation, where it is not the traditional machismo and militarism but Communist puritanism, statism and reformist fanaticism that are the culprits, is obviously a special case, though it might be maliciously described as overcompensation; the importance of "decorum", incidentally, even in Cuba, is illustrated by the fact that the recent reforms to the Cuban criminal code provide harshest penalties not for homosexual acts but for "overt homosexual behaviour."

None of this is to deny, of course, that in any dictatorship, military or other, where the power structure is hierarchical and an attack on any member of it is perceived as an attack on the whole hierarchy, individual abuses may occur practically unchecked, and individual fanatics or criminals may indulge with impunity in private vendettas or crusades—even within the relatively mild Brazilian military government. Obviously all rights, including gay rights, are better safeguarded under democratic regimes, and it is no mystery why Argentine gays, for example, saw their only respite from harassment in the brief, democratic Illia and Cámpora governments, and Brazilians prospered under the democratic rule of ex-President Kubitschek. But, again, how many Latin American "democracies" are real democracies, and not mere oligarchic fronts for military control? Even in military-controlled governments, "discreet", closeted Latin American gays often reach relatively high office: these include, to my knowledge, recent presidents of Colombia and Chile, an important Brazilian finance minister and "kingmaker", and at least one Latin American cardinal.

Legally, the situation is not so mediaeval: most of the Latin American nations have criminal codes based on the Napoleonic Code, legalizing all consenting sexual activity between adults—usually of the age of 18, or 16, and over, though Latin Americans complicate this latter point in actual practice by counting their age from birth, rather than from their first birthday—a 17-year-old boy, for example, considers himself 18 from his seventeenth birthday on, because he has "completed 17 years". Sexual relations with non-adults are governed, as elsewhere, by a

range of fines and prison terms, depending on age and circumstance, but which, from a strictly impressionistic point of view, I would say tend to be much less severe than those prevailing in Anglo-Saxon countries. And, besides such umbrella guarantees as the one that no group may be persecuted for its beliefs, or intimidated, that is all Latin American constitutions and law codes usually have to say about us. Some countries, like Ecuador, retain pre-Napoleonic legislation defining homosexual activity as a misdemeanour or felony; others, like Colombia, seem to be perpetually revising their laws without ever enacting or enforcing anything, often because of practical factors like church opposition to decriminalisation or liberalisation. It should be noted that in many Latin American countries—Argentina and México are perhaps the most flagrant examples—the relatively laissez-faire attitude of the legal code is contradicted by vindictive, oppressive local police regulations (often most severely enforced in the largest cities: Buenos Aires and Mexico City are well-known for vicious police vigilance and suppression of gay and straight sexual activity), which often forbid loitering, solicitation, wearing of drag, male and female prostitution, and such vaguely and dangerously defined activities as “association for illicit purposes” or “being in the company of a minor” (for those already convicted of morals offences, even if the minor concerned is a blood relative). Though these regulations would seem, in constitutional terms, to be illegal, they often take precedence; it is obvious to what nefarious use they can be put.

One more important practical point should be added; if, as is I think the case, in Latin America gays seem to get more lenient police and court treatment than in Anglo-Saxon countries, charges often being reduced or dismissed against them, and matters settled with mere fines, this is not necessarily due to the greater humanitarianism and tolerance of either Latin American laws or law-enforcers, but rather to the corruption and venality of both police and court officials, who are usually ill-paid and who subsist by means of bribes. Whatever the offence, “fines” and “gratifications”, judiciously applied, usually have surprising efficacy, and a good Latin American lawyer can work virtual legal miracles. Influence, social standing, and good manners help too, obviously, in such cases, as does the very fact of being a tourist; Latin American legal officials are not particularly anxious to have difficulties with intruding consular officers, or to be accused of sabotaging national tourist industries. The converse of course applies—one may encounter a xenophobic official, and a tourist is just as likely to be blackmailed for crimes he didn’t commit, or for acts which are legally not crimes at all; in these cases, it is wise not to assert rights and legal expertise, as Latin Americans do not like to lose face with foreigners. All these are among the dubious charms of most underdeveloped countries, and obviously there are arguments on both sides of the question.

All considered, it seems to me that the Latin America I encountered some two decades ago permitted, legally and socially, a degree of sexual liberty which I had not then found in North America, and would have been unlikely to find outside such cities as New York and San Francisco. Certainly it was a distinct improvement on the Jansenist Puritan environment in which I had grown up or its US Calvinist counterpart. Younger gays may simply not realise how legally and socially repressive Anglo-Saxon America was during the late 50’s and early 60’s; Latin America, in contrast, at that time, seemed an oasis of liberty, at least as liberated as Europe, and, as I have stated earlier and reiterate forcefully, a society that permits and regards as good some sexual expression, however limited, is better than one which permits none; I’d even say a society in which the homosexual is mocked and his sexual activity considered ridiculous is far preferable to one in which he is taken too seriously and his activity considered criminal and sinful. Enamoured as I was at the time of every non-Anglo-Saxon attitude, being young, naive and uncritical, I failed of course to understand Helder Câmara’s dictum that there is no freedom without economic freedom, and failed to see how much that relative “liberty” was a function of male power and of poverty, and how limited it was to the macho and the affluent, including the tourist. What charmed me then, what chills me now and turns all thought of any but the briefest and most monetarily-based relationship with Latin American youths repellent to me, was what still delights the tourist first visiting Latin America—the army, as in all third-world countries, of willing, able, even aggressive young men prepared to do much, if not all, to please one, for money or love. Balm to a timid soul. Some of these youths are gay, some do fall in love with one, some simply love sex, but even in the most noncommercial (seemingly) and affective relations with a Latin American boy, in that subcontinent of liberty, observe the familiar recurring pattern of the search for a *patrón*, the hopes pinned on one. Even the impecunious foreign student or wandering hippie becomes the key that might unlock all the doors in the world, and help a boy escape the misery and, above all, the absolute hopelessness and immobilism of his present situation. Whatever one’s social, financial and cultural situation, it is usually beyond the boy’s wildest dreams; one represents the breakthrough to another social level, another life, another country. Cruellest of deceptions. “Take me with you”—the saddest of phrases. Of course one can’t take then with one—all of them or even one. But they don’t know that, and neither does one, at first. Books like *Some Boys*, however well and lovingly written and whatever tenderness is apparent in them, are then in that sense records of exploitation; in the first flush of delight over the sexual choice available to one in Latin America or elsewhere, one should always remember the economic factors producing that abundance of choice.

Twenty years after my first contact with Latin America, of course, the tables are turned and the US, at least, is far more liberated, relatively, than Latin America, which has not experienced, and may never experience, a Stonewall, a gay revolution or an organised gay activist movement, let alone orgy bars, sex shows or sex shops—“decorum” will see to that. There are several reasons for this lack of momentum. The lack, obviously, of overt, or even covert discrimination against “discreet” gays, in most Latin American countries, in their professions (including teaching and other posts involving contact with the young), in housing and in public means that there is a corresponding lack of pressure for gay rights, protective legislation and the formation of gay organisations and publications. Even if such pressure existed, it is unthinkable that the kind of regime generally existing in the subcontinent would countenance any expression, even verbal, of such a potentially explosive and subversive ideology as leftist-oriented, libertarian gay activism. Even in relatively sophisticated (though not liberal) and westernised Argentina and México, attempts to organise and issue periodicals by concerned gays have met with considerable official opposition and discouragement, though similar efforts in more easy-going Brazil have had some success—the Rio-based cultural journal *Lampião* attesting to that. Puerto Rico, benefiting from the protection of the US legal system and constitution, must be left out of this discussion.

Another factor is that Latin Americans, because of their cultural individualism and the relatively loosely structured nature of their whole society, are poor joiners and organisers; Latin American gay groups, like all Latin American quasi-political organisations, will prove to be hard to form, and, once formed, subject to being riven by centrifugal forces. The profound political apathy, the “*qué sé yo*”, “no me meto” attitude produced even in educated circles by generations of political corruption and tyranny in many of the larger nations, should also be mentioned as a source of this lack of faith and interest in organised activity. And the subtle forms of persuasion and oppression practised by the family and the church are matters of attitude which it is very difficult to take up arms against. Constraints are sociomoral ones. The struggle of gay people will take a long time here because... we have no special laws to fight against. Our battle is against moral attitudes, which are harder to recognise,” says, in a recent issue of *The Body Politic*, the Italian activist Angelo Pezzano, describing an analogous situation. A “Letter from Argentina” published in an earlier number of *Gay Sunshine* speaks similarly: “There are no laws against us, but there are social attitudes which are often used as levers for blackmail.” Basically, Latin America is a deeply conservative continent, including Cuba and even Brazil, where the same structures and strictures exist as elsewhere, but are more lightly interpreted and more easily altered. This conservatism reposes on the obvious bases of a traditional land-owning oligarchy, a traditional impoverished peasantry, suspicious of change and set in its customs, an illiterate and oppressed urban proletariat, a growing but small middle class, an intellectual elite which tends to migrate in search of freedom or to become sclerosed at home, nouveaux riches clawing for a position in the power structure, church, family, the military and foreign imperialism.

For the homosexual who submits to the dictates of this society, above all its code of decorum and respect for appearances and for community opinion, and limits his social behaviour accordingly, there are compensations, and the pressures are not unbearable, especially if one is of a middle- or upper-class background and fairly well-off financially. The members of one’s family may “know” or suspect (just as one will “know” about one’s husband’s or father’s mistress and “*familia chica*” or “*segundo frente*”, an institution of Latin American society, without ever commenting on them) but decorum, even in the intimacy of family matters, will prevent their ever mentioning anything, except by indirection. One is spared the traumas of coming out publicly (only amongst one’s kind), of telling one’s parents (they won’t, and won’t want to, know or understand), hence of breaking with family (one will, even as a young adult, continue to live at home, renting a *garçonnière* or the cheap hotel and other rooms which abound in Latin American cities, for one’s sexual purposes, until and even after one marries, as, in this context, one often will), of leaving the church (a Latin American male, after puberty, need pay only lip service to the church, rarely entering it except for purely ceremonial occasions such as baptisms, weddings and funerals), of telling one’s colleagues and superiors and possibly losing one’s position (they already “know”, but, again, decorum and hypocrisy intervene, and, at all events, in a society based on influence and patronage, jobs are not obtained, held or lost by merit or on moral grounds, and no one can be lightly insulted, slighted or dismissed). Family friends, political allies, and older lovers, mentors and members of the gay brotherhood will, in the traditional Latin role of patrons, aid one on the road to professional success, just as one will, later, play the patron to younger men. Meanwhile, one has all the sexual license and legal impunity that a closeted society, “decorum” and a culture of poverty can permit and provide, which is often a great deal, though the US has recently made giant strides to catch up with Latin America in the matter of promiscuity.

Except in the larger cities of the most liberated countries (mostly in Brazil and Colombia, the two most liberal in their unofficial attitudes), one will not have access to the extensive number of gay bars and baths found in US and European cities. This lack is often one of the first complaints of the tourist visiting Latin America, who is

unaware of 1) the function and abundance, in societies where the sexes are still very much socially segregated and frequentation of many places of amusement is forbidden to women or possible only for prostitutes, of all-male institutions such as the bar-cantina and the club, as surrogates for the gay bar—see the article by Carrier on homosexual activity in Guadalajara, Mexico in *Gay Sunshine* No. 26/7; 2) the generally more mixed, unstructured, less separatist nature of Latin American male society in general, and the resultant fact that sexual contacts are possible, if, again, “discreet”, in almost any public place, be it bar, restaurant, cinema or city square, and that some homosexual activity goes on in most saunas in large cities, though decorous and frequently disconcertingly concurrent with use of the saunas for non-sexual hygienic and recreational purposes by straight patrons. Similarly, the visitor from our separatist, overstructured society is often unaware, in the absence of overt signals—apart from the most screamingly obvious—in the form of strategically placed handkerchiefs, keychains, earrings, etc., with what consummate ease communication is made, conventionally, by ocular interaction in Latin America—what Salvador Novo calls “the oblique world of those who understand each other with sidewise glances,” and these, where they exist, will sometimes be either semi-private clubs, with entry by invitation or influence only or rather dangerous, semi-clandestine underworld haunts; in all, whether respectable or not, decorum and the generally less sexually adventurous nature of Latin Americans will tend to impose severe limitations on same-sex dancing and other public intimacies, as well as a lack of specialisation in the bars’ clientele. In recompense, however, a network of private friendships—“the anonymous sodality”, in Novo’s words—will provide one contacts with society’s most desirable and delectable young males who for financial, social or sexual reasons are amenable, usually at private parties (the party plays as important a role in middle- and upper-class Latin American gay life as it did in pre-liberation gay life in the US), and the inevitable prostitution of lower-class males in street and bar, for the same reasons, will supply the rest. The older and richer one becomes, of course, the more open one can permit one’s behaviour to become; aged Latin American queens may seem almost liberated. All this social acceptance and economic and legal security are naturally very beguiling, and the agents of gentle oppression know how to reconcile one even to a loveless cosmetic marriage and unwanted children. One’s integrity? Do not Latin America’s closet gays stifle in this atmosphere of hypocrisy and concealment and long for freedom and honesty? Perhaps not: they have grown up with decorum and machismo and by the time they reach adulthood no doubt the need for subterfuge and pretence seems as natural to them and is as embedded in their conduct as the law of gravity. For whatever oppression, social and psychological, Latin American middle-class homosexuals on occasion may be victims of, they would seem to have themselves in part to blame; their social and political attitudes are frequently as reactionary and irresponsible as those of apolitical “50’s queens” in the US—naturally enough, since they are among society’s “have’s”, rather than its “have not’s.”

As for the “have not’s” who happen to be born gay, they share the same misfortunes as all the others who happen to be poor, and their only fulfilment, or destiny, unless extremely fortunate, beautiful or talented, is certain specialised professions, as elsewhere, such as hairdressing and decorating or male prostitution, of varying degrees of respectability, from the status of gigolos and kept boys through street prostitution and pimping to the opprobrium of red-light districts. Red-light districts, tellingly called “zones of tolerance”, which are found, whether officially or unofficially organised and recognised, in most Latin American towns and cities, are significantly connected with the activities of lower-class effeminate homosexuals, drag queens and all those gays of any social class who refuse to be closeted or to conform, even partially, with the code of decorum (except, perhaps, the very wealthiest). There, outlaws, despised and rejected by society and often subjected to the same intolerable legal status as female prostitutes—identification cards, regular medical examinations, restrictions on freedom of movement outside the *zona*, etc.—they live and sell themselves in rooms or sometimes houses of male prostitution, or work as barmen, bouncers, domestics, messengers, transvestite artists in cabarets, even as “madams”, receiving, in return for their pariah status and ostracism by polite society, the legal and police “tolerance” of their sexual activity. The equation “queer equals prostitute” seems easy and inevitable enough for the Latin American mind to make. So much for sexual freedom of the poor in Latin America.

The “noble savage” has a distinguished literary lineage, going back at least to Rousseau’s natural man and even further to Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and, indeed, the first post-Conquest interest in European courtly and intellectual circles in the Amerindian; his figure has been enhanced and romanticised by authors from Chateaubriand, Longfellow and James Fenimore Cooper down to our days, without even mentioning the similar glorification of him in Latin American literature, especially in the literary movement, already mentioned, known as “indigenismo”, in great vogue in the period between the two World Wars. A part of this romanticism originates in western civilisation’s sense of guilt for its treatment, and virtual extermination in many cases, of the Amerindian. The legend has its gay version, propounded notably in literature like *The Call of the Loon* series, and in a great deal of inaccurate popular travel literature, fiction, anthropology (?) and word-of-mouth information; gays further tend to extend this romantic aura to the figure of the Negro, in part

no doubt because of his alleged and to some extent attested phallic endowment. There are indubitably many qualities worthy of our humble admiration in the various cultures and societies, extant or extinct, of the many Indian peoples of America—holistic world-view, artistic expressions, social organisation, scientific and architectural achievements, harmonious integration with nature, philosophical profundity, etc. I myself, like Erskine Lane in his recent *Game-Texts*, have often vibrated and responded to the obvious, innate superiority of the rural Indian cultures of countries like Guatemala, Peru and Ecuador, integrated, timeless and acceptant, as compared with the restless, fragmented westernised mestizo cultures, tawdry, heterogeneous and at war with nature and themselves, which have replaced them in the cities and are supplanting them now everywhere. Despite all these qualities, however, I must insist that the Amerindian and his societies have in general very little to offer specifically to gay people, very few experiences for us to assimilate; in general, their simple straight-laced monogamous heterosexuality is more alien, though not necessarily more hostile, to us than that of the most bourgeois community of Anglo-America.

Following Darcy Ribeiro, we can classify the peoples of Latin America as witness peoples (basically Indian in culture), transplanted (European) and new peoples (mestizo and mulatto countries and cultures); more exotic mixtures like the *zambo* (Negro-Indian) and the *cabôclo* (Portuguese-Indian-Negro) are not of great cultural or statistical importance in an over-all view; and I shall deal with the "pure" Negro in a moment. Without attempting a complete, complex breakdown, country by country and region by region, one can nevertheless state categorically that, the more purely Amerindian in culture the region in question, the more inhibited, suppressed and lesser will be its homosexual community and degree of homosexual activity and expression, and, the more Europeanised it is, the less inhibited and larger, at least apparently, its gay community is likely to be, and the greater degree of homosexual activity. This holds true both between and within Latin American nations and cannot be simplistically explained on the basis of cultural differences between peasant rural cultures and urbanised ones, though this latter factor undoubtedly plays a part in the differentiation. An operative term here is "Amerindian in culture". Race and culture in present-day Indoamerica are almost inextricably intertwined concepts: whether one is considered Indian or *mestizo* (*cholo* and *ladino* being other local terms equivalent to *mestizo*) depends, not on ancestry, as in the US or South Africa, and not on phenotype (a composite of skin colour, hair type, lips, nose—and socioeconomic position), as in Brazil or the West Indies, but essentially on culture—an Indian wears locally distinctive "Indian" clothing, lives in an Indian community and speaks an Indian language, whilst a *mestizo* (*cholo*, *ladino*) is the same Indian who has put on Western clothing, left his village for the metropolis and learned, or chosen, to speak Spanish. His phenotype has not, of course, altered, and to our racist Anglo-Saxon and European eyes he is still an Indian. This easily explains the generations of gay travellers who have returned from Latin America with glowing tales of the beautiful Indian lads they have enjoyed in such abundance; they have, of course, been bedding down with *mestizo* city boys, Indian in racial heritage but Europeanised in culture. Few get close enough, culturally and in personal relations, to the real Indian to bed him down; fewer even might really wish to. I can still count on my fingers the sexual encounters I've had with culturally pure Amerindians; and these rare contacts have been almost all furtive, guilt-ridden, inexperienced tumblings. Even when propositioned bluntly, the Amerindian responds, not with offence or annoyance, but with fear or absolute incomprehension, in most cases.

The four great survivors among the "high" Indian cultures of Latin America, the Aztec, Maya, Quechua (Inca) and Aymara civilisations, about whose past we naturally know most, were, in pre-conquest times, close approximations to totalitarian communist theocratic dictatorships, extremely regulatory of the lives and customs of their citizens, and extremely intolerant of any dissent or variation from social and cultural norms. From the records, written and oral, we possess, none of them particularly encouraged homosexuality. Most, particularly the Aztecs, frowned on it as unmanly and unwarlike; all possessed strict codes of machismo and decorum and, in the best of cases, homosexual practices were reserved to certain, especially priestly, castes and ritualistic observances. The evidence of graffiti, murals, pottery, etc., does little to inform of any possible popular homosexual practices. The same can be said of most of the extinct "high" cultures, about which even less is known, with the noteworthy difference of the Mochica and Chimú cultures of Northern coastal Peru (200 B.C.—1400 A.D., with a long gap between the acme of the Mochica and its decline and the rise of its successor, the Chimú culture), whose huge quantities of erotic pottery, preserved by a rainless desert climate, depicting practically every sexual act known to man, are the great questionmark in any survey of Amerindian sexuality; naturally, we know next to nothing about the daily lives and sexual practices of the Mochica and Chimú beyond what we learn from their pottery, which seems to have had religious, as well as utilitarian purposes. Though the Spanish conquistadores certainly destroyed any openly sexual artifacts and images they came across, it would have been difficult for them to destroy all evidence, and the relative silence of the early Spanish missionaries and chroniclers, usually so detailed and quick in their condemnation of Amerindian cruelty, perversity and depravity, would lead us to the conclusion that homosexual activity was not particularly prevalent in the

Indian civilisations with which they came into contact at the time of the Conquest.

Neither the remnants of the four great "high" civilisations mentioned above nor those of the many lesser "high" Amerindian cultures scattered today throughout Latin America give us much of cultural interest in their present form; most neither practice nor tolerate overt homosexuality among their members—what cultural expressions remain—use of female dress by men and appearance of hermaphroditic folk figures, etc. during festivals and carnival—seem divorced from context, their origin and meaning lost. Naturally, immediately after the Conquest, almost all these groups came under the direct protection and influence of the Spanish Roman Catholic church and its brand of zealotry and "Mediterranean puritanism"; all evidence, however, suggests that the majority of Amerindians practised already in pre-Conquest times a life-style similar to today's practices: a simple, strict sexual morality, monogamous, except for the privileged wealthy, with a high priority on female virginity and chastity and harsh penalties and strong social sanctions against adultery, or adult homosexuality, and that it was relatively easy for them, given the similarity of their syncretistic abilities, to adapt their sexual practices to Roman Catholic orthodoxy; with their typical cultural intractability, they would no doubt have continued homosexual practices in some form if these had been current among them before the arrival of the Spaniards.

The situation among the small, primitive, neolithic "low" cultures of jungle regions, particularly the Amazon—including practically all Brazilian Indians—seems to have been, and to be, quite different. Here the groups, tiny, isolated, and inbred, of semi-nomadic hunters-and-gatherers, are both diverse and numerous, and practice a bewildering variety of differing customs (often in quite close proximity but complete cultural isolation from one another), as distinct from the great uniformity of the much more extensive "high" civilisations; being smaller, they tend as well to be in some respects more "democratic" and less rigidly centralised than the former. There is moreover likely to be in the hot lowlands, which make nudity or near-nudity both practical and comfortable, a less puritanical attitude toward the body and a consequent greater freedom of sexual expression than in cold highlands and mountains. Some at least of these societies, a few of which have not yet made any significant contact with Western civilisations, have been reliably reported to practice, and even give prestige to, homosexuality. These cultures are, however, not only extremely small, often numbering fewer than one hundred people, but also, for good reason, quite hostile to all outsiders and extremely inaccessible geographically; only the persistent anthropologist, linguist or missionary is likely ever to come into contact with them, in a state of cultural purity uncorrupted by Western influences, above all today, and several countries, such as Brazil, actually forbid attempted visits without authorisation. Without doubting the testimony of books like *Keep the River on Your Right*, I'd suggest that the average gay tourist's Amazonian experiences will probably more resemble *The Yage Letters*. For this average tourist, in the Indian nations of Latin America, sexual adventures will be scarce except in the Europeanised larger cities and other *mestizo* islands: Guatemala City and the Oriente and south coast of Guatemala; Guayaquil and the coast (but never Quito) in Ecuador; Lima and other coastal cities of Peru; and perhaps the capitals, La Paz and Asunción, of utterly Indian and alien Bolivia and Paraguay. Let the gay tourist have no illusions about the undoubted attractions of such exotic destinations; they are not usually sexual. Even in an Americanised country such as México, European Guadalajara, mulatto Veracruz and international Acapulco display much more (at least more overt) gay activity than the much larger, architecturally European but culturally Aztec, Mexico City.

The Negro is found principally in Brazil where he makes up possibly some 20-25% of the population, with another 25% or more possessing at least some sufficiently distinct physical characteristics for an Anglo-Saxon to call them negroid or mulatto—so that we can call Brazil a mulatto country, as the Negro tends to assimilate to mulatto status. Imprecise census methods in this country in which all possible types and degrees of miscegenation seem to exist make any accurate statistics impossible; and of course, the racial mix varies widely throughout the huge nation, from largely Negro Bahia through the mulatto regions of the Northeast, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro to the Indian or *cabôclo* Amazon and the largely white South. But extensive Negro and mulatto communities also people the east of Venezuela, both coasts of Colombia, the Atlantic coast of Central America and most of the West Indian islands. The Negro's racial and cultural experience in America was very different, despite the subjection in which both races were held, from the Amerindian's policy of cultural separatism and survival, through syncretism and apparent submission, in his own homeland. Brought from a distant continent and cultural reality, the Negro saw that culture, however primitive, pulverised and destroyed deliberately, even his languages and religions forbidden, and himself reduced, for over 300 years, to the status of a chattel, a work- and breeding-animal—a condition from which he began to emerge in Spanish America only in the early 19th century and in Brazil only near the century's end. Trained to sire children indiscriminately, as a stud animal, and separated by force completely from his offspring, the male slave naturally developed a tradition of casual promiscuity and complete parental irresponsibility which, as elsewhere where slavery existed, has persisted to this day. What remained of family structure being provided by

the mother, the Negro social structure developed into a matriarchy of strong women and absent, non-authoritarian males, a tendency reinforced probably by similar matriarchal strength in the West African societies from which the slaves descended, and certainly by that West African religion known under such more or less accurate, popular names as *umbanda*, *macumba*, *voodoo*, *shango*, *candomblé*, *santería*, etc., which has been and is the most fertile element of preservation of original African cultural traits and ties in Brazil, Uruguay, Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad and elsewhere. In this religion female deities and female priests and worshippers are figures of great importance. The fragmented family, the generally degraded slave status and living conditions, the encouragement of male promiscuity and the lack of any stigma attached to illegitimacy and consensual unions—the slave, unlike the Indian, being left largely outside the sphere of influence of Roman Catholic proselytising and missionary work—certainly gave to the Negro subculture a greater sexual freedom, or licence, in some respects; while a matriarchal family structure may well have been favourable to development and tolerance of homosexual behaviour. There are definite elements of ritualised homosexuality and sacred male prostitution in the *umbanda* cult, in fact, where the important figure of the *pai do santo* is usually a passive homosexual (see the relevant article in *Gay Sunshine* 34).

Whatever the attitudes of the original parent African cultures—a wide spectrum, from present-day Senegal and Mali through Nigeria and Zaire to Angola—may have been toward homosexuality, I have no doubt that it is the Negro and his subculture that are chiefly responsible (the greater tolerance of Portuguese social and religious attitudes, as compared to Spanish ones, and of course the considerable European migration to southern Brazil in the last century have also been contributing causes) for Brazil's being in practice the Latin American nation most favourable to homosexuality and, indeed, to all human sexual manifestations, permitting public behaviour which Spanish America would consider intolerably indecorous. No Brazilian samba band, for example, is without its platoon of parading transvestites, considered an element of prestige for the group, during carnival; not only individual males, but, in some towns, the entire male population, as in the southern city of Pelotas, dress in female garb for the same celebration; while the gay dances and drag balls and costume contests of large cities such as Rio de Janeiro—briefly prohibited by the military government after the 1964 *coup d'état*—are justly famous throughout the world. It might be noted that the pre-Lenten carnival in Latin America, where celebrated, performs something of the function formerly exercised by Halloween costume balls in Anglo-American gay society—an occasion to evade police regulations against drag and, giving oneself over to the fulfillment of fantasy at least briefly, to forget society's attitudes: the carnivals of Veracruz, Mexico, and Barranquilla, Colombia have similar "gay" reputations. This is merely a personal opinion, which would be contradicted by eminent authorities such as Gilberto Freire, for whom the "lasciviousness" of Brazilians is rather the cultural heritage of concupiscence of the first Portuguese settlers, men set free in a rich and bounteous land, far from the restraints of church, law and "decorum", without women of their own race and surrounded by a subject multitude of easily available slaves and Indians of both sexes. Freire beyond a doubt does have a point; as the extent of miscegenation in Brazil, if nothing else, should indicate; one should consider, moreover, in any judgment the tendencies, already mentioned, for inhabitants of the warm coasts and lowlands to be more sexually open and permissive than those of the highlands and interior.

NOW THE VOLCANO:

II

We now at least possess a text as touchstone for many postulates and suppositions, myths and prejudices concerning Latin America. *Now the Volcano: An Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature* (Gay Sunshine Press, 1979) is edited by Winston Leyland and translated very largely by Erskine Lane; other translations in the book are by Simon Karlinsky and Franklin Blanton.

A couple of cavils, first. "A Book of readings" would possibly be a more accurate subtitle than "anthology" for this valuable pioneering effort, since it does not aim at either historical or geographical completeness. Only one of the selections included, Adolfo Caminha's astonishing *Bom-Crioulo*, dates from before the 20th century; all except it, the Barba-Jacob poem and the Novo memoir are more or less contemporary. And, with the exception of a few poems from Colombia, all the material included comes from only two Latin American nations, representing perhaps two social poles, Mexico, the acme of Latin American machismo and Brazil, the capital of permissiveness, though this polarisation is not particularly reflected in the actual contents of the volume. There are practical reasons for these limitations, chief among them being, until very recently, a paucity of suitable material from many countries. Indian nations such as Bolivia and Ecuador, with scarcely any gay society or consciousness as yet, cannot be expected to have produced an outflowing of gay literature in the past. One cannot in general, in fact, expect societies traditionally attuned to privacy, secrecy and hypocrisy in all sexual matters to celebrate gayness openly and joyously in their literature.

It is, indeed, a kind of miracle that so much good writing by and about gays could be found, even if most of it comes, as might have been predicted, from liberal Brazil. What material did exist had not previously been translated into English; a vote of gratitude is accordingly due to Erskine Lane for his accurate and often elegant translation of some 90% of the short stories and poems included in the anthology. The lack of dramatic material in the collection merely reflects the absolute nonexistence of stage presentations for or about gays in a subcontinent where productions of *Boys in the Band* are still considered new and controversial. Moreover, Latin American literature is both copious and badly researched and catalogued; libraries in Latin America itself are, like the universities which often house them, scattered, uncomplementary and disorganized, and even the best North American Latin American libraries are relatively incomplete. The divisiveness and compartmentalisation of Latin America into nationalistic units, culturally as well as socially and politically, with often very little contact or knowledge of each other's literature even among the intellectual elite, between one nation and another, completes this picture of faulty, often unavailable information, bibliographies and documentation. One can hardly, in such a context, expect any person or group of people, even working full-time at the task, to go through the more than four centuries of texts from more than twenty nations which might shed light on gayness in Latin America.

Considering that the present anthology was basically a one-man job, it is a remarkable achievement; as he obviously had to, editor Winston Leyland opted for choosing from the material that, through travels and journalistic, personal and literary contacts, was brought to his attention, and against casting his nets too wide in any attempt to strain the whole sea of Latinoamericana through them. The limitation does mean, however, that this anthology cannot claim to trace the history, such as it is, of gay thought or of public and private attitudes toward gayness in Latin America; to do so, it would have been necessary to return to the earliest Spanish chroniclers and missionaries and record their every relevant reference, as well as all those by later historians, novelists, travellers, etc., whether laudatory, condemnatory or neutral in tone, to homosexuality and homosexuals in Latin America. The editor has chosen to restrict himself to imaginative literature (fiction and poetry—plus one long memoir) written by authors who are gay themselves and have considerable knowledge of gay society. Straight Latin American attitudes toward gayness, including the more sophisticated reactions found, for example, in more recent Latin American fiction, are thus absent from the collection, or conveyed only indirectly. The lack of geographical representativeness in *Now The Volcano*, however, is its most serious flaw. While recognising the various practical limiting factors mentioned, one must consider it a pity that nothing has been included in this volume from such important communities as Argentina, Peru, Central America and the Caribbean; one hopes that *Now the Volcano* may be only the first volume of a series. It is only fair to warn the reader of this incompleteness, and to caution him most emphatically against taking the attitudes to, and self-image of, gayness encountered in these short stories and poems as being in any way typical of all Latin America, which, though indubitably a region with certain common characteristics is also indubitably a coat of many colours. What this anthology basically does reflect and present is the relaxed sexual and social attitudes of Brazil, traditionally the most tolerant in Latin America; it would be a grave error to take this permissiveness as characteristic of the Indian nations, Argentina, or, despite Novo's aristocratic sophistication, even of Mexico.

The first comment one is tempted to make, after a quick reading through the selections in *Now the Volcano*, is that the world they depict is not really so unfamiliar. I have already counselled against exotic and highly coloured expectations and visions of Latin America not corresponding either to its actual cultural heritage and composition or to its sometimes rather grim social realities. Nor do I think that this impression of familiarity comes solely from a personal knowledge. The dominant cultural heritage of the region, especially its urban sectors, which are those described in almost all these stories, being Arabo-Iberian subjected to very strong Roman Catholic regularising pressures, a subtype, that is, in our Judaeo-Christian Western civilisation, it was inevitable that the resemblances should outnumber the differences. The stage sets may indeed be rather exotic—red light districts, cheap movie houses and seminaries rather than our traditional cruising bars, baths and boarding schools; but the equivalence and comparisons are easy to make, especially if, in view of Latin America's economic realities, we compare the world of these authors with the fictional universe, not of our Capotes, Vidals, Waughes, Prousts, Cowards and other comedians of manners whose interest has been directed essentially toward chronicling the misdeeds and foibles of upper middle-class society, but rather of those writers who have dealt extensively with low-life and lower-class or outlaw homosexuality, such as Genet, Rechy, Tennessee Williams, and, for that matter, straight writers of the type of Erskine Caldwell, Nelson Algren and Céline. (Though even as I make this comment, I become aware of its essential uselessness and inadequacy, in the face of the paradox that gay society, at least in our civilisation, in its rapports between rich and poor, clients and hustlers, is, at one and the same time, both the most mixed and the most stratified, the most classless, the most class-conscious, and perhaps the most exploitative of class and economic differences, among societies.) Social realities, at all events, are similar enough, and the kinds of

social oppression encountered, and the reactions to that oppression essayed, by the Lina Lees of Recife, the Deborahs of Rio, the Snow Whites of São Paulo, are already but too familiar to us from both life and literature. Not merely these spectacular drag-queen heroines (expectable in Latin American fiction, especially Brazilian, in view of the Latin American macho's puzzled fascination with the figure of the drag queen, that negation of his whole *raison d'être*, and the relative freedom of action given in Latin America, particularly Brazil, to members of this "profession", ironically often chosen by them in this milieu out of economic necessity and as a reaction to intolerable social pressures), but Trevisan's infatuated schoolboy lovers, Coutinho's uneasy middle-class, middle-aged bureaucrats, and the hustlers, kept boys and respectable closet queens of the subtle, low-keyed stories of Gasparino Damata and Darcy Penteado seem already well-known types to us, their motivations and future behaviour almost depressingly predictable. This is, surprisingly perhaps, not *terra ignota* at all.

The first real cultural and institutional difference which engages our attention in this anthology is the role and importance of the Roman Catholic church. Two of the stories, with heavy obviousness, commence in Holy Week: one oozes overwrought and, to this reader, inappropriate Christ symbolism; the other, set in a seminary, is equally thick in Biblical references to the story of Jonathan and David and the love of Christ for his apostles. A third story is about a refined and pathetic queen who after death becomes a saint, another, Cáo Fernando Abreu's *Requiem for a Fugitive*, a chilling allegory of the figure of the absent father, is supposedly about an angel, and references to priests, religious schools and the sacraments recur with total naturalness through the collection; Salvador Novo, for example, bats not a figurative eyelash in relating to us the nicknames and proclivities of priestly queens such as "Father Tortolero, for example, whose room was replete with chasubles and ecclesiastical ornaments . . . Father Vallejo Macouzet, affectionately known as Sister Demonio, who sported a scar from a knife wound on his lip and was famous for the throngs of young cadets that called upon him in his Church of Santo Domingo; Father Garbuno from Guadalajara, always in the company of Sister Demonio"; jokes and tales about homosexual priests, like similar jokes about priests and nuns, are of course among the staples of Latin American humour, or that of any Roman Catholic society. But there is no doubt that given the isolation from centres of local church authority of many vicarages, as well as the further distance from church and inquisition headquarters in Europe, and the relatively total control granted priests over the lives of superstitious and illiterate villagers and peasants, a tradition over the centuries of unbridled homo- and heterosexual activity by ecclesiastical figures has grown up in Latin America, is tolerated, more or less without scandal in a sexually realistic society, as an inevitable concomitant of priestly celibacy, and will die hard.

Such Chaucerian realism and levity, bespeaking, of course, a thorough, comfortable familiarity with the church and its acceptance as one of the society's institutions, fallible, like all the others, may not seem to breathe from some of the selections, such as the first two mentioned, but rather an unhealthy religiosity, particularly in Aguinaldo Silva's confused, baroque "Greek Love" (whose symbolism seems merely decorative, since the sailor hero shows no ready parallels with Christ, besides having the name Cristo and dying at the story's end). Both Novo's easy familiarity and Silva's perferivity, however, are quite natural in the context of the subcontinent's crusading, missionary Roman Catholic past, the church's long and oppressive presence and its important role, even today, as educator of youth (until recently, for example, a seminary education was the norm for bright but impecunious young men, even if not intended for the priesthood, in many regions where government schools were absent or insufficient) and conductor and guardian of society's rites of passage and moral codes. Yet we do not find in any of these authors, even in Trevisan, the rejection and condemnation of the church that we might expect in view of its repressive role. The reason seems to be not only that the church is too familiar an institution, too deeply intertwined with childhood experiences and the family to be completely set aside, but also because the Catholic church seems to mark and distort the Latin American male, especially sexually, less than religion normally does the sensitive young in other societies. It appears to *matter* less to him as a relevant institution of society, however omnipresent it may be. This says something about European Roman Catholicism's success in imposing itself superficially on the very different social realities of Latin America and at the same time, its failure to understand, sympathise with or attempt to remedy them, at least until recently.

Remote from the people both physically, in its European provenience, and psychologically, in its adherence to and absorption by a ruling creole or foreign oligarchy, Roman Catholicism seems to be in Latin America, though ubiquitous, increasingly irrelevant to all but the most conservative sectors, and to have long been so; Latin American Catholicism, as compared with European Iberian Catholicism (especially Spanish) and Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, is both more superficial and less guilt-ridden. This is especially true of Brazil, nominally the world's most populous Catholic nation, which has also often been described, sometimes by worried clerics, as the world's most populous voodoo nation, considering the almost universal adherence, in all social classes, to what is probably the country's true and most deeply-felt cult, the superstition-ridden African *umbanda*. Brazil has long worn its Catholicism, like most of its other attitudes and

institutions, *à flor da pele*, lightly and as decoratively as Silva's symbolism, not as something organically experienced and perceived. Mexican Catholicism is both pro-founder and more fanatical than the Brazilian variant, and perhaps the sprightly memoirist Novo is not here the best representative of his fellow-countrymen's attitudes, but, in any event, nowhere in this collection does one find any evidence of the agonised, joy-hating, flesh-fearing Jansenist consciousness of a Mauriac, a Graham Greene or a Peyrefitte. Nor, I should note, are those attributes normally to be found in straight Latin American novelists and poets. A word should perhaps be added in defence of the Roman Catholic church, at least in its expression in Latin countries, to counter the barrage of criticism and vituperation directed against it by gay circles in Anglo-Saxon countries. Its traditional, relative tolerance—at least in comparison with Puritan Protestantism—of sins of the flesh, which are pardonable (as against sins of doctrine and dogma, which are not) should be considered, as contributions to the Latin American authors' relaxed and uncritical attitude vis-a-vis it.

Another institution oft-attacked by gays, the family, also receives unexpectedly gentle treatment in this anthology, where mentioned. The family—extended, of course, by grandparents, aunts, uncles, family servants and others—and family ties are much stronger in Latin America than in Anglo-Saxon or modern European society, both as necessary refuge and support against a harsh, hostile outside world, and as a social unit, with its history, traditions, power struggles and alliances, interacting with other such social units, and within the progressively larger social units of the barrio, town or city, region or "patria chica", and nation-state. With reason both the church and the Latin American nation-state consider the family as the foundation-stone of their power, and Latin American literature and life are rich in sagas of family-village-nation like Gabriel García Márquez's *Buendía-Macondo-Colombia* epic. The Latin American gay, however rebellious, though he may leave his family behind, never completely rejects it, or ceases to depend emotionally in some way on it, basically because it never completely rejects him; his semi-closeted consciousness, and the rules of "decorum" which in Latin America govern even close family relations, prevent any full "coming out", expulsion or final break, in most cases; the prodigal son, at the worst, prefers to go away and be forgotten in dignified silence. The worst calamity in life for any Latin American is still the loss of the female parent: Novo takes obvious pride in telling us, on the first page of his irreverent memoir, that he—evidently—still lives with his mother, who "still has all of her teeth . . . as well as a full head of black hair which with defiant relish she brushes vigorously in the presence of my baldness." So much for independence! Even in the lower classes and among the peasantry, where inhuman living conditions are common and the child becomes not only aware of but a participant in the economic battle for existence, with all its accompanying hardships and cruelties, at a very early age, Latin American child rearing is generally more permissive, more truly educative and more affectionate than in our technological society; children possess fewer toys and articles of clothing, but have more playmates and freedom of action and experimentation, and, above all, are more rarely punished, beaten or deprived for inappropriate behaviour, and more often rewarded with caresses and bodily contact by all members, male and female, of the extended family. The result is that for most Latin Americans childhood, however poverty-stricken and miserable, is a vale of lost happiness which they remember and for which they yearn throughout the rest of their lives: the happy childhood is a universal of Latin American literature, where bitter recollections and memoirs à la Samuel Butler or Orwell are virtually unknown. It may be that this permissive childhood gives Latin Americans an emotional stability and elasticity, a sense of worth and self-confidence which enables them to react with such characteristic resilience to the vicissitudes and changes of fortune of their often picaresque lives. It may, as well, be that some of the often-noted emotional infantilism of the Latin American male comes from the same sources (and no one who has watched Latin American adult men "play", at work or in the cantina or at a sports event, can doubt the evidence of his eyes concerning this infantilism, and, incidentally, concerning its very large homosexual component, and its function as an outlet for homosexual urges, in the form of otherwise forbidden bodily contacts).

So, in this anthology, the childhood of even the pathetic queens Lina Lee and Snow White, seems to have been happy; Lina Lee recalls the "terribly sugary candies my aunts used to give me . . . and the memory of a rainy morning, and a sad melody playing" and a family environment which, if uncomprehending, was certainly not rejecting: "I could have left if I had chosen to, I could have gone back to the home I had had to leave because of my scandalous behaviour. They would have had their doubts and misgivings, but still they would have welcomed me back like a prodigal son who had already suffered enough. . . . The house would have been confining, yes, but there I would be safe. There I could have grown fat and old if only those terrible attacks . . . had not forced me out into the streets again, me, the possessed, in search of men and unspeakable pleasures, me, the fallen angel, so beloved by my aunts and looked on with pity and scorn by the neighbours." Snow White later, in adolescence, does come into conflict with her elder brothers for "dragging the family's good name and tradition through the gutters" by offending against "decorum" and publicly "hunting men along the Viaduto do Chá" (a central São Paulo overpass), but finally finds peace and anonymity cruising the discreeter suburban Avenida Paulista park; this story, by

Darcy Penteado, is filled with amusing darts and barbs against church, society and family ("a grand old family in the state of São Paulo . . . who were almost direct descendents of the Indian chieftain Tibiriá through his daughter Bartira, whose Christian name was Dona Isabel Dias. She had been married to João Ramalho, an adventurer, who dedicated himself to the pursuit of runaway slaves. They were, in short, a family of the highest lineage"; "the eldest brother . . . had taken the title of Baron of Alfazema, without any real claim to it, and he intended to transmit the title—if you can imagine such a thing!—to the first son born from his marriage with his Lebanese bride.") and their pretensions and hypocrisy, but the humour is obviously affectionate. The loveless, uncommunicative relation between mother and son described in Cáo Fernando Abreu's "Requiem for a Fugitive" and the bleak middle-class family of Edilberto Coutinho's "Lost in Recife" are nearer to the nuclear family as we know it in our society.

Adolescence is for the Latin American youth, as elsewhere, a period of rebellion and confusion, but fortunately, just at the point where family and church constraints might prove intolerable to the Latin American male adolescent, he is freed from them and the family and church lose most of their control over him; he has reached sexual maturity, ergo, he is a macho, a man, and capable of living his own life; henceforth, his goings and comings in the family home, his friendships and his sexual activities are largely his own business and unsupervised, and the rules of "decorum" are applied more strictly than ever in his parents' relations with him. This is obviously a considerable advantage to the gay adolescent, as well as to the straight, and eliminates much of the need for rebellion and "coming out". Such a situation does not obtain, perhaps, in the most conservative, patriarchal families, and certainly not in the repressive atmosphere of church-run boarding schools, but, though the liberty enjoyed by the adolescent Salvador Novo in Mexico City at the ages of 15 and 16, as described by him, might seem both unbelievable and excessive to an Anglo-Saxon reader, I am convinced that a similar degree of freedom is granted to most Latin American boys, in all social classes, after the onset of puberty. Accordingly, adolescence, with all its turbulence, is also generally remembered by Latin Americans, straight or gay, not as a period of conflict with their families but as a glorious age of much greater happiness, social activity and sexual satisfaction than in our youth-hating (though youth-obsessed) societies. The sexual and social poise and maturity of the Latin American adolescent—he has, remember, much greater opportunities and a greater need to acquire both, in the kind of society in which he lives—have always impressed me, and have begun to be attained by the youth of our society only in the last decade.

Certain of the harsher and more disagreeable social and economic facts of life in an underdeveloped region, are also immediately apparent in these stories. One is set in the squalour of the organised prostitution of the red-light district (I have already referred to the importance of such districts in Latin America as perhaps the only refuge for both lower-class effeminate homosexuals and other gays who reject cloister and public "decorum", and Aguinaldo Silva's "Greek Love" is rich in confirmatory sociological data), another in the similar atmosphere of Rio de Janeiro's formerly notorious "bohemian" Lapa district. Several more deal with lower-class hustlers and male prostitutes, professional or casual, both victims and victimisers in their sordid non-affective commercial relations with insecure middle-class closet queens. The fastidious but downward-mobile Novo's Mexico City is lively but just as louche—an underground of panders, drag queens, cheap rented rooms and apartments, and anonymous commercial sex with lower-class tricks. Not a very elevating social milieu, but it is not just Latin American gays and gay authors who possess *le gout de la boue*; the world inhabited by, and the relations among queens, hustlers and johns seem to have an astonishing element of universality about them, and, as I've remarked, most of these figures could have stepped from the pages of Rechy or Genet—and perhaps did. Bald, dire economic need—normally more pressing than that known in our welfare states but also often more masked by "decorum" and the hustler's need to protect his stoic, inviolability—is a constant in these stories. The enigmatic hustler of Damata's interesting study of incommunication, "Wall of Silence", finally "reluctantly" accepts the cash pressed on him by a deeply enamoured client, after having first refused it, then leaves immediately, walking forever out of the latter's life; and the reader knows that, behind his wall of silence, he has been thinking and worrying about money all the time. In "Greek Love" Cristo orders the heroine to "go and make a lot of money with the Norwegians and the Japanese. Give it to me. Then I'll go to bed with you." Novo and friends trick gladly with older johns in order to pay for their own pick-ups. In Abreu's "A Story about Butterflies" the protagonist cannot afford to send his lover to a clinic and so despatches him to the horrors of a state mental hospital. The heroine of "Snow White Revisited" has "a good family name to live up to, but no profession to provide her with the means" and lives in poverty. Blackmail and "pay-offs", even in the childish world of the schoolroom, corrupt the innocent youthful sexuality of the heroes of Ernesto Bañuelos' perceptive, comprehensive poem series about growing up gay, "The Story of myself and some friends." Bom-Crioulo wins over the cabin-boy he loves with gifts and promises.

The pitiable hustler of Damata's "Revenge", down on his luck, out on the street, submits, in return for a meal and the possibility of a place to spend the night, to all the humiliation heaped on him by his former "keeper", the dentist, though maintaining, like a proper macho, for as

long as possible an elaborate pretence of nonchalance and well-being. "Revenge", in fact, prefaced by a blunt statement beginning "male homosexuality, as practised by young men in underdeveloped countries, is a problem of the stomach, and therefore a social problem", is an honest, unsparing, penetrating glance into the mechanics of male prostitution in a large Latin American city (and by extension in large cities around the world), into the vicious economic and power relations existing between lower-class boys who "came from the provinces or lingered on in Rio to try their luck in the city after finishing their military service and ended up wandering back and forth through the busy streets of Copacabana during the day, often hungry, with nothing but a cup of coffee for breakfast, stationing themselves night after night in front of the Mercadinho Azul and the Alcazar in search of sex, decked out in expensive clothes stolen from an apartment where they had spent one night but would never return", who "say as little as possible and fuck because they need the money", who "didn't really have a fantastic body either, not the type to make an old queen's mouth water—nothing like Belini, for example, that prime specimen of manhood, so handsome that all the rich faggots sighed for him and were ready to pay whatever he asked to get him in bed, (but) did have smooth well-made thighs . . . a pleasant face, dark-complexioned, and a certain attractiveness of the kind that some boys have without even being aware of it", who are passed from keeper to keeper like goods sold to the highest bidder ("Paulo, always smart and alert, ended up in bed with Botelho, who had had an eye on him for some time. Botelho took a strong liking to the boy, and they became lovers, and it wasn't long until Paulo was buried under gifts—a gold Swiss watch, a motorcycle, expensive clothes, and all sorts of things that he had never seen during his time with Marcondes, who was a nice guy but rather stingy") or simply discarded ("in Ferreira's way of seeing things, every boy had a price . . . if the boy was goodnatured and caused no problems, he might stay with Ferreira for three months or so, maybe even longer, then he would try to arrange the boy's life for him—that is, to help him find a job . . . or sometimes he would send him back home, just send him away summarily, with no regrets, but in such a way that they would part as friends, not as enemies, the boy leaving with a suitcase full of good clothes, money in his pocket and the hope of coming back to Rio") and of the middle-class gay man who prey on them and are preyed on by them, and a withering indictment of all parties involved.

The socioeconomic consciousness of the various authors is not always so well developed. Aguinaldo Silva's descriptions of Brazilian lowlife are more journalistic and colourful than analytical, but do contain interesting comments on the relations between society's outcasts and its respectable members and the economic bonds linking both: "The Zone exists, we both know, and like the rest of the city it's little more than a system with a single objective: to humiliate people, to crush them. On the other side of the river live the workers, the respectable people, those with fine habits and manners, but they are crushed and beaten in the same way that we are"; I could discern a common thread running through the labyrinth of our lives, linking us all together like puppets, for the truth is that they, though seemingly determined to lead clean, upstanding lives, had their weaknesses no less than we. They too had sold themselves into some form or another of slavery . . . they, though they did not partake of our disgrace, were not really different from us after all, that behind all the disguises . . . they too were helpless against their own destinies." "Lost in Recife" includes a "communist doublé as surrealist poet", working as an economist for the Brazilian dictatorship, who has "written a poem for a peasant who'll be killed in the class struggle in a sugar mill in Pernambuco . . . and now all he has to do is wait for someone to be killed", but the satire seems forced and unreal in the doggedly middle-class setting. I do not of course suggest that writers in underdeveloped countries should not describe and satirize the *mores* of the middle- and upper-class and the nouveaux riches. "Snow White Revisited" does just that, for example, with a great deal of wit and bite, and, while seeming to remain a rather unsubstantial fantasy, manages to insert a considerable dose of incisive and at times virulent social commentary on almost all aspects of the São Paulo scene, past and present.

"Social irresponsibility" has always been, one realises, one of the labels with which gay writers have been tagged by hostile literary critics and other intellectual enemies hiding behind a facade of objectivity, as part of an image of our frivolity, our insignificance, which they seek to impose on the intellectual community—as though one really expected all Prousts to write like Célines. One also recognises the problem of censorship in Latin America for authors attempting to deal directly with any controversial social, economic or political topic: two of the stories in this volume have been suppressed or denied publication by the Brazilian censors—as have innumerable other publications in recent years, such as Rubém Fonseca's mordant collection *Felix Ano Novo*, which contains several stories treating realistically of lower-class homosexuality—cum-poverty, and even issues of the magazine *Time* referring prominently to homosexuality; while, in Mexico, it is evidently felt that the Novo memoirs could not appear in Spanish at the present time. Granting all the above, one nevertheless does expect the third-world writer to have a somewhat developed revolutionary conscience, and not to devote himself entirely to the comedy of manners, if he is to be taken seriously. I find it incredible and disturbing, for example, that Novo's account of his life in the period 1910-1922 (approximately) should include almost no reference—beyond a few modish remarks about a resurgence of folk art and "decorative nationalism" in

connexion with the 1921 centenary of independence, and mention of José Vasconcelos' educational reforms—to the Mexican revolution, Latin America's most important social upheaval in this century. This is especially noticeable when it is considered that he spent the years 1910-1917 in Torreón, virtual headquarters of the movement led first by Francisco I. Madero and later by the opposing bands of Villa and Carranza, and taken by Villa in a bloody battle in 1914, and the years from 1917 on in Mexico City, during precisely the phase of greatest political and social agitation there. It may be objected that the purpose of this memoir was obviously other, and that Novo has paid his dues to the Mexican revolution in other, weightier publications. Agreed. Nevertheless, can one's private life, however private, be so absolutely truncated from its sociopolitical setting? And should it be?

One literary document contained in *Now the Volcano* is absolutely revolutionary; historically and sociologically speaking, it is certainly the most important item in the book. This is a selection, translated for the first time into English, from Adolfo Caminha's radical 1895 novel, *Bom-Crioulo*, (*The Good Nigger*). Perhaps the first really gay novel in modern Western literature, *Bom-Crioulo* is many things: a pro-Negro, anti-slavery tract (albeit published a few years after abolition of slavery in Brazil, but while the social and economic position of the ex-slaves was still virtually at pre-emancipation level); a violent denunciation of racial discrimination and inhuman social conditions prevailing in the Brazilian navy; and, not least, a sympathetic defence of homosexuality, pederasty and miscegenation, in the story of the openly sexual love-affair between the adult illiterate Negro sailor Amaro, an escaped slave, and a fifteen-year-old white, blue-eyed cabin-boy, recounted, despite the usual gloom-and-doom ending of naturalistic fiction—in this case, an Othellian murder—with complete approval of the relationship and obvious partiality toward the Negro hero. One wonders why this important gay and literary document, still eminently readable, despite a few stylistic excesses typical of the era, has not come to the attention of a wider audience before now. It alone would justify the acquisition of this anthology. Perhaps a complete translation of the novel will now appear in English in the near future. It is difficult to speculate on the literary demon, or spirit of revolt, which must have driven the author, who, having led a short, stormy life, died soon after the publication of *Bom-Crioulo*. He had been for some years an officer in the navy he attacked (the most conservative and aristocratic of the three branches of the Brazilian Armed Forces, still noted today for its discrimination against non-whites). The scandal which the novel provoked at the time of publication, and the threat of legal action against the author, seem much less significant today than the fact that it did appear, it was not confiscated or burned, it enjoyed a considerable literary and popular success, which has maintained itself through the years, and its author was not in the end brought to court at all—all this, in "primitive" Brazil, contemporary with the Wilde and Dreyfus trials in "civilised" Europe!

A considerable dose of fantasy (which has been exploited literarily for centuries by folklorists and more recently by novelists of the "magic realism" boom) inhabits the Latin American, and particularly the Brazilian, popular imagination, the product no doubt of the natural exuberance engendered by a tropical environment, and the confluence of Arabo-Iberian folk beliefs with African and Amerindian magical and animistic concepts of the universe (especially as preserved, in Brazil, by *umbanda*, with its rich corpus of mythology, poetry, music and ritual). These elements, incremented by a certain playfulness and theatricality which seem to characterise gay sensibility, are everywhere detectable in this collection, especially in Darcy Penteado's two delightful "fairy-tales", in Aguinaldo Silva's beguiling, dead-pan account of the exploits of Deborah, the flying queen ("Matinee at the Iris Theatre"), and in the precise, lucid derangement of Cáo Fernando Abreu's short surrealist offerings.

Brazilians also bear a reputation for their offbeat wit, good humor, and—rare in Latin America—their ability to laugh at themselves. Considering the characteristics of gay humour, Brazilian gay humour could be expected to be something special. If nothing else, *Now the Volcano* will provide many moments of amusement for the reader; this anthology is proof positive that gay literature may be serious without necessarily being tragic—a point I shall return to shortly. "Snow White Revisited", with its satisfying equilibrium of pathos, wit and sharp satire, is probably the volume's *tour de force*, but the Novo memoir, displaying none of those Mexican qualities of "ceremony" and "gravity" which made P.K. Page classify that country as "a heavy Brazil", is certainly its most sustained, stylistically distinguished example of humorous belletristic achievement: Novo, with his Portuguese surname, deserves classification as an honorary Brazilian. Silva's "Greek Love" is also guaranteed to reward the persevering reader with many *trouvailles* and moments of emotion, though these may not be precisely of the kind the author intended. For in this ambitious but to my mind fatally flawed story, one of the anthology's longest, the theatrical, grotesque, symbolic and fantastic (including elements of *umbanda*), deliberately heightened and tiresomely reiterated (and, alas, in this case unleavened by any spark of humour), lead only to overwrought melodrama, which, while it has psychological validity, perhaps, as a portrait of a drag queen's hysterical, melodramatic private universe, achieves not the "Snows of Kilimanjaro" sort of transcendence to which it aspires via its bizarre ending, but rather the status of a camp classic, the terrain inhabited by some of the short stories of Tennessee

Williams, bearing all the trappings of Jean Genet without his high moral purpose and austerity, larded with minor inconsistencies and incongruities which, while unimportant, irritate the reader, and, above all, often terribly sentimental and funny where it attempts to be most pathetic and profound.

Genet, whose lush, baroque prose style and salacious subject matter might have been expected to have great appeal to the tropicalist mentality, not only exerts a major influence on the writings of Silva (who quite openly acknowledges the debt, in "Matinee at the Iris Theatre") but also can be detected among the influences on other authors here, notably Pentead and Damata. Most, indeed, of the clearly traceable literary debts, direct and indirect, come from that commanding French gay pantheon that extends from Rimbaud and Verlaine through Gide, Cocteau, Proust, Genet, Peyrefitte, Sachs, etc.; many other French authors, including Baudelaire, Flaubert, Balzac, Zola, are obvious literary forbears. This is very natural, in view of the fact that the Brazilian middle and upper classes traditionally looked, until after World War II, to Europe, especially to France, Portugal and England, for their educational, cultural, literary and social models, rather than to North America, which, in point of fact, has not as yet developed a comparable, or easily exportable literary tradition and continuity, at least in prose. Novo's *recherche* impudence (in Erskine Lane's superbly mannered translation) irresistibly demands comparison with Christopher Isherwood or John Glassco, but actually derives from the ancient Spanish picaresque tradition, harking back to such ancestors as *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *El Periquillo Sarniento*. His superficially quite dissimilar poetry, represented here by three sections of "Nuevo Amor", rhetorical, heavily metaphorical and elegiac, resembles that of other Mexicans of his or a slightly more recent generation, like Gorostiza and Octavio Paz; the exquisite nocturne of his lifelong friend, Xavier Villaurrutia, one of which appears in the anthology, is reminiscent both of the similarly titled poems of the 19th-century Colombian poet, Asunción Silva, and, with their bouquet of sex, sailors, night and exoticism, of a host of foreign poets, notably Whitman, Pessoa and Cavafy. Unlike several previous *Gay Sunshine* anthologies, incidentally, this one contains only a small proportion of poetry, most of it Mexican; hence, the limited attention given to it in this review.

In his recent study of male homosexuality in American literature, *Like a Brother, Like a Lover*, Georges-Michel Sarotte proposes four major archetypes for the homosexual couple in American literature: adolescent crush; teacher-pupil; captain-soldier/sailor; and black-white. He further considers that all these relationships suffer from a social inequality or impossibility that condemns them to the tragic ending so characteristic of North American gay fiction; this pattern, he says, illustrates American homosexuality's basic sado-masochism. Allowing for differences of scope and treatment between fully developed novels and drama (which is what Sarotte largely bases his theory on) and the more episodic story, one must still say the fit is not very close when this framework is applied to the present collection. Trevisan's "Jonathan's Bequest to David" exemplifies the adolescent crush pretty well, and *Bom Crioulo* is a classic example of both black-white and superior-inferior relationships (*Bom Crioulo* is the cabin-boy's mentor and protector, strikingly similar to Huck-leberry Finn's Jim). But relations between gay older men and younger hustlers (though one could consider them a considerably distorted variant of the teacher-pupil archetype, distorted in that the power relationship is somewhat skewed), to say nothing of those between a sailor and a drag queen who in the end achieve equality and union, are either ignored by his scheme or don't fit into it. What is most notable in the present anthology, however, is that none of these stories has the traditional unhappy ending Sarotte seems to think inevitable, except *Bom Crioulo*, written under the influence of naturalistic doctrines and authors that practically prescribed a tragic finale; and even here, it is a tragedy with a difference: the "guilty" lover survives, and the "exploited" cabin-boy, who betrayed him, dies. Salvador Novo survives his various academic, financial and amatory misfortunes (the worst of which seem to have been the results of an ill-starred attempt to accommodate the legendary cock of one Agustin Fink) and, though his friend Clara dies, worn out by excesses, on the last page we leave the insouciant memoirist and poet, making his way up the stairs of the most recent of his transitory abodes, "trailed by a furtive shadow." Cristo and Lina Lee of "Greek Love", after a night of ecstatic and mutually satisfactory love-making, die in flames, but are freed from all their earthly tribulations, purged by suffering and united as one in what one assumes is a Bras Cubas type of immortality. The humble princess of "Snow White Revisited" is similarly granted physical incorruptibility by God and sainthood by the Pope after her suicide, and Silva's queen, Deborah learns successfully to fly in order to escape from police raids. The adolescent lovers in "Jonathan's Bequest to David", unlike their counterparts of *Les Amitiés Particulières*, seem not destroyed, but strengthened by discovery and disgrace; the sensitive growing boy of Banuelos' poem-sequence vanquishes the obstacles placed in his way by society and assumes his love and his gayness; the lovers of "A Story about Butterflies" are reunited in shared insanity in the mental hospital; and even the hustlers and their clients terminate relations sourly, but not tragically, and enter new ones.

This positive image of gay social and sexual affairs clearly corresponds in part to the bias of the anthologist, a well-known activist and propagandist for the gay sen-

sibility, who could probably, had he set his mind to it, have compiled a collection of gloom-and-doom as depressing as anything American fiction might provide. It also originates partly in a uniquely Brazilian talent for optimism, for sublimation; "Greek Love" and "Snow White Revisited" are, for example, very sordid tragedies that have simply been thus sublimated by the characters' choosing to rise above the miserable circumstances of their lives and ends, assuming deliberately heroic or royal status. Another point to be made is that, with the abundance of cheap, small presses in Latin America, and in view of the fact that few Latin American authors earn their living solely from their creative writings, they do not labour, as in Anglo-Saxon culture, under the financial necessity of pandering to their publishing houses by equipping homosexual stories with a conventional punitive moralistic ending in order to make them commercially viable, or even printable. But the very fact that it was possible to bring together such a collection, of considerable literary merit, would seem to point inevitably to the fact that Latin American, or at least Brazilian, gay authors do not apparently take their, or others', homosexuality so tragically or even so seriously as do many gay authors in other cultures. We must ask the question of whether this levity, this lesser degree of seriousness, are an actual response to social realities in their countries, or whether this is merely one more instance of irresponsibility, of superficiality, of "le Brésil n'est pas encore un pays sérieux." Is Latin American homosexuality, hence society, less "sodomasochistic" (which I take it here means "destructive and self-destructive": one grows weary of writers who bandy about this term, without defining whether it is intended in its narrow, ritualistic or wider, sociopsychological sense) than American homosexuality and society? In a recent newspaper article, Ed Jackson has pointed out that in any society, many kinds of happier, more positive gay relationships exist which do not correspond to Sarotte's archetypes, but that American authors ignore the former and choose the latter "either consciously or unconsciously, as paradigms of the social problems of homosexual love rather than of some intrinsic psychological weakness." If Latin American authors, conversely, tend to choose the former and avoid the latter, may we conclude that homosexuality and homosexual love do not present a social problem to their adherents in Latin America, or is this avoidance simple evasion and fantasy compensation, empty Brazilian optimism?



The answers to these questions, I'm afraid, are not very satisfactory ones. It is Latin American society as a whole, machismo, that, as I've stated before, does not take homosexuality seriously. Unlike Anglo-Saxon society, which considers it a very grave menace, indeed, but at least pays it the compliment of regarding it as serious, machismo takes in earnest only the two roles-poles defined in its code, and everything else is classified in terms of these. There are *only* men and women, males and females, biologically-sexually-socially, only *macho* and *hembra*—no interim gradations, no combinations, no "switchability". There is thus in this dualism no such thing as homosexuality, as a concept. There are no homosexual acts: performed by the *macho* as penetrator and enjoyer, whatever the biological sex of the receiver, they are male acts; received by the other partner as penetrated and enjoyed, they are female acts, and the receiver, whatever his/her biological sex, is a *hembra*, the broken one, *la chingada*. There is no homosexual social behaviour, only appropriate male-manly and female-womanly social behaviour, and the social animal is classified accordingly: the Lina Lees and Deborahs and Snow Whites of our stories are despised *just as women are despised*; not because of their homosexual social behaviour, their homosexual acts, because they are homosexuals; but because of their female-womanly social behaviour, their female sexual acts, because they are women, females, *la chingada*.

There are thus, in this schema, no homosexuals. What does not exist need not, obviously, be taken seriously or even legislated or discriminated against; hints of its existence will be ignored; whatever it is, it is a minor flaw, worthy only of ridicule. Reality naturally cannot aspire to such schematic perfection. But if, in reality, in accordance with the macho concept of honour as extrinsic and social, not intrinsic and personal, the public-social (manly-womanly) aspects of the code take precedence over its private-personal (male-female) ones, and sometimes adherence to the former's rules permits even violation of the latter's, so that manly behaviour excuses unmale (sexual) acts, so long as these remain strictly in the private domain; if in practice the promiscuous, unvirtuous woman, because she is more publicly and more frequently *la chingada*, is despised more than the private, virtuous, monogamous one; if the homosexual does in actuality exist, and is in effect despised by macho society more even than the unvirtuous woman, because the latter, being by

nature an incomplete, weak being, had little option but to be broken by the macho, whereas the former has voluntarily surrendered the jewel of his hardness, his completeness, his inviolability to become something worse than *la chingada*—a *hueco* (empty hole), *joto* (lame), *bicha* (female insect), *loca* (madwoman), *buey* (ox), *mandinga* (devil), *dañado* (hurt, bewitched), etc.; if, then, society in Latin America, as everywhere, does indeed confer a negative recognition on the homosexual, with socio-economic discrimination, punitive spiritual, criminal and medical legislation against him and a set of pejorative epithets and folk beliefs, nevertheless, it does so grudgingly, and the *macho-hembra* dichotomisation is so deeply implanted in the Latin American collective mentality that this invisible minority does tend to be recognised, and legislated, *for or against*, less than in some other societies. Hence the seeming tolerance, the real neglect, dismissal or unawareness.

In the end, society's attitudes reveal little, and one must go back to the individual authors and ask how they perceive their own and their characters' gayness, what comments and protests they make, what mechanisms of defense they construct against society's punishments and discrimination. The response of our authors is naturally individualistic. Abreu is basically interested in interpersonal relations and the problem of communication and has little to say about society and the outer world, his being a world of two. Damata to these same interests adds a Balzacian fascination with money and with the mechanics of socioeconomic exploitation. The vision of the gay world that he presents in "Revenge" is one of the bleakest and most negative in this anthology: a hostile condemnation of its frivolousness, malice, exploitation, inhumanity and refusal to assume its gayness. Neither his closet queens nor his hustlers would earn many marks for gay pride or consciousness. The author lets his characters, especially the dentist Ferreira, damn themselves out of their own mouths, and adds a swipe or two of his own: "I hate to see people making a spectacle of themselves", Ferreira often said. "Let your hair down, but only at home, or at least between four walls"; "he was never really happy, not even when he had a boy living with him. His friends often said that he felt some kind of compulsion to flagellate himself, to make himself miserable... the worst misfortune of his life was his inability to enjoy himself sexually; ordinarily he could not reach an orgasm"; "in questions of love Ferreira believed only in bought pleasures—that is, in boys who fucked exclusively for money or material gain... a boy who got emotionally involved was no good because he was a queen on his way out of the closet ('and I know enough queens already'); as if losing the boy had not been enough, all of his friends pounced on him at the same time, and for days the phone did not stop ringing. His bad luck was all they could talk about, and everyone, it seemed, was laughing at his expense, taking delight in his predicament"; "just as each day's newspaper reports the previous day's robberies... so news travels through gay circles and sooner or later—or immediately—everybody knows. It is part of the homosexual's character not to let such happenings drift by without comment"; "(boys who) when they've lost their bashfulness, are worse than the queens themselves, dancing in public with their 'spouses', always on the make, drinking and talking madly without giving much thought to what they're saying". A charming portrait of our community indeed—but is that *all* we are? Without even quoting, natch, the hustler's opinions on this "mean, stingy band of pederasts" and on "the faggots and buggers" of Rio de Janeiro.

Salvador Novo has a much more positive conception of his own gayness and of gay society: despite his taste for lower-class sexual companions and his zest for low-life adventures, despite his occasionally cruel, ageist and snobbish witticisms at the expense of those who were unlucky enough not to share his youth, beauty, intelligence—and social status—he at all times makes it clear (with winning egotism) that he considers himself a member of an elite, "eccentric and unique". It is difficult to imagine that any human being's coming-out and adolescence can have been completely free from guilt and self-doubt in matters of sexual definition, but—though he appears to regret having been molded essentially by his mother rather than his father—not a trace of these problems appears in this affectionate memoir written by the adult man, not even in the delicious scene in which a mentor upbraids him for his tendencies, but not before having asked the poet "Would you do it with me?" and having received an affirmative answer. Barely a register of protest or discomfort at Mexican society's rather harsh treatment of gays appears here either, of course: blasé sophistication is the obverse of social irresponsibility, and flippancy is his defence mechanism against society. Caminha's *Bom Crioulo* shows a similarly calm acceptance of homosexuality, surprising for its period but in harmony with the "whatever is, is right" tenets of naturalistic determinism. "Grecian carnality" is neither attacked nor defended, neither blamed nor praised, simply sympathetically and realistically described, like all other phenomena. There is no sign of the presence or absence of a gay consciousness, no social protest. All these are merely implied in the scandalous choice of subject matter. "Lost in Recife" similarly implies the superiority of a freely formed homosexual friendship based on elective affinities over the chains of joyless bourgeois heterosexual marriage but, though the three male characters are clearly gays, they are low-consciousness, closeted ones (the word "gay" or "homosexual" never appears in the text) and any protest against society is once more only implicit. Darcy Pentead sometimes uses his much more pointed satirical weapons to poke friendly fun at the gay community ("His real charm

did not reside in that anatomical feature which our libidos—yours, too, dear reader: don't pretend otherwise—caused us to imagine a moment ago when I was listing his fine points and qualities"; "What a living doll," crooned the friends of his mother. "We're gonna have a faggot in the family," his older brothers muttered."), but he just as often defends it seriously against its oppressors: "During the days of Snow White's youth, homosexuality was not the amusing, permissible . . . thing that it is today. Far from it. Women were women then and men were men, real he-men, with no middle ground. There was no room for transvestites and androgynes . . . In actual fact they were pariahs, segregated and pushed aside like wandering bands of lepers who offended by making a public display of their putrefaction. The whole situation was tragic, truly tragic." Amidst all this humanity, wit and sympathy, one can object, however, to the stereotyping of the drag queen, Snow White, who progresses inevitably from "preferring playhouses and dolls to games of soccer with his brothers and classmates", through being expelled from boarding school for "indecorous acts", to reading Proust, adoring Paris, using Black Mystery Hair dye by L'Oréal, gowns of pinkish nylon, diamond tiaras and Mitsouko perfume by Guerlain, to plastic surgery and final suicide by means of a poisoned apple. Don't we, in 1979, deserve a little variation? Trevisan's "Jonathan's Bequest to David", an affirmation of homosexual love in the bosom of one of its negators, the Roman Catholic church, is another implicit attack on the false values of a community which practices self-denial and non-communication ("speech was not prohibited in the refectory but we took our meals in silence . . . like a continuation of the hermetic climate of the chapel"), wears "festive black" on "occasions of love" and refuses to recognise the real nature of human or divine love. The self-image here is a triumphant and loving one, but once more, social comments and protests are merely implicit in the contrasts.

Poets are often more private ("All of the men are in on the secret and nothing/would be gained by breaking it into a thousand pieces/when, on the contrary, it is so sweet to keep it whole/and share it with the chosen person", "Nocturno de los Angeles", Xavier Villaurrutia), but several here speak a less closeted language, for instance the Mexican Ernesto Banaños, in the sad social awareness of the youthful gay isolate growing up in a world with repression everywhere around him, in a poem-sequence in which all the familiar figures and stages of downcast gaylife appear in an impressive pageant: the "different" boy, the "gentle" boy, the youthful experimenter, the candy-offering pedophile, the priest, the Saturday movie experiences, the macho father, the friend too dear to be a friend, the "other gay boy in school", the adolescent crush, the friend no more a friend, the gay barber, mechanic, etc., the friend who marries, the bisexual friend, the policeman, the blackmailer, the suicide, and, finally, affirmation of gayness: "I fell in love with him,/we were together a lot,/we fucked together,/it's as simple as that"; and the undiscovered, greatly talented Russian-Brazilian poet Valery Pereleshin, especially in his sparkling, though flatly translated from the Russian by Simon Karlinsky, "To One Who Confessed", addressed, naturally, to an ex-seminarian ("You've been inscribed among those odious creatures/whom anyone may crucify at will") and ending in a ringing exhortation to fight "for equality, for decent legislation/and for the right to live and be ourselves." These are probably the fightingest lines in the whole anthology.

The Brazilian novelist, journalist and gay activist Aguinaldo Silva is however probably the most outspoken and one of the best known of the authors here included. "Matinee at the Iris Theatre" is really two stories, the first a witty account of the flying queen Deborah and other similar characters of the bas fondos of Rio's Lapa in its last days. Silva describes himself and friends as a "special reconnaissance committee sent by the outside world", but he considers himself a hanger-on in Deborah's world, at least; he too has lived in the Lapa, though as its "most insignificant resident. To reach that conclusion all I had to do was glance off my balcony at all the dethroned royalty" and he clearly sympathises with the queens in their struggle. The second story is a nightmarish account of mass sex in the tearoom of Rio's downtown Iris Theatre. Here again, Silva is an ambiguous figure, drawn toward the spectacle but frightened and sickened by it, while a "doorwoman"—conscience encourages ("go on, there's nothing to be afraid of") and admonishes him ("don't you think it's time you made up your mind?")—his way of dramatising the divided world, of respectability and quasi-criminality, which like Novo and so many other middle-class Latin American gays, he inhabits. The importance of his odyssey resides, however, not in the spectacle of sexual activity in itself, but in the phrase, written in large letters, which the author finally discovers on the washroom wall: "The Iris Too is Brazil", a phrase summing up, in its revolutionary honesty, all the frustrations that its inscriber is evidently determined not to suffer in silence any longer; the affirmation that homosexuality exists and is also part of the Latin American reality; that it is not, as society claims and tries to maintain it, invisible.

One of course expects further social commentary and protest from such a distinguished and perceptive, if ambiguous, observer, in "Greek Love". Despite the melodramatic, overwrought style he chooses to employ here, in order to mirror his heroine's state of mind, Silva is indeed skillful at evoking the red-light-district and tropical-port atmosphere, and above all at provoking an unlikely sympathy in the reader for the romantic and wretched drag queen-prostitute, Lina Lee, and outrage at the conditions of the milieu she inhabits and the discrimination she is the

victim of, however much all this comes by her own choice. A long passage in which the heroine describes forbidden excursions into the "enemy territory", the downtown area, and the aggressions she received, ending in lapidation, is especially noteworthy. Yet "Greek Love" unwittingly exemplifies perfectly the flaw in the Latin American gay self-image which is chiefly responsible for the passiveness, the lack of protest, outrage or organisation among the region's homosexuals, and which causes me to be very doubtful of the possibility of any amelioration of the present situation. One of the features of this story which will strike the Anglo-Saxon reader forcibly is its misogyny. Lina Lee patently detests her female colleagues and rivals, repeatedly calling them "smelly cunts" and observing jealously "the painted women trying to convince their men that they were somehow better—more womanly—than I was." Óptima, an ageless Tiresias-figure of indeterminate sex, technically male (perhaps it is for this reason that Erskine Lane, in this story—as in parts of Novo's memoirs—adopts the unnerving practice of translating references to certain characters with alternating male and female third-person pronouns, a form of gender-fucking which I find needlessly distracting), notes that "rats work harder than women." Cristo, just before the story's climax, brutally beats up and perhaps murders a prostitute, who masochistically (and I use the word in its ritualistic sense here) accepts the beating, like a good Latin American woman ("coldly and knowingly he beat the poor woman, while she coldly and knowingly consented, without a gesture of protest. He seemed about to destroy her, to transform her into a puddle of blood, and she wanted him to do it . . . she wanted to take advantage of his blows until the last . . . Cristo's hands were without doubt a punishment she felt she deserved, and so she desired it . . . yes, her posture seemed to say, after so many years of whoring, she had at last reaped her just reward."), while Lina Lee watches unmoved; Cristo then remarks "I hate whores. I hate the whole lot of them" and departs with the drag-queen for ecstasy and apotheosis. (Nor is the misogyny limited to this one story: we find it, explicit or implicit, in Ferreira's hatred for the lesbian Elvira, in "Revenge"—"Worst of all, Laércio had left him for a woman, a fact that he could not forgive, though Elvira, to tell the truth, was not exactly a woman"; in "Jarbas the Imaginative", where the boy, preferring men, still fantasizes his male clients young virgins and old maids to be raped, to the better to assert his machismo and disguise his gayness; in "Lost in Recife," where the protagonist despises his cuckolding wife; and everywhere in *Bom Crioulo*.)



The world of these stories is in fact almost completely womanless, and when women appear it is as rivals or enemies. Lesbians figure in only one story, as background characters. There is certainly little to interest and not a little to repel the female gay reader in this anthology, a deficiency which, for the same reasons as discussed near the beginning of this review, is doubtless inevitable, but still regrettable.) And what is one to make of the following speech from one drag-queen (Óptima) to another (Lina Lee): "You are still a man. A man, you know, is the most priceless of jewels. It's hard to break him, to shatter him into so many little meaningless and useless coloured stones. And that's what the people here in the zone are—just brightly coloured stones with little trace of value. From time to time one of them gets divided even further, becomes even more of a trifle, and every night some of them are ground to dust. But you are still a whole stone." Or of Lina's similar perception of Óptima: "She was there, whole in the way I was whole the first time I realised I was a man. She was a stone that nothing had ever managed to break." What, above all, are we to think of the incredible dénouement in which Cristo and Lina Lee, alone at last together in Óptima's virgin bridal chamber, disrobe ("His sex began to arch up fiercely beneath his underwear, and my sudden awareness of it made me tremble because the same thing was happening beneath the strap that concealed what was for me the least esteemed part of my body . . . I had breasts and he had a strong hard chest. But even so we knew that we were alike"), enjoy mutually satisfactory sexual relations ("in that virgin bed our limbs tangled like an indecipherable puzzle—he sucked me and I sucked him . . . in the darkness our eyes met in a mute question: would I fuck him or would he fuck me?")—despite which nonsense (nonsense because of the primitive descriptive techniques employed, not because of the psychological probability or improbability of the acts described) we have little doubt as to who the real man is: "Cristo's arms were hard and they had that incredible smell of man"; "he broke into an incredible manly groan . . . which was the groan of

the first man, the ancestral male, and I groaned as he groaned"; "at last he exploded and I could feel him spilling inside me, and I came too while he was still panting"; all night while he talked I explored his body, trying to coax from it the mystery that he had first attracted me to it, the certainty that he was beautiful and proud, that nothing could really degrade him"—and, locked in their nuptial chamber by Óptima, who has decided to burn the building down, are purified by fire and become in death one being ("we had been two, but now we were one, or at least he was what I had always dreamed of being"—my italics)?

Obviously the quotations cited here do not necessarily coincide with the sentiments and opinions of the author, who is, attempting to map the psychology of a drag queen; simultaneous femaleness and maleness, not his own. But, unless we are to take this whole tale as a brilliant parody—a definite possibility, to my mind—what is all the foregoing but a groveling, obscene obeisance at the altar of machismo? Mesmerised by the macho's perceived wholeness and hardness, polarised by the macho dichotomisation which divides all humanity into the duality *macho-la chingada*, the Latin American gay, as represented here by Lina Lee, can aspire only to the role of the despised *la chingada*—the broken one—or to the condition of *macho*, the whole, virile ideal. All Lina Lee's revolt against machismo has been a sham; denied her condition as *macho*, she had merely sought to assume the other pole, *la chingada*, as perfectly as possible. But Óptima reminds her that they both are still "men", "the most priceless of jewels", and thus even Lina Lee, who values herself and her woman's name so little that "I stood for what was nameless", is restored in the end; she is still "a whole stone", she has *not* been broken, and through Cristo's maleness she recovers her own. The argument has of course been taken from Genet, and the Lina Lee-Cristo relationship, though it also recalls *Querelle de Brest*, specifically is based on that of Divine with Mignon and Notre Dame, her "robbing" of their maleness, in *Notre Dame des Fleurs*.

The examples of misogyny quoted earlier now have an explanation other than mere jealousy and competition; they are but a further homage to the macho, a pathetic attempt to identify with him even further by emulating his scorn for woman; by denying and attacking what one is, one becomes its opposite. It is my thesis that this immature, anachronistic worship of the macho, this longing for the normalcy of the male ideal, is even much more deeply imprinted in the Latin American consciousness than in the North American, paralyses all activism in the subcontinent and produces precisely that confusion and impasse characteristic of a love-hate relationship. Latin American gays cannot continue to love the enemy—but they do. They cannot continue, as a corollary, to despise themselves and each other for lacking the enemy's supposed virtues—but they do. Macho worship and its self-hatred pervade many of the selections in this anthology, one of its other typical forms being the homosexual's desire to expose seeming machos as false, as *chingadas* like himself. This is the "revenge" of Ferreira the dentist and his clique: the attrition, the ridiculing, by doubt and gossip, of the hustler's assumed masculinity, until finally the young man, after vainly trying to defend himself "with the phony masculine air of a boy who talks about women but is ready to roll over for any man who wants him", stung by his lesbian lover's taunt, *pace* Genet, that "a macho who lives with a queer ends up queer himself", finally confesses that he no longer knows "what in the fuck I am any more—whether I'm a man or a queer", while Ferreira publicly humiliates him: "You're a homosexual, and it's time for you to stop playing the big macho!" The same group divides boys into a clear rigid "macho-queen" dichotomy: "there were two kinds of boys: those who are *worthy of respect* (my italics), who say as little as possible and fuck because they need the money and then end up getting married . . . who have no hang-ups about the whole matter; and those who at first seem to be very serious . . . (but) who got involved emotionally . . . (and) later, when they've lost their bashfulness, are worse than the queens themselves." Bom Crioulo at first seems a model macho: he endures sadistic (and sadistically described) whippings, participates in brawls, and clearly is attracted "priapically" to the cabin-boy and will assume the male role in relations with him. But his machismo is suspect; he is uninterested in women: "He could not remember ever having . . . indulged in any of those adventures, so common in youth, which involve easy women. On the contrary, he had always been indifferent to such things, preferring to make merry with the other men aboard ship, far from the intrigues and deceptions of women." Conclusion—Bom Crioulo is a false macho, and his mental and physical collapse by the novel's end is already predictable. Despite his intelligence, even Salvador Novo falls once or twice into the trap: in his attraction to rough trade, not merely because of supposed penile endowment (Novo is a size queen, and that is of course another form of macho worship, less easily satisfiable in Latin America) but also for supposed manly qualities in "those who drove trucks, buses, and taxis—the new generation to which, in the small Mexico City of the time, had fallen the task of handling the machines and living dangerously"; in the portrait of a very unmacho, weak, henpecked, tuberculous and, hence, unloved father; in a sententious observation about the dangers of a queen's falling in love with another queen. The little anecdote about his being forced to perform—or pretend to perform—the macho sexual act in a brothel by a group of colleagues suspicious of his tendencies, who, after the performance, accept him with alacrity as one of them, is amusing and is part of the necessary rites of initiation to the code of decorum and hypocrisy for every Latin American

gay. The weak hero of "Lost in Recife" is not suspected, however, but despised by his wife because of unmacho conduct—not because he is unfaithful to her or because he neglects her but because "I did not neglect her for another woman. I just simply neglected her."

And so on, and on, ad infinitum. Reluctantly one must conclude that Latin American gays are in many ways in approximately the same social and psychological situation from which Anglo-Saxon gays, especially in North America, began to emerge some 25 years ago. If they undoubtedly enjoy, to a certain extent, a greater degree of legal and social tolerance, a greater freedom from discrimination and police harassment, sometimes even a healthier psychological environment during their period of sexual definition, than North American homosexuals at that time possessed—and perhaps more still than they possess—these are due not to any noble abstract altruistic libertarian impulses which thrill in every Latin American breast, but to certain specific historical, social, economic, cultural, geographic and even climatic factors—each with its disadvantages as well as advantages—that help distinguish their world from ours. The tolerance and

freedom that are theirs, for example, are theirs wholly upon the macho society's terms: adopt the code of decorum in public (never come out, never be yourselves), consent to be ignored, not taken seriously, perhaps ridiculed, as a group, refuse activism, organization, gay pride, gay consciousness, and you will lead a pleasant negative existence—you will not be fired, discriminated against, or considered criminal or sinful for your sexual activities—so long as nobody—officially—knows about them. *Plus ça change.* Hypnotised often by an unattainable macho ideal, having accepted and internalised the macho code and its dichotomisation of the sexual and social universe, disapproved of by church, family and society in general yet insufficiently oppressed to feel the need of any kind of protest or organization, treated as invisible by government, Latin American gays are in a remote pre-revolutionary condition, hardly aware yet of the subjection in which they are maintained, and will make little progress until the magic chain of role dichotomisation is broken and the whole range of sexual and social activity can be freely examined and experimented with by a pluralistic society. I see little possibility, from the evidence of this anthology

and personal experience, that such a radical change will occur in the near future. Despite the anonymous hand which printed "The Iris Also Is Brazil" on the walls of the tearoom, Aguinaldo Silva's grimly puritanical description of the joyless, warlike sexual activity occurring there leaves little doubt of how far this society is from sexual sanity. Nevertheless, almost all the Brazilian authors included here are alive and publishing, and their existence, like the appearance of this anthology, bodes well for the future. *Now the Volcano* is an extremely valuable exploration of what to most of us, North American or Latin American, up to now was an unknown jungle, a *casa verde*. Gay Sunshine Press, the editor and the translators are to be congratulated for having made it more accessible. Now it is up to Latin Americans to take the next step.

Now the Volcano is available directly by mail from Gay Sunshine Press, Box 40397, San Francisco, Ca. 94140 for \$7.95 paperback, or \$20 quality limited edition hardcover plus \$1 postage/handling per copy. Calif. residents add 6% sales tax.

BOOK REVIEWS

WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture by Arthur Evans. Fag Rag Books, Boston, 1978. 156 pp. of text, with an appendix listing events affecting homosexuals in history (339 B.C.—1801 A.D.), bibliography, and index. \$5.50 paperback.

Reviewed by Will Inman

Arthur Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* is a knife without a handle, an arrow without a bow, in many ways a very informative indictment against industrialism and organized religions (especially Christianity and Judaism and also, in effect, the Muslim faith) but profoundly lacking the very spirituality that would be entirely necessary to bring about the revolution he rightly calls for. His fault—notice I say 'fault' not 'sin'—is reducing human wholeness to what would be essentially a kind of sexual demonism. It is substituting *sexual* liberation (as if any part of human behavior and awareness can really be liberated healingly apart from the rest) for *human* liberation. He speaks of returning to 'nature' perspectives, and I submit that that, indeed, can work toward wholeness. But the entire book so mechanically equates sex between man and man, woman and woman, whether religious sex with shamans, furtive sex without relationship—in any age, indiscriminate sex in peasant societies, and 'gay' sex with the powdered and pompadoured boys whom Augustine pointed at to portray homosexuals as abominations—so mechanically equates all these, I say, uncritically avoiding the implications of class abuse and corruption, enslavement, and compulsion, without facing which we cannot accept, let alone heal, ourselves as human beings in a society which has crippled so many of us to its sick purposes. We are not crippled because we are homosexual or heterosexual, but our manifestations of sexuality, no matter what, are bound to be affected by the competitiveness, self-destructiveness, and self-hatred deliberately fostered by a system which sees, and uses, individuals as functions of commodity production and corporate power. Evans implies much of this, but his careless equating of all manifestations of 'gayness' and his willingness to strain historical points undercuts the authority of his essential vision. His voice again and again takes on the shrill authority of the goddess Kali, on whose presence he calls so significantly in the last sentence in his book. Kali is the Hindu goddess of destruction. She is also a projection of the male anima, the enraged and vindictive male anima, against unfair authority, yes, against patriarchy and industrialism. The problem with Kali is that, while she embodies a powerful and even necessary source of energy for social change and individual/mass catalysis, she herself tends to be more vengeful than fair, more bitter than wise, more vicious than healing.

On page 3 of the introduction, Evans says, 'The book is as true as any other historical work. It is true because all historical works are one-sided, subjective and arbitrary. Every historian works this way. The real falsehood occurs when historians hide their values, emotions, and choices under a veneer of "objectivity." A work of history cannot be assessed apart from the values of the person who wrote it.'

I do not object to Evans' claim to be partisan. Life, wherever it manifests itself, is not passive, not liberal, not tame. To use the documentary and academic methods in a context of bold perspectives—is admirable. This does not mean to suppress, distort, or twist facts to fit any proposition, however. Perhaps we must measure a work of history by the values of the person who writes it, but we must measure its effect by the values of those who do, or don't, believe it—and what they do with it. If, to paraphrase Yevtushenko, we consider a revolution a necessary means of bringing Truth into being, we won't get there by telling lies. He was speaking of communism. The communists persistently lie, and they are not really liberating humankind. We must not fall into that trap, the trap of

twisting the truth to fit our intentions, no matter how validly provoked we may be with the lying historians of the past and with the outrages of present social systems and their ideological spiritual diseases, Christian, Jewish, Marxist, or whatever.

Even though I am no good judge of when Evans' twists facts, it is commentary enough to report that his mechanical and persistent speaking of shamans, witches, heretics, homosexuals—all as 'gay'—reduces to an idiot sameness the widely varying significances which seemingly identical sexual acts may have in different contexts and with different attitudes and feelings working.

Having said that, I must be fair enough to acknowledge that it has been the societies and the religious authorities over time which have been the primary oppressors in using the homosexual label as a club to crush opposition in most mechanical ways for their own nefarious purposes.

What I especially resent in Evans' *Witchcraft* is the double standard he subtly plays on throughout the book regarding homosexuality. On one hand, he affirms that, as an experience of androgynous godness in all of us, sexual sharing between man and man and woman and woman can serve to build in us a sense of oneness with the universe, of being and containing god (p. 110). On the other hand, he fails to acknowledge that men came to be used under the class system, as women have been—as objects, as victims, as exploited persons for their bodies, that this drove many men, as it did women, to become caricatures of human beings, to exaggerate their tenderness and their compassionate healing aspects, their 'feminine' side, with pseudo-womanhood, to incite rather than to embrace, to divert rather than to dilate. Not to speak of exaggerating the macho side to absurd mockeries of 'whole' manhood. It is a difficult subject, to be sure, but not to deal with it honestly does not serve to fight the *business* that has grown up around gayness, the postures, the mockeries, the exploitations, the self-hate, the desperate 'bitchiness'—all functions of a society which reduces human beings to fragments. Men have a right to be tender, affectionate, wonder-filled, spontaneous, giving—and they don't have to be mock-women to do it. Women have a right to be bold, to lead, to decide, to fight, to say NO—and they don't have to be mock men to do or be any of those. We do not have to make effeminate men and 'butch' women feel cheap to ask them—and us—to look unguiltily and healingly and laughingly and compassionately into our behavior and feelings to build in us new habits of being so that we do not serve those who hate us and exploit us by filling their expectations on one hand or acting out their values on the other. The Syndicate is the one that makes profits off turning young gay boys into entertainers for a society that makes itself feel superior by laughing at gay men; such a society grew fat laughing at funny black people, ha ha, them niggers, them fags. We gays have been as afraid of dealing with such realities for fear of being called 'anti-gay' as liberals have been of facing up to the outrageous alliances Israel has made (South Africa, Nicaragua, Brazil) for fear of being called anti-semitic. We cannot lay real foundations for freedom and fairness as human beings, let alone as radicals, until we address ourselves to such questions. If we are brave and undefensive, neither patronizing nor tepidly tolerant in how we raise such realities, we can call for responsible healing among ourselves without generating still more guilt and self-hatred.

Near the end of Evans' book, he draws generously on studies of modern societies to make devastating and, I believe, entirely deserved indictments of capitalism, communism as state industrialism, Christianity, militarism, industrialism. He proposes generating small groups of conscientious persons who, more and more, can make ways to survive (p. 146):

'The way to do these things is through collective work. I mean real collective work, not the forced collectivity of industrial socialism . . . For example, we can form small collectives to start getting food for ourselves in the cities . . . We can join together to publish our own magazines and books. We can study herbs and people's medicine to heal ourselves. We can form collectives to work on satisfying

practically any of our needs—and we can do it better than the privileged professionals (I've seen it happen). . . . In this way we can begin replacing industrial technology with people's technology . . .'

In these later chapters, Evans' indictments are more than Kali screams; they are terrifying and inescapable facts. Then he calls us to wake to the possibilities of 'magic.' (p. 148).

'The new work collectives that we form must be more than loose functional groups. Experience shows that such loose groups are usually short-lived and weak. If we are ever to overthrow the industrial patriarchy, I believe we must tap into deeper energies, energies that the ruling classes of Christianity and industrialism have always desperately tried to deny and repress. These are the energies of magic.'

'Magic is the art of communicating with the spiritual powers in nature and in ourselves. Nature societies throughout history have known that trees, stars, rocks, the sun and moon are not dead objects or mere resources but living beings who communicate with us. They have also known that there are mysterious nonrational powers within ourselves . . .'

While his call here is a little glib, even simplistic, it is valid. Evans, however, gives away his own lack of spiritual seasoning by calling, p. 151, for hit-and-run terror tactics. My objection to this is not that I don't believe modern systems deserve such attacks. What they do to their own advocates and to each other, daily, is far worse than anything we could conceive of. I do insist, however, that such a call for terror is to give in to the demon of Kali—frustration, desperation. It is to prove to the powers that be that we are a bunch of spoiled brats who will foul a world we cannot have our own way in. It is seeing ourselves first as gay, then as human beings. To be sure, Evans calls, almost in passing, for building alliances with other oppressed groups. But to speak of terror tactics *before* building such alliances—suggests a lack of seriousness about the perspectives of potential allies. The social systems that oppress us—are constructed to *make* us see ourselves as gay, or black, or whatever, *first*: we do not have to settle for those perspectives: we know humanity needs us for our many varieties of selfbeing, even if humanity is prevented from that vision of us now.

Essentially, however, my protest against calls for abstract violence is that such calls are adventurist, they invite suppression before we are organized (they play the role of provocateur); they breed narrow sectarianism. Further, in and of themselves, such tactics would organize us into the very kind of mentalities and modes that we want to transform. This is a fact, whether we look at it from a standpoint of ancient karmic law, of modern psychology, or of basic common sense.

We can begin to transform ourselves, as absurd as it may seem, *within* this society, learning slowly and boringly, to use all our resources of caring, sharing, creating, loving, surviving—we can do it unsentimentally but with profound sentiment, irrationally but with lucid intelligence, angrily and with persistent compassion, and with that doggedness that any single experience of real trust, real love—can give us the energy and steadfastness to make endure and prevail.

Evans' book is a mixed tissue of opportunism and keen facts, of demagoguery and actual terror, of valid outrage and postured militancy. Read it to inform yourself, not to find in it a new bible for gays.

Postscript

In my review of Arthur Evans' book I've hit the author rather sharply on certain perspectives and uses. The fact remains: *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* is the first book that gives such a wide-ranging view of history from inside a gay perspective. Every interpretation of history is a political one, even those that use the masks and postures of academia and objectivity. J.A. Symonds' *A Problem in Greek Ethics* sets a fine example of what is

possible, and he was an early pioneer in the subject. But Evans has taken on the sacrosanct philosophers of history and has, again and again, caught them with their deadly notions fingering the spiritual till of humankind. That he has dared to do this—in many ways sets us free to do our own looking and our own interpretations. *En garde! histoire.*

NEW GAY NOVELS

Special Teachers/Special Boys, by Pete Fisher and Marc Rubin. St. Martin's Press, 352 pp., 1979. \$10.00 hardcover, \$4.95 paperback.

Ron, by Carl Tiktin. Arbor House, 338 pp., 1979. \$9.95 hardcover.

Nocturnes for the King of Naples, by Edmund White. St. Martin's Press, 148 pp., 1978. \$7.95 hardcover.

David at Olivet, by Wallace Hamilton. St. Martin's Press, 240 pp., 1979. \$10.00 hardcover, \$4.95 paperback.

Among the Carnivores, by Daniel Curzon. Ashley Books, 377 pp., 1979. \$9.95 hardcover.

No More into the Garden, by David Watmough. Doubleday, 207 pp., 1978. Hardcover.

Reviewed by Scott Jones

Years ago, characters in novels would worry about whether they were homosexual. Now, they know they are, and they worry about whether they should come out. In the new books, the ambivalence isn't about whether the private act of gayness is valid; it's about whether the public act is. Here is how Pete Fisher and Marc Rubin's *Special Teachers/Special Boys* sees the domestic front: "Tom greeted them at the door, looking disheveled, paint-splattered, and happy. He kissed Bob and Jenny and hugged Jake before he led them into an apartment that seemed to be totally filled by a wildly barking dog, paintings, plants, and three incredibly assertive cats." Tom and Bob and their animals are like a fun, kooky, alternative family—a rambunctious heaven. When a homosexual youth gets assertive, though, things go awry. A teenager named Rocky O'Brian III tells Bob he wants to proclaim his gayness at school, and Bob tells him to go see a psychologist first. He's afraid he'll be traumatized. Nevertheless, the boy makes his stand, and the novel has an upbeat, celebratory ending.

Special Teachers/Special Boys is set in a New York City school for delinquent boys. It's a strange mixture of things: crummy-pulp sex scenes, gay self-discovery, and liberal piousness about the mainstream values of education, lawfulness, and staying off dope. The main story—though there seem to be about sixteen—becomes clear toward the end. Through a TV interview, the teacher Bob Davidson comes out, and one of his students decides to follow his example. The gay student, Rocky O'Brian III, Warlord Supreme of the Deadly Ghouls, swaggers around in a gang jacket with a knife and an oozing skull pictured on the back. It's a fascinating set-up. The adolescent machismo of the boys, with its constant physical provocations and taunts of "fuckin' faggot," seems like the ultimate force of opposition—an unnegotiable, impossible thing.

The ingredients are right for an explosive social melodrama, but unfortunately the authors can't deal straightforwardly with action or violence. If somebody throws a punch, they end the chapter. There are too many scenes like the one in which the kids set off fireworks in the john, and then get penitent; you could put together a pretty passable Hayley Mills comedy with some of the social violence that's perpetrated in this book. It has a pronounced flavor of sixties-social-worker condescension. The final statement seems to be that when you do come out, you'll give up the streets, start studying, and join the kids playing touch football at recess. In other words, it's like being straight.

Another book, Carl Tiktin's *Ron*, treats the issue of coming out in a fiercer, funnier way. The story is told at a lively, New York pace, and some spots have a racy, boiling-over hilarity that's reminiscent of Philip Roth. There's bravado in the plot conception, the scenes build the way they should, and the action works as it doesn't in *Special Teachers/Special Boys*. Fifty pages in, Tiktin already has two teenaged brothers going to a gay bar, getting into a fight with a street gang, and coming home to explain their wounds to mom and dad. The book follows one of these boys, Ron Starr, through college, cabdriving, play-wrighting, and an eventual career in insurance. Ron is never satisfied with his sexual impulses, and he has a positive-thinker's inability to distinguish enthusiasm from self-deceit. He's as gung-ho about the idea of turning straight as he is about selling policies. So he marries a nice, big-bottomed woman named Doris and has a daughter and moves into a gigantic pushbutton house in Jamaica Estates. When he's had enough of it, he decides to go crazy, so he can get a company pension and spend the rest of his life writing. The book ends at the banquet where he's decided to stage the flip-out.

All Ron's optimistic life, there's been an underlying miserableness. He's a series of curved feelings and crooked desires that's been ironed into tight parallel lines. As Tiktin sets up Ron's flip-out, it's to be an act of sanity—his breakdown into anger, honesty, and maybe happiness. But then Tiktin chooses an unexpected, capitulatory ending in which his motivation is all too shallow and obvious: To

trip you up. So he's even less direct about his final action than *Special Teachers/Special Boys* is. The complaint isn't that Tiktin is against sexual honesty. His whole book is for it, but for his surprise ending he throws the book out the window.

Nocturnes for the King of Naples, an exotic and sensuous novel by Edmund White, is like an oasis in this group of books. Its concerns are so far removed from the present-day question of coming out that it probably stands a better chance of being read thirty years from now than any other novel in this column. It's a posed, stylized book. The first chapter's clearly divided into a black half and a white, light half. Chapters end in transformations—an adult becomes childlike, or someone dies—and the chapters occur in matched pairs. The book has symmetry. There's a feeling of duplicity in its point of view; the subject switches back and forth between "I" and "you." The novel is addressed to the narrator's former lover. A sample: "As we walk out to the end of the dock, our feet sounding a different note on each slat of this crooked xylophone, your hands sketch out several possible replies, none to your satisfaction. The gleam of that bright town in the distance . . . fills me with a longing to flee you."

With its twisted-jungle prose and arabesque descriptions, *Nocturnes* is deeply unstraight in every way. Unlike many of the other new gay novels, it doesn't make any effort to put together a critical social view. It doesn't lead toward a particular climactic statement; when it reaches a conclusion, it's through the back door—wandering through tunnels and hitting jewels capriciously. Via a zigzagging route, you get to know a set of characters, including some former bedmates, two dogs called Tim and Anxiety, and a sharp-witted European jet-setter named Didi. There are overdramatized passages, but the perceptive genius of the writing saves it. Some of the prose is immensely beautiful, and the work has a lush, writerly elegance that one sinks into like a couch. You're pleased, and in an unorthodox, slightly weird way. This book endorses eccentricity in a way lesser authors are afraid to.

Wallace Hamilton's *David at Olivet* is another escape from some of the current gay tensions. This strongly readable novel is about David of Bethlehem. It's set at a moment of political crisis, as David's throne in Jerusalem is being usurped by his rebellious son Absalom, who has mustered a shaky following of people that he's attempting to consolidate by such public shows as screwing his father's concubines on the palace balcony. Hamilton has a knack for taking scrupulously chronicled, tantalizing, but rather dry bits of information from the Bible and turning it into succulently readable fiction. Like Mary Renault, he fills the page with sensual detail, the clank of soldiers' metal and the smell of smoke, so the past has a tactile feeling of thereness. The things David recalls doing with the bearlike, brooding Saul in tents late at night are speculative, of course, but in the Mary Renault school, erotic speculations are what give the material its fiery charge. The idea of a liaison between David and Saul—the harpist-king and the warrior, the lyric and the tempestuous—is a good one, and emblematic of the touchy political unity which existed between Judah and the tribes of Israel. The whole thing's carried off in just over 200 pages, which makes it the right size for a Saturday afternoon.

In *Among the Carnivores*, Daniel Curzon demonstrates a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't attitude about coming out. The hero, Jock Jones, is an openly gay professor at a small-town California university; the book is about how his career is destroyed by the forces of reactionism. Though Curzon is probably the youngest author in this group—and definitely the most vociferous about gay liberation—he's the bitterest. The novel's point is that if you're honest about being homosexual, they'll get you; it's modern-day variant of the old-style novel in which if a character was homosexual, the character had to die.

There's nothing wrong with writing about social intolerance, but *Among the Carnivores* is a book that is, itself, palpably hateful and unaccepting of people. Characters are always picking their noses or exposing their privates and fat bellies, so all along you're revulsed, and you feel indecently treated. You're rewarded for your attention by pain. Curzon gets you interested in knowing whether Jock can come out in front of his mother, so he comes out, and she dies a month later. Everybody you're interested in dies. A lesbian professor who's raising a baby becomes intriguing, so Curzon kills her off in a car crash. One scene actually seems to be saying that society is so homophobic that when somebody wants to be sexually honest, a kitten is killed. The book's climax is our punishment for reading that far: A nine-page self-loathing interior monologue on Jock's part after he's mashed a rabbit with his car in Death Valley. Death Valley is supposed to be a metaphor for the hero's progress—it's where you end up in this rotten world if you have the courage to speak out. When you're liberated, you're dead. Actually, Death Valley symbolizes *Among the Carnivores*. It's the pits.

Lastly, David Watmough's *No More into the Garden* deserves a special recognition. It isn't as lovely as *Nocturnes* or as forceful as *Ron*, but it's simply and literately told, and it has a craggy imperfect wisdom. Each chapter of this autobiography-fiction treats a different period from the life of the protagonist, Davey Bryant. Some of the chapters are like finely shaped short stories with haunting, evocative endings. There's a funny, unusual segment about an Amazon-sized woman from Alabama who pays Davey three thousand francs to visit her at the Paris hospital where she lives. She gives him a sumptuous supper and three bottles of wine, and he compliments her on her hair. "An early suitor, now almost prominent figure in Washington, D.C., attempted to strangle himself with

these strands," she recalls with a shudder. Despite Davey's extreme gentility towards her, she ends up deciding that a further meeting won't be necessary. The subtle suggestion is that she's aware of his homosexuality and deems him inadequate to her purposes.

There are some temperamental problems in the writing—a spitefulness toward women, I think, and a pompous tone. But the book offers an overview of a whole lifetime, which is something not many gay works do. The hero is from a generation that never really did vocally come out, so it's a voice that's especially satisfying to hear. In this mature, battle-scarred novel, there isn't any doubt expressed about the dilemma of coming out, because the hero never comes out. It's the author who's come out, by writing the book. The few heterosexual passages in *No More into the Garden* probably wouldn't fool anyone; they're a throwback to the author's youth, when it was normal for gay writers to produce fraudulently heterosexual works. Now writers are coming out in print in their twenties and thirties. This is going to change the state of literature. What will the results be? What will Edmund White be writing about when he's as old as David Watmough, and what will the young writers be creating?

FLOWERS

Flowers Poems by Richard Ronan, Drawings by Bill Rancitelli. Calamus Books (323 N. Geneva St., Ithaca, NY) 1978 \$4 paperback

Reviewed by E.A. Lacey

Modern gay poetry in North America has been, for obvious reasons until now, basically an urban experience of bars, baths, tenements, main streets—a poetry of the urban jungle, "the city of dreadful night". In this it stands in contrast to the mainstream of North American poetry, profoundly rural and smalltown, and finding in nature both the meaning and the terror of existence. Richard Ronan's *Flowers* is a welcome return to these old immutable verities. This set of 15 poems, with titles which are the names of common North American wildflowers, accompanied by the sensitive drawings of Bill Rancitelli, is not, as might be supposed, purely imagistic, but rather loosely associative, each flower being reminiscent or symbolic of some remembered experience, usually of love/sex or loss. The flower names are delicious in themselves ('spatterdock', 'nelumbo', 'blue'), and their prominence in the drawings provide the collection's unifying principle. But there are poems, such as 'Fireweed', a strong comment on racial injustice and the rape of the land, which can be called sexual only insofar as all life is sexual. For, though Mr. Ronan is open and proud concerning his sexuality, he is definitely not an orthodox practicing member of the cock-balls-cum school—in fact (oh sacrilege!), whole poems pass without a single numbing reiteration of any of the magic words. As the preface makes clear, this little book is intended "as step toward the notion of gay humanism". Nobody reads prefaces, of course, but this one is important. North American gay poetry has been focussing too exclusively on genitality of late. If genitality and orgasmic or promiscuous sex are indeed values in their own right—not merely as therapy, but as a variety and extension of experience, allowance must, nevertheless, be made for the other (not opposing) values implicit in the one-to-one relationship, the gay affair or even marriage, as being positive as well. They are not contradictory, but rather complementary, and most people's experience includes, even today, both types of relationship. The focus has been too much on the former and too little on the latter in most recent gay poetry, and Richard Ronan's attempt to re-establish a balance is valuable.

Something must be said for tenderness, and the word which would sum up Mr. Ronan's poetry is 'tender'. Tenderly he describes sexual feeling in and for young boys ('Dandelions', 'Sweet Cherry'), jealousy and lovers' quarrels ('Ghetto Dogwood', 'Ghost Pipes'), the fatal hardening of the young into insensitivity ('Violets'), the playfulness of sex ('Geraniums'), young men uncertain about their sexuality ('Red Tulips'), the sadness of relationships never realized, or impossible ('Rose Mallow', 'Clover'). Tenderly, and with a note almost of pity. He has a feeling for the complete mysteriousness of other human beings, their individual uniqueness as revealed and expressed in their sexual activity, and for the imperfection, the flaw that resides in all human relationships. At the end of one of his best poems, 'Blues', he concludes: "and though I have fears/freddie—fears/more numerous than the grasses/I will seek/to welcome the/creatures that come/after perfection". His short-lined poems flow gracefully down the page, drawing the reader's eye on, though the line-divisions—as in all poetry of this type—occasionally fail to correspond to either breath-groups or sense and seem annoyingly arbitrary: like all poetry, this has to be heard. The imagery is apt and vivid ('I mean/our deliberate and/temporal and/behavioural lives—/like the closed/tulips/of the spatterdock/yellow/as watch eyes/above/where our bodies/went/together', "there are no banks/there's a single/shore/instead/an ellipse/where frogs lay/thick eggs/and fishlets/sun/still and anonymous/until you kick/a stone out of line/and they flick away/together/like a mane of hair/being pulled/under water"). The quiet voice of this wistful, delicate poetry, showing a strong influence of William Carlos Williams, is a music that deserves to be heard in these disco times.

SPIRITUAL POEMS

Heart's Witness The Sufi Quatrains of Awhaduddin Kirmani. Translated by Bernd Manuel Weischer & Peter Lamborn Wilson, Tehran, 1978 \$9.50 hardcover.

Reviewed by Winston Leyland

Issue Number 32 of *Gay Sunshine Journal* (Spring 1977) included a long, detailed article titled "Arab Civilization and Male Love" by Marc Daniel, translated from the French by myself. Among other topics that article discussed medieval Arab poets of the mystical "odhratic" school, based in Baghdad, who used the terminology of boy love to speak of divine love.

Several Persian Sufi poets of the 12th and 13th centuries also followed this tradition. Perhaps the best known in the West is Fariduddin 'Attar (died 1220). Now for the first time in English we have a selection of poems by another Persian Sufi master of this period, Awhaduddin Hamid Ibn Abi'l-Fakhr Kirmani (ca. 1163-1238) who lived much of his life in Baghdad, although he travelled extensively throughout the Near East.

Awhaduddin Kirmani was one of the most prominent Sufi teachers of his time. His disciples are said to have numbered seventy thousand. Stories handed down present him as a warm, caring man, a guide who comforted and assisted his disciples through charismatic signs such as clairvoyance and bilocation.

Awhaduddin's favorite poetic form was the ruba'i, or quatrain, and at least 1700 of these have survived. One hundred and twenty of these quatrains are presented in this new book, with the original Persian and English on facing pages. The translators write about this poetic form: "A good quatrain attains real power by being moulded from a single thought, a single 'flash' which then composes itself out of a strongly linked constellation of images or expressions, woven tensely and rhythmically into the warp of a conventional form (in this case *aa/ba*). The literary quality of the quatrains in this book is quite uneven; the English translation is generally well crafted, although occasionally stilted. But at their best Awhaduddin's quatrains work poetically and do have a brilliant flash as well as intellectual depth.

The translators have chosen a series of quatrains which deal with the various states of the Sufi Way. Thus the first section of the book deals with the transience of the world and the inevitability of death:

My heart
imagine that all things
conform to your desire
imagine
you've become a millionaire
overnight
with goods
piled from the Throne of Earth
to the Pleiades—
still—remember:
tomorrow too will pass
as today has passed.

Other poems give Awhaduddin Kirmani's advice to his disciples, a moral teaching directed at those who wish to follow the Sufi path. The desire for fame and honor consumes many men, turning them bitter and cynical. This has been a pitfall for mankind in all ages. We see it in our own society, not only among politicians and "stars" but also among some artists and poets whose drive for recognition becomes all consuming to the point of brushing aside friends. Awhaduddin writes about this syndrome:

If you cannot bear
to be alone, you will never
become a person;
if you cannot forget
your name
and honour
you will never
reach one stage on the road
to Unity
you will never
attain the rank
of Man.

Awhaduddin Kirmani was considered an innovator and eccentric by many of his contemporaries, some of whom reviled him as an unbeliever. Thus have innovators and reformers often been treated. Awhaduddin believed that the absolute cannot be comprehended. The Divine must be contemplated and experienced in His creation, the world. The world is the "outer aspect of God" and God is to be approached through form. For Awhaduddin the contemplation of beautiful boys ("the unbearded") is the most direct way of contemplating the absolute divine beauty. This approach is certainly a liberated one and rings very modern indeed. Here is a man seven hundred years ago who had integrated his homosexuality and his spirituality. His approach can be a model for those of us (and I count myself in that number) who are striving to do the same today.

For me the 20th century relevance of Awhaduddin Kirmani's work lies in its integration of the spiritual and the sexual. The spiritual dimensions of gayness have too often been neglected by gay liberationists in their struggle for

sexual and political liberation. It is vital that we be aware of our spiritual roots: these are traceable to such writers as Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter, to Michelangelo, and in earlier centuries to men like Awhaduddin Kirmani. The freshness of his vision comes down through the centuries, his words as relevant now as they were to his fellow Persians seven hundred years ago—as in this poem urging us to see the Divine in form, in the bodies of those we love:

While my eye looks
with the heart's eye
at Meaning
I see the figure
but my soul
sees Essence.
Then can you understand
why I look
at the form?
Only in the outer
can one see
the inner.

And again in this poem where the Divine and the body of his lover are interchangeable:

I've freed my heart
from everything except
this affair with you,
my soul
from everything
but your light.
In humility
I dare look only
at your feet:
your foot gains nothing
but my eye . . .
everything!

Music and dance were considered by the Sufi mystics as expressions of union in love and were an important element in their spiritual Way. A charming story is told of Awhaduddin: during the ritual music celebrations he often "rent the shirts of the unbearded (i.e. young adolescents) and danced with them breast to breast. While he was in Baghdad, the beautiful son of the Caliph heard of this practice and said, 'He is an innovator and an unbeliever. If he acts in my presence in this way I shall kill him.' Now, when the *sama*' (the music with dancing) became heated, Awhaduddin realized by his miraculous powers the hidden intentions of the Caliph's son, and said:

It's nothing for me
to balance on the
knife's edge,
to lie
beheaded beneath
the beloved's feet.
You came to kill
an unbeliever. But if you
are a fighter
for the Faith,
then must I not be
an infidel?

At this the Caliph's son bowed his own head upon the foot of the shaykh and became his disciple." (The color cover jacket of the present book is reproduced from a miniature representing this incident.)

Some of the poems in the present translation reflect Awhaduddin's "contemplation" of young adolescents:

My only work
is to publish abroad
my sole aim
the goal of worship:
the longing
for your face
for I am the slave
of him whose cheeks
blush
with the colour
of that which is
hidden within.

Judaeo-Christian teaching with its puritanical shunning of the sexual would have considered Awhaduddin Kirmani an instrument of the devil, and Ayatollah Khomeini, that Moslem Cotton Mather, would doubtless have a similar view today. The contemplation of God's beauty in a handsome boy is a tradition which goes back to Plato. For Awhaduddin God is present in the beloved youth as in a mirror. The created world is the looking-glass for His divine manifestation:

You don't think
I'm dancing to be
'creative'
or to invent
something new
and amusing?
You don't imagine
I believe my choreography
'divine'?
No no I dance
for the sake of a
moonlight boy.

Perhaps the following poem most clearly expresses Awhaduddin Kirmani's philosophy of the contemplation of the divine in a boy—a poem which could be a motto for the boy or girl lover of today, and tomorrow:

Lord you know it was never
now and again
I gaped
at the beauty
of your face.
Each child
of this world
is a mirror
of your beauty
a glass to gaze
forever on the
King's face.

GREEK HOMOSEXUALITY

Greek Homosexuality by Sir Kenneth J. Dover, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978. X plus 244 pp. \$22.50.

Reviewed by Arthur William Rudolph

This is a technical study of the "phenomena of homosexual behavior and sentiment" during the pre-classical and classical periods of Greek history, essentially the eighth to the second centuries B.C. Dover, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, is eminently qualified to produce this rather definitive work. His evidence is derived from many sources. These range from inscribed and uninscribed vase paintings, records of legal proceedings, writings of familiar and obscure philosophers, poets, dramatists and orators. They also include observations of ancient historians and travellers, and linguistic variations and usages. Although in his bibliography Dover makes reference to dozens of secondary works, many of his conclusions are derived from his own analyses and go beyond his own earlier writings.

One striking general feature of Greek sexuality is that a sharp dichotomy is drawn between sexual behavior that strengthened the social, civic and military needs of the city-state form of political organization, and that which expressed the urges, impulses and desires of individuals. Linking the two poles of the dichotomy is a common conception of maleness and femaleness, beauty and social relationship.

Unlike the Hebrews, the Greeks never developed a cohesive, monolithic religious authority and institution that promoted the development of rigidly enforceable sexual prohibitions. More appropriate to them is the distinction between dominance (i.e.: "masculinity") and submissiveness (i.e.: "femininity"). Thereby homosexual relationships between free citizens almost invariably took the form of passivity on the part of youths in anal or intercrural intercourse with active older males. The youths were not expected to enjoy their role on a physical level, but rather to love and admire their mentors. The older male is attracted mainly by the beauty of body and potential personhood of the younger, whereas the latter is attracted mainly by the masculine grace, skill and wisdom of the senior partner. Youths, like women, were regarded as underdeveloped and subordinate, though females were held to have much stronger sexual impulses than males. A heterosexual counterpart to male homosexual behavior can be seen in the ridicule heaped by Greek comedians upon men who assumed a passive sexual posture with women. Apart from an acknowledged individual and personal variation recognized by Dover, youthful male beauty was the norm of aesthetic experience and expression during the Classical Age. Even Plato, who late in life disdained physical acts of sexual behavior, begins his discussion of ideal beauty in the *Symposium* with its lesser and earthly counterpart: a lovely and arousing male body. Thereby it would be taken for granted, for the most part, that all adult males were susceptible to the titillating charms of beautiful and athletic young boys, regardless of individual practices. It was a cultural value. Heterosexual marriage tended to fall within the scope of social duty, but was accompanied by matrimonial and familial love.

Other cultural values circumscribed the ways in which Greek homosexuality was expressed. *Hubris*, behavior which violates the sanctity and rights of a human being, and treats him as chattel, was a serious moral and civil offense. It called for trial by jury and possible death sentence in the event of conviction. Thereby assault was prohibited, and homosexual activity between free citizens was carefully demarcated. Reducing a free youth to sexual servitude was abhorred in Greek society, even though male and female prostitution by peoples of other classes and nationalities was commonplace. Likewise, homosexual activity was not regarded as being in essential conflict with heterosexual marriage and family life. They all strengthened the fabric of society by maintaining the civic community, its military and social sustenance, and perpetuated such traditional values as loyalty, caring and courage.

The Classical Greeks usually regarded co-equal sexual activity between male adults as an offense against nature. Adult men penetrated other men in situations of military conquest and the like, in which the dominance-submission motif could be maintained. Fellation between males apparently was most uncommon. The usual course of homosexual relationship, and the values, attitudes and practices accompanying it, bear little resemblance to the

usual varied norms of contemporary Western homosexuality, especially when imitative of the patterns of bourgeois heterosexuality.

Dover devotes but part of one chapter to female homosexuality. He is not a "male chauvinist." There is a "paucity of women writers and artists in the Greek world and . . . virtual silence of male writers and artists on this subject." Dover holds that in part the silence reflects male anxiety concerning female homosexuality, and an attitude that dominance is unbecoming of a woman. The poetic tradition begun by Sappho of Lesbos of the sixth century B.C. suggests that, though female homosexuality was a taboo subject, it took the form of greater mutual eros than its male counterpart. It had its own rich tradition, and like male homosexuality, was expressed in differing degrees and intensities in various times and places in the Classical Greek environment.

It is held by Dover to be the case generally that

The most widely accepted generalisation about Greek homosexuality at the present time is that it originated in the military organisation of Dorian states (so that its diffusion throughout the Greek world was a product of Dorian influence) and that in the classical period overt homosexual behaviour was more acceptable in certain Dorian regions (notably Sparta and Crete) than elsewhere. The first part of this generalisation is not refutable and may be true, but the evidence for it is not as cogent as is commonly believed and asserted. The second part of the generalisation might possibly be true, but it has to contend with a significant body of contrary evidence; the difficulty of assessing the evidence lies in the fact that Greeks, like other people, passed judgements in accordance with the emotion engendered by examples present to their minds at the moment of speaking, and in the notorious disparity between professed attitudes and actual behaviour.

This observation raises fascinating questions that deal with the periodic overt surfacing and overt repression of homosexual behaviour and sentiment at various times and places, such as our own. Dover, fairly faithful to the demarcation and scope of his book, chooses to deal little with such speculation, except in his closing words:

The Greeks neither inherited nor developed a belief that a divine power had revealed to mankind a code of laws for the regulation of sexual behaviour; they had no religious institution possessed of the authority to enforce sexual prohibitions. Confronted by cultures older and richer and more elaborate than theirs, cultures which none the less differed greatly from each other, the Greeks felt free to select, adapt, develop and—above all—innovate. Fragmented as they were into tiny political units, they were constantly aware of the extent to which morals and manners are local. This awareness also disposed them to enjoy the products of their own inventiveness and to attribute a similar enjoyment to their deities and heroes.

MARIAHIANA

This Light Will Spread: Selected Poems 1960-1975 by Paul Mariah, Manroot Books, 1978, 189 pp., \$4.95 paperback (available for cover price plus 66 cents postage from Box 982, South San Francisco, CA 94080)

Reviewed by Steve Abbott

Out front Gay poetry today owes much to the work of Paul Mariah. Since the inception of Manroot Press and magazine in 1969, some 25 books, many Gay, and some 300 poets and artists, in *Manroot* magazine have been published. The Spicer issue *Manroot 10*, is a classic and is largely responsible for my taking up poetry again after a ten year hiatus. But it is Mariah's own poetry we are here concerned with, work which itself has appeared in some 300 magazines and done much to awaken the general reading public to openly Gay poetry. *This Light Will Spread* is Mariah's own selection of 140 poems, half of which appear for the first time. The poems are arranged thematically, rather than chronologically, into five sections. Not all poems deal directly with homosexuality but homosexuality is woven throughout all sections as a leitmotif.

Mariah's prison poems are not only among his best but are also among the best I have seen on this subject. Ideally he would have liked to include *Personae Non Gratae* with the "Rivers and Bars" section but for spatial reasons does not. Our loss. Enough "cool zebras of light," to quote a line from Robert Peters, however, to still make this section a marvel. Powerful and deepfelt simplicity, for instance, in "the Wind Transcends:"

*Back in that place
Where bars block all sunlight
Where the River*

*He-Whose-Name-To-Me-Is-Always-
Tears*

*Where the River was love and lover
Where he sits with ninty-nine years on his back
Heavy as all possible promethean*

mountains

*Where I transcend into the Wind to kiss him
Where I played cards with Stevie and Seeger
When later that same night, the broom
broke*

*Where I scatter myself as seeds in remembrances
Of the pact that is a pact that is upon
The River
The kiss upon his eyes a seal.*

Or again in "The Other Wind:"

*I am the Other Wind
the one that crept under your barred door
into the cell
to steal a kiss
upon your cheeks
and to rattle your paper
while studying . . .*

The terrible anguish of longing for love and freedom is here transcended in seemingly effortless and meditative calm yet references to the broom breaking and the irony of "stealing" a kiss in prison add a tension. We're reminded, despite outward calm, that prisoners must always walk a tightrope of razorblades.

Switching to a longer, more lyrical line in "Muse Elektriue," the poet speaks more openly about prison anguish and the cost of love pared down to its painful roots:

*This immaculate steel door is a structured ocean
That blocks me, that shocks & rocks me—a shunned man,*

*This man I find to be a turgid river
Running thru my life. O Muse Elektriue, deliver*

*Me from this violent flowing that bashes
At my brain, as his riverhand slashes*

*At my art, at my life. He wears tattoos on his
Catholic arm and also the bad stitches*

*Of a scar above his heart cut by his wife,
A war wound torn by a hidden knife,*

*She sliced him. She could not see the flood
Of tears in his face, she saw the blood . . .*

A remarkable fact that hits me as I read these poems is that Mariah's anger over his prison experience does not devour him. The "I" of these poems never whines or intrudes. Even the heaviest poems break thru to a deeper universality, an objectivity wherein the reader is allowed to make his own response. Another Gay poet who has spent time in jail told me he felt Mariah's prison poems don't speak from the guts. I disagree. One needn't use jivy streettalk or fourletter words to be gutsy, powerful and true. Understatement can sometimes do the job better as the last stanza of one of the best poems in this section, "The Spoon Ring," shows:

*A spoon, a wedding ring,
Crest of prison despair
that knows the ritual song
"To spoon the empty air."*

Oddly enough, where I have most trouble with Mariah's work is in the Gayest section of the book, "The Gay Heretic." In prison, Mariah portrays love between men as a deep and touching experience. The existence of real bars seems to heighten tenderness and sincerity. Outside prison, however, a campy silliness takes over as in "Zipper Poem:"

*"Is/your/birth/day/all/ways/celeb/rated/by/stoned/
who/pull/you/to/floor/and/un/zip/you/O/really?/
How/fresh/that/is/to/start/the/new/year/year/on/
your/day/of/birth/in/all/ways/coming!"* Or again in "A Dog For The Kinsey Study:"

*When I was seven
there was a neighborboy
who used to suck
off his dog;
then he started on boys
me included.*

Okay. I can enjoy being cute, raunchy and "naughty" as much as anyone. Nor do I object to humor, per se, in poetry. Quite the contrary. I'd like to see more humor in Gay poetry, not less. Several of Mariah's pieces I do find delightfully amusing such as "A Study of Scat" and even "A Fuck Poem" where we see a playful exercise in word play. What I object to in the above quoted poems is that, unlike the prison poems, they operate only on one level. For me, they don't go anywhere and seem toss-offs for shock value. Thom Gunn's "Courage, a Tale" I find lightweight in a similar way though as a joke it's better paced. But where such humor seems particularly out of place is in Mariah's six poem Cafavy sequence.

Cafavy was the first homosexual poet I discovered, even before Ginsberg, and I identified with his proud nobility, his sensuous evocations, his bittersweet agony over lovers and days gone past. His was a voice from the other side of the wall. I can only imagine Cafavy would be mortified at a poem dedicated to him that ends: "Well, you got yr dam/poem!/and I've got this/sperm/all over the hands/of this page." Cafavy valued his "vice," did not mock it. He savored, lingered over and celebrated the rare and exquisite delicacy of desire. It's clear from his poems, even if we didn't have Liddell's excellent biography, that not even the sleeziest brothels cheapened him. The difference I'm talking about is between Garcia Lorca's "drinking fountain" and Lady Divine's club Neon Woman, a difference not in locale or even in clientel but in the attitude of the poet-participant to this experience. For Cafavy and Lorca, the tremor and beauty of homosexual love is not

merely sexual but "mirror," a tremendous mirror which reveals one's deepest face in the face of the other, an almost numinous self-discovery.

The roots of our sexuality run deep as the roots of language and in the view of many an etymologist, are intertwined. They can neither be joked away or placated by occasional mythological references. The sexual humor of Catullus lives on, not because of its raunchiness, but because of his deep centeredness in the importance of human dignity. He joked, not to torpedo value, but because in our "mere" lust, delightful as it is, we fall so short of our ideals. In criticizing Mariah's stance of outrageousness, I am also criticizing a stance I myself have taken in certain early poems. What may be acceptable in a chapbook or magazine, however, seems out of place in an author's selected work. I would like to see more dialogue on this issue.

Whereas some poets start out with a distinctive voice, others explore a number of styles and themes and only gradually does one come to see the whole picture of what their work means. Mariah's stylistic and thematic range is impressive. More than most Gay male poets, his early and strong sympathy with the feminist movement is evident. "The Daily Reach," dedicated to Alta is especially sensitive. Certain anti-war poems are also interesting. But I am most moved by the nature poems which I take are the most recent.

In *Witchcraft: The Gay Counterculture*, Arthur Evans contends that the source of our Gay culture, the realm in which we've traditionally found greatest acceptance and support, has been with Nature worshipers. Perhaps Whitman intuited this when he sang of his body as a garden and entitled his masterwork *Leaves of Grass*. I'm pleased to see Mariah moving in this direction also. Although "Let Me Call This Pine" is ostensibly about a forest fire, it can also be read as a paean to our own struggle amidst current attacks against us:

*Let me call this pine
Careless Fire.
The height is sixty feet
but there are no branches
until the last few feet.
The black charcoaled trunk
extends up
where the stars burn
in Calaveras County
next to the "No Trespassing" sign
on Forest River near West Point.*

*Was there violation in trespassing?
Or in the fire burning the pine?*

*There were charred stumps
all around. Stubs of trees.*

*Charred the air around us.
Stunted, the growth this world
fights against.*

It is not easy for a poet, particularly an openly Gay poet, to win acceptance in the literary world. One sees the stumps of many poets who've given up. Mariah's work, however, continues to grow and branch out. Despite my reservations to certain aspects of Mariah's poetry, its consistent vitality and neverending surprise makes it a must in any Gay library, not simply as a record of the past but as a path still spreading light into the future.

FAGGOTS

Faggots by Larry Kramer. New York: Random House, 1978, \$10.95 hardcover, 304 pp.

Reviewed by Larry Puchall

Faggots might easily be subtitled "The Boys in the Band Go to the Mine Shaft;" it's a gay *Nashville* of a dozen or so forlorn characters wandering through the sex pits and the swank spots of New York, all in search of love but settling for, nay, addicted to, much less. Fred Lemish, its hero and chief Yearner, is on the brink of age forty, a screenwriter, Jewish, intelligent, trying hard to keep his body together and scared to death that he will reach that watershed age without a Meaningful Relationship. In the final days of his pre-forty existence, he plunges himself into the drug-ridden, orgiastic, sadomasochistic world of faggoty and reaches out to old lovers, tries to sell a screenplay about gays to a manufacturer-turned-movie producer whose grandson and son are both gay, gets depressed, gets angry and finally, after myriad forms of degradation, gets Self-Love. He revolts against the shallowness of the Bars, Bushes, Baths life, condemns his fellow faggots for throwing their lives down the sewer and decides that loving real people is something very different from loving images and fantasies in the form of large penises and bulging muscles decked out in leather.

In the course of his odyssey, Fred meets the various and sundry characters whose lives intertwine in this world of Sleaze: Randy Dildough, the closeted king of an entertainment conglomerate into "scenes" of torture and blood; Irving Slough, the psychiatrist-ad agency president who, along with his friend Hans, has a stable of New York's hunkiest models, including none other than the Winston Man himself who, in a fit of PCP frenzy, mistakenly believes he can fly. The young mingle with the old: Timmy Purvis is sixteen, gorgeous beyond words and thrown into the world of porno not four hours after getting off the bus

at Port Authority. Wyatt Bronstein, the grandson of Fred's movie producer, hustles his stuff on the piers and winds up making it with his uncle during the grand opening of The Toilet Bowl, the city's latest and grandest fuck bar.

It is clear from his cynical, exaggerated, occasionally funny but usually self-conscious style, that Kramer is as angry at the life he portrays as his main character. Precious few of his people are remotely content; most are made to look like stupid children with ridiculous names, obsessed with fashion and status. Kramer knows this world well obviously; the detail with which places both real and semi-real are described attests to that. That such a world exists and, as such, is fair game for literary treatment is impossible to deny. The sociologic dilemma posed by *Faggots* is essentially that of *Boys in the Band*: the old image problem. The *Boys* all knew something was wrong with their world, less graphic though it was. The only difference here is that someone escapes. Fred is able to see the self-loathing that motivates the compulsive sex and the sado-masochism and summons up the discipline to say "no" and build a life on sturdier stuff. More encouraging, perhaps, than *Boys*, but no prettier a picture and certainly not the Great American Novel of *Positive Gay Love* that many of us would like to see.

The literary dilemma of *Faggots* is somewhat less complex: though the book has a certain raciness and provides, dare I give myself away, the shock of recognition, it does bog down in repetitiousness and shallow characterizations. There are only so many orgies and scenes one can read about before getting a bit weary of the whole thing. The tone is generally too cynical for these descriptions to provide much erotic interest and, after awhile, a blow job in print is merely a blow job in print. Fred Lemish himself, when all is said and done, is not that interesting: likeable enough, but almost a cliché, a gay Portnoy.

Ultimately, the latter dilemma is of greater import than the former. It is unfair and somewhat cowardly to demand of gay writers that they avoid dealing with certain aspects of gay life for the sake of public relations; that really isn't too different from the CIA telling its agents to lay off the dirt-ditching. However, the problems of conception, style and characterization that plague this novel are purely literary and will remain with it long after gay public relations considerations have become irrelevant.

WRECKED HEARTS

Wrecked Hearts, raw poetry by Steve Abbott. Dancing Rock Press, San Francisco
\$2.95 paper.

Reviewed by R. Daniel Evans

Some of the strongest "new" poets writing today happen to be gay, and happen to live and write poems in California. Robert Peters. Aaron Shurin. Paul Mariah. Steve Abbott. (I've probably missed a couple—check the pages of *Sunshine* to make sure.) Not to mention such revered Californians as Robert Duncan and Harold Norse. Steve Abbott's *Wrecked Hearts* is a good example of this new mind-blowing-West poetry energy.

Before you even turn to the first page of this handsomely produced chap book, the cover startles with its aorta-valve lettering (printed in red, naturally) and its complicated Abbott cartoon featuring the Faggot-killer, his Jesus (alias Abbott)-like victim, bar patrons, Divine, hair-tearing intellectual, and—my favorite—a large eared Cyclops with a drunken smile, most likely of Martian origin. Whew! If this cover doesn't freak you out, nothing will. Fortunately, Steve's fertile imagination keeps going, going, gone inside.

As the Jesus drawing proclaims on the title page, "What we sissies need is a good revolution!" Steve Abbott gives us this revolution in his writing. Not that there is any clear-cut plan to revolt; while the poet decries the usual middle-class American atrocities, he uses the image of Mao in a light-hearted way: "Chairman Mao had a big globe between his ears/he used to turn carefully as a poem." . . . /So far as I know/Chairman Mao never wore a dress/but maybe he does now/in heaven."

Steve Abbott is a radical, a father, a lover, an ex-monk, a cartoon-artist, a hedonist, a romantic and more. It all shows in his poetry. The word-plays and artist's colors combine in gorgeous rainbow-hued poems in Steve Abbott's mind:

*when I saw Kiala the potter
pants thick with clay & desire
rolling her round thighs downstreet
like a steamroller
I thought, Oh Lord,
here comes thunder wearing a green cloud.*

.....
*Blue! Blue! Blue, baby, blue!
You blew it again & the world, I know,
is a rotten place
but expand your cosmology, change your palate,
drop your mind & glaze your mallet.*

There's a lot of humor in *Wrecked Hearts*. The first poem in the book (after a marvellous cartoon about Rimbaud) is called "The Poem That Could Neither Fit Nor Sing," and the poem-persona is a fat poem that wants a singing crotch. The zany continues in the wild religion-sex poem, "Ave Maria Altarboy Cruising," about the sexual blast of being an altarboy with a constant hard-on. Other

sex poems are also turn-ons, such as the languorous "Lines Clustered on Castro Street":

*I think men's eyes in this city
are like laser beams
burning thru bank vaults
or aimlessly nursing the sky.*

*What magnificent treasures we steal
at a glance, or secrets hide
when we shut our eyes and die.*

This is the type of poem that captures the eroticism of a cum-celebrating poet in the city of St. Francis.

Not that this poet is merely praising the stereotype of male gay sex lifestyle. I admire the sentiments in the non-agist poem "Getting Home":

*Smoothness is not all.
Gaps between crooked teeth
tell more than Pepsodent smiles
& are more generous.*

Steve Abbott also sensitively limns a father-son love situation in the exquisitely crafted "Blackbird Lovers." Only in one of his more serious themes does the poet fail. In "Song For My Lesbian Sisters" the poem is too much about too many topics: gypsy troubadors, cutting a little girl's hair, stars dancing in his blod, etc, etc; beautiful images, but not on the subject of Lesbian life. Sometimes I've felt like a Lesbian Separatist in a Faggot's body (to quote one of the cast members of the play "Crimes Against Nature"), and I'd advise poets not to write about the Lesbian experience at all if they can't identify very closely. In "Song For My Lesbian Sisters" Steve Abbott writes "This is not my song." He's right; it isn't.

But there are so many fine qualities in *Wrecked Hearts*. Besides the humor, wisdom, sensuous imagery already mentioned, there is a marvellous concern with song. Several of these great musical rimed poems I'd like to hear the poet read, such as the Leprechaun Song (p. 34) or "When I Find a True Love Elevators Will"; "Allah, Allah, Loch Ness/ monster lurking Donald Duck quark conundrums" . . . etc, etc. Many poems show a powerful use of language, and there is frequently a strong concern with form, as in the villanelle section of the title poem. This concern with form is such a refreshing contrast to the numerous lazy free-verse practitioners of so many unmentionable lazy free-verse practitioners of so many unmentionable gay-oriented poetry rags being published today. Steve Abbott's influences are numerous and all top-notch: Rimbaud, Mayakovsky, Apollinaire, Charles Simic, Duncan. With the examples of such powerhouses this gay poet is forging his own highly distinctive style.

I want to quote almost every poem in *Wrecked Hearts*: these poems are so exciting to read. Since I can't do that, you o readers, will just have to go out and pick up a copy—this verbal catnip is worth it.

NEW AGE POLITICS

New Age Politics, Healing Self and Society; the emerging new alternative to Marxism and Liberalism, by Mark Satin (Whitecap Books: 2229 Jefferson Ave., West Vancouver, B.C. V7V 2A9; 1978), \$2.95.

Reviewed by Mitch Walker

New Age Politics is a good book to know about. It's a gathering, a centering, a vast summary, gentle, conscious, confident, loving, high. It's a creative digestion of many people's thoughts, works and struggle. The struggle is to free our planet Earth from the curse afflicting Mankind. Be sure that she will be free, one way or another. But our hope is to do this in life/love/growth instead of holocaust and obliteration.

We're at a critical point in this struggle now. All contributions are welcome.

Mark Satin has brought together the ideas of "the feminist, men's liberation, spiritual, human-potential, environmental, appropriate-technology, simple-living, and nonviolent-action movements" of the 60's and 70's. He says a new, coherent and consistent way of looking at the world is emerging. He quotes hundreds of recent thinkers, writers, activists and poets. He identifies this way as subtle, profound, radical and unique: something real happening here/now, beyond the dead reach of 19th century concepts, affecting millions of people, with a promise at once spiritual, economic, psychological and political. The new age, Aquarius. The end of Mankind's hate, rape, destruction and exploitation. The rebirth of Life. The triumph of Vision.

Mark says all this is going on right under our noses. His aim is to help the birthing, one of thousands of midwives. In *New Age Politics* he distills a political analysis and plan of action, concise, hard-hitting, yet non-dogmatic. He tries to show us the whole thing in one grand view, all the way from its spiritual center to its detailed practical manifestations in community organization, economics, government and technology. There's no way I can summarize this marvelous summary for you. Get the book.

I know Mark personally and can vouch for his sincerity and compassion. He is not anti-gay. He knows that gayness will flourish in his New Age. Yet I must add this criticism: he hasn't yet realized the extent of homophobia and anti-gayness which exists in the New Age movement, and he hasn't yet realized that gayness lies at its center/heart, that

is, the sacred *Gay Spirit-Tree* is the center of the New Age hoop. As the Tree flourishes, blossoms, bears fruit, so will the movement. As Lesbians and gay men realize themselves, there will be success.

So I urge you, Mark, when the new, expanded edition of NAP is published by Dell in November, that in it you speak openly of the Gay Movement when you speak of all the others, that you acknowledge the existence of gay people as Gay People and our right to exist as such, that you call homophobia and anti-gayness clearly and upfrontly by name and denounce them wherever possible, and that you personally recognize that gays are *not* homosexuals, are *not* bisexuals, are *not* straight, and will *never again* be exploited and then eliminated by non-gay theories, movements or governments, as has so often been the case in the past. Not if you want to see a truly new age.

Peace be with you all.

MAKING IT NEW

You rasp from your pants
and the hair springs back,
pull off your shirt
and your body's a bride
in its coarse lace,
the blonde whorls rinsed with light.

Stubble softens your face,
your skin, a frayed
surface. Hair is what blends
between us. It is all of the animal
that is left, the nipples' mane
the sparse fleece of our stomachs
carded into so much wool.

Jerah Chadwick

SONG WITHOUT WORDS

I'm looking for simple words.
They alone leave room for quiet doubt.
How shall we say so many things
that gainsay themselves as we speak them?
How shall we say so many things
when a kiss turns to dust in one's mouth?

Words are the refuge of uncertainty.
Which will convey this instant's enigma?
Your body is a word, the wind is a word,
the rustling of the viper on the lawn,
the firefly that lights the night,
the cackling of the jackal, and silence,
are words.
Your look is many words.
Your caress is all words.

But words are not enough for me.
They all fall silent in the end.
In my blood throbs the beat of ancient passions,
yet solitude is an echoless void.
What was there before solitude?
I don't know. Mine is a race without history.
And after?

Open up to me!
I'll fill you with insatiable longings,
with vast emptinesses.
I invite you to share solitude
—not mine, your own.

Don't be deceived by the Spring.
Never forget that we're deathbound,
That silence is running out on us.
There will be no answer to your questions.
Nobody will tell you why, how, or who you are.
We're just a passing passion,
parasites on our own hunger.
We're the sphinx and the riddle,
the start and the goal.
We're the dream we dream ourselves dreaming.

The only certainty is death.
There we can cling.
The very certainty stiffens us.
It's hemlock to longing,
and longing is sweetmeats to mortals.
Have no doubt, we've already died many times.
Can't you feel the chill of our embrace?
Not even we are safe
from the plague of certainty.

Study the contours of silence.
They're broader than any words.
So, perhaps, this tide of solitude
—breaking over my clumsy gestures,
flowing into words too shallow for it—
may find itself in the depths with yours,
and they'll know one another by immemorial instinct.
So shall they swirl and flood into each other,
underwater currents,
while you and I remain,
face to face, lips to lips,
at a loss for words.

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado
from *Poemas del Silencio* (Barcelona, 1976)

POEMS BY ANTLER

Antler, poet from Milwaukee, has currently finished the manuscript of his first book of poems *Last Words*. Selections from it appeared recently in *City Lights Journal* No. 4 and *New Directions Anthology* No. 37. Excerpts from his long poem "Factory" are scheduled to appear in an upcoming *CoEvolution Quarterly*.

THE LUMINOUS KEY

A man who longs to blow boys
Is honorable as a man who longs
to fuck to make babies.
Blowjobs are needed more now
than new mouths to feed.
A boy getting blown is beautiful
as a baby being born,
As a baby suckled by motherbreast.
Blowjobs need to be born now
more than new mouths to feed.
Nurture blowjobs to save Humankind.

Don't have a baby.
Give birth to yourself.
Better to offer your mouth
To every delinquent youth
Than fuck to reproduce.
Every boycock that spurts
In the blowjob mouth
Means more hope
For the future of man.

I never thought I'd write this.
Always and above all I perceived
The Harmony of Homosexual
and Heterosexual Love.
But now I realize I want
Humankind to survive.
Blowjobs and Homosexual Love
Can't help but appear
the luminous key!
Once a baby's being born
Was more beautiful than it is now.
Now when a child is born
The mother and father who do not
Invoke the Ideal Homosexual Spirit
In its Ultimate Identity's Growth
Betray the Survival of Humanity—
Betray the Utopia of Love.

TO THE SEED OF THE MALE OF MY SPECIES

How many gallons of semen
do human testicles produce
in a healthy life?
Imagine standing under the waterfall
of all the orgasms of your life
in an instant!
Imagine swimming naked
in a swimming pool of come!
How many boys would have to jack off
to fill a swimming pool to the brim?
Swandive into boycome!
Cannonball into boycome!
Float on your back on boycome
and spout mouthfuls of boycome to the sun!
Imagine how different America would be
if rather than cowmilk
we drank boymilk!
Grade A Boymilk! MMMMMM!
Delivered fresh by your milkboy
or available in every store!
Each boy is rich with his come!
Each boy has a fortune of come!
Each boy has a free lifetime supply
of luscious delicious come!
No need for milking machines!
At last a job for American youth
and cocksucking boylovers everywhere!
At last boys in restaurants as creamers for our coffee
standing naked by tables,
Customers jerk them off
into their cups.
At last boys in hospitals as nurses
giving patients a good drink of hot boycome
before bed.
More fun to see boys and men
jack off together or alone
than to see warfilms
or quizshows!
More fun seeing boys and men jacking off
than seeing horse races
or demolition derbies!
Not till we're more interested in ogling
semen ejaculating from boy's and men's cocks
than football or boxing
is there hope for the future of America!
Not till boycome is served at communion
will I believe the Father of Jesus
is the God of Love.

THE SMELL THAT LEADS THE NOSE TINGLING BACK

Walking through Camp one night
I discovered on the familiar path
a fresh turd.
Among leaves and moonlight
the sleek dropping lay,
wisps of steam wavering in the cool.

Remembering the campfire hush
when shadows, sparks, smoke
and dying coals made horror come alive,
I wondered how one boy
after all the rest were sleeping
dared sneak through pines
and screams of twigs
to squat and tremble,
the solid flame
melting loose and slipping free,
the grunted sigh and shiver.

In the morning everyone saw it.
Walking to breakfast I heard them joking,
accusing each other,
and wondered which boy who laughed
was the one who rose from that place
and ran back through the woods to sleep,
ran back alone under stars.

IN MEMORIAM

More than a thousand, perhaps a million
Boys viciously murdered by insane men
after being seduced or raped—
This poem is for them.
Yet all the boylove poems on earth
can't make up for even one
of those hideous deaths.
Perhaps all the sex-murdered boys
go to a special heaven
Where their bodies are made whole
and their minds no longer remember.
So one would like to believe.
Blowjobs, Passionate Ideal Fucking, etc.
must become so powerful, so beautiful
they can assuage the torture nightmare reality
of strangled, stabbed, shot, poisoned boys.
Will dismembered bodies of murdered boys
be found in plastic bags
2000 years from now?
Ah, may boys be taught in every school
the beauty and goodness of boylove
rather than have sex-murderers of boys
held as the arch example
of the essence of homosexual love.

POEM FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE DIVINE HOMOSEXUAL MANIFESTATION IN EVERY HUMAN BEING—TO BE RECITED AT THE BAPTISM OF EVERY NEWBORN CHILD

In the name of the ideal realization
of homosexual love in children,
in boys and girls, in women and men,
I baptize you, (name of infant).
May the homosexual spirit be tender with you
at an early age!
May you be worthy of the cosmic homosexual lovers
of the past and the future and today!
If you are a boy, may your cock grow to love
jacking off and cocksucking and buggery,
May your mouth grow in wisdom and stature and favor
in the blowjob love!
If you're a girl, may you kiss the nipples
of the girl you love with unbridled joy,
May you lick each other's young teenage cunts
with simultaneous abandon!
Not that boys will be denied the love of girls
or girls the love of boys,
Not that homosexuality be exclusive
be the law of the land,
But the light of love shedding its rays
over the total spectrum,
The secret homosexual love
That begins in every boy loving
to jack off his own boybody
And every girl loving to fondle
her own pussy and breasts—
You see, it cannot be denied.
There is no one on earth who is not
a homosexual.
O grow up to love the boy you become!
O grow up to love the girl you become!
O grow up to immortal homosexual experiences
of tenderest friendship and love!
O may you not die without having tasted
one of the greatest joys
of life!!

ECCE PUER

Here is a boy who gets turned on watching himself jack off,
Who likes to make little sighs or moans or says
"Jack me off!" or "I'm coming!"
when he comes,
Who, because it feels so good, arches his back,
flexes his strength,
Sprawling himself in postures that make the ejaculation
spurt even farther
Watching the boyish expression of his boyish face
in the mirror.
Here is a boy who's learned how to become
a master of giving himself pleasure,
Who will spend hours each day, any chance he gets,
making love to himself.
Here is a boy who plays with his balls when he comes,
who kisses his armpits when he comes,
who wiggles his finger up his ass
watching his semen spurt
from the tip.

FOR BLOWJOB POWER

For all their fast-talk and macho,
For all their postured coldness
and manner of superiority,
Rowdy, tough, joking,
Wary or contemptuous,
Once naked, once spreadeagled
on the silk bed
It's a different story.
Now silent, deep-breathing,
motionless,
Completely given to the experience
of homosexual joy,
Completely lost in total abandon
to the swirling tongue,
to the sucking mouth
As the boyloving lover
performs his love
Feasting not only on the cock
and balls,
But the whole crotch,
Service divine,
delicately done,
Yet fierce with devotion,
with worship.
Yes, how many boys so boisterous
and punky before,
Are reduced to silent naked forms
gazing at the
passionate ravishing
blowjob mouth
with awe
Finding it hard to believe
anything could feel so good.
How many boyhoods distilled
into the unquestionable essence
of a whimpered sigh,
The look of absolute ecstasy
on their face,
Tamed and made gentle again
by the blowjob mouth.

THE IMMORTALITY OF BOYLOVE

It does no good to make boylove illegal
Or to believe it's a sin punished by hell,
To imagine it's a rare mental illness
or to pretend it doesn't exist.
Boylove is everywhere.
As long as there are boys
there will be the love of boys.
Millions of boys understand this.
They know what boylove is
every time they jack off.
If you want to get rid of boylove
Assassinating me won't solve your problem.
Boys do not love boys
only because they read my poems.
And if they did, it would be
no less beautiful.
Burn all my poems if you want,
it won't do any good.
As sure as the violet comes up every May
in every continent on earth
boylove continually unfolds.
The only way to destroy boylove on earth
is to destroy the world.
And even if you did
there are a billion suns in our galaxy
and a billion galaxies in the visible universe!
More planets with BoyLove Utopias exist
than all the boylovers or boys
that've ever existed on earth!
Every time you denounce homosexuality
10,000 beautiful boys
ejaculate in their bestfriend's mouth!

GAY SUNSHINE PRESS

GAY SUNSHINE INTERVIEWS Volume 1

Edited by Winston Leyland.

This anthology comprises 12 indepth interviews with gay poets novelists, playwrights and composers published originally in Gay Sunshine Journal during the past several years, plus 3 new interviews. They provide seminal insights into the connections between sexuality and artistic creativity, as well as dramatic revelations on the personal and literary lives of the interviewees. Included in Volume 1 are: William Burroughs, Charles Henri Ford, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, John Giorno, Lou Harrison, Christopher Isherwood, Harold Norse, Peter Orlovsky, John Rechy, Gore Vidal and Tennessee Williams.

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TONIGHT DESIRE HAS A MAN IN IT

sinewed thighs thrust against bone
needs blue and agape
and the hearts poison
sweet as blown silk
fascinated and singing

tonight i would be possessed by him
and by the virile rush of arms
like a pale lavender flood
drowning desire
immersing the visited in the visitors
torso of mild steel

still and drowning
the silent swell of rushing thrust
that wears no darkness

Jeffery Beame

THE GRAVEYARD (for W. McN.)

The white rose springs
From where he lies,
The boy who loved a priest.

The red rose springs
Above the youth
Loved by a knight
Who trod stone steps
As soft as any carpet.

The yellow rose, the yellow rose,
Above the one who found
The stars his cobblestones.

The blue rose springs,
Springs from a dream,
A dream now dead
Which said:
"It is too easy, dear, to learn
Beauty from this world."

And so the dark rose dies
Upon the grave of my lost angel,
Soft speaking silence that is speech
Between dark skies and water.

Oswell Blakeston

MEN LOVING MEN: A GAY SEX GUIDE AND CONSCIOUSNESS BOOK

by Mitch Walker.

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RIMBAUD/VERLAINE: A LOVER'S COCK

Erotic gay poems a hundred years ahead of their time written by the teenage Rimbaud and his lover Verlaine. Original French text plus superb English translation by J. Murat & W. Gunn. Included is the "Sonnet to the Asshole" written jointly by the two poets; also Rimbaud's poem "The Tortured Heart" describing his experience of being raped by a gang of soldiers. First English translation for several of the poems. 64 pp. \$3.95 paperback. Limited hardcover edition of 50 numbered copies: \$25.

Reviewed by Arthur William Rudolph

The exaltation of all aspects of gay sexuality: multi-hued expressed and unexpressed emotions felt during every phase of anticipated to sated erotic experience; revelry in the innumerable tastes, textures, feelings, sounds and scents of unique and familiar bodily encounters; great joy in the uniqueness of being gay. These are but some of the vibrant joys accessible to the reader of these poems.

Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine were giants within the burst of vitality that took literary form in late nineteenth-century France in the tradition loosely described Symbolist or Decadent. Few of the major figures, including the earlier Baudelaire and Mallarmé, actually fitted well into such an academically-concocted cocoon, and the genius of Rimbaud and Verlaine is too richly expressive to be contained within such categories. This free translation of most of Rimbaud's and Verlaine's overtly gay poetry communicates to us an immediacy of concrete and specific moments and feelings with which we can identify. We, too, can revel in the odors, tastes and textures of the cum and the glistening ass that are too precious to leave unconsumed and unadored. The simplicity and freshness of the vital experience; the subtle utilization of three thousand and more years of collective poetic skill; what a combination!

These are poems of assertive and dynamic Gay Liberation. Were they to appear unaccompanied by the names of their authors, they would be acclaimed as the works of skillful free spirits of the 1970's. All but three of the Verlaine poems have appeared before in one fashion or another, but the fidelity to the spirit of the poems, if not to their verbatim exactitude, is the unique gift of this translation. For that reason it is good that the poems are accompanied by their French originals. It also would be helpful to some readers to compare these translations with those of Verlaine by MacIntyre and the ones of Rimbaud by Schmidt, to mention but two of several options. The comparisons will add dimensions of understanding, and at times provide more (or less) literal renditions of the original texts. They also will cause one to enjoy the uniqueness of the new translation by Murat and Gunn, all the more.

Take, for example, Rimbaud's poem *Nos Fesses Ne Sont Pas Les leurs*, written when the poet was perhaps seventeen years old. The very title, which is the first line of the poem as well, is rather simple, in French. "Les Leurs" literally means "theirs," in the plural form. However, for the sake of poetic integrity, given what follows, plus the subtle awareness that, since the word *fesse* is feminine, an added double-entendre is considered. Thereby Murat and Gunn translate the first line as: "Our butts are not like women's." Schmidt translated the line as "Our assholes are different from theirs." Schmidt takes a poetic license with the word *fesse* which is both inaccurate in the literal sense, and incongruous with the rest of the poem—which speaks entirely of the butt in its entirety, and of the asshole in only one place. In that instance, the relatively genteel term *raie* is used, with reference to the anal opening of females. Schmidt translates that word as *crack*, whereas Murat and

Gunn translate it *crevices*. The latter term is closer to the spirit of the original. Yet the original is in the singular—so thereby Schmidt retains greater accuracy—but Murat and Gunn, choosing the plural, are much more readable in English. These are some of the dilemmas faced by translators! I must point out, too, that this is a relatively uncomplicated poem, to begin with. Many others are incredibly more problematical for translators. Rimbaud's *Young Glutton*, in which every line is but two syllables long, is uniquely, incredibly difficult to translate. Schmidt's older translation bears virtually no kinship to the original, but Murat and Gunn produce an incredibly accurate and readable version of it. They must have put endless hours of labor and agony into their task.

Verlaine's poetry written after 1884 apparently was too much for MacIntyre to include in his *Paul Verlaine: Selected Poems*. Seven years after that date, Verlaine produced the poem which constitutes the title of this collection, *A Lover's Cock*. It took an additional dozen years for this poem and the others in Verlaine's work, *Hombres*, to appear at all in a limited printing in French, years after the death of the poet. The present translation once again varies from being literal to figurative, largely in order to maintain integrity with the intent of the poem as a whole. The result is an incredibly fine work in English, preserving the erotic passion, tenderness and visionary flow of the original.

Needless to say, there is no reference to the title poem in the biography by Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson, *Verlaine: Fool of God*. One must remember that the Hansons wrote in 1957, and were biographers of figures as diverse as Vincent van Gogh and Chinese Gordon, to keep from laughing aloud when reading their observations of the erotic behaviour and poetry of Rimbaud and Verlaine. They write: "By May, Rimbaud was back again and he and Verlaine took up where they had left off... hard driven to devise new methods of deranging the senses." Furthermore, to add shockingly to the unbourgeois life style, they produce "a sonnet brimful of horrid hints" (*sic!*) at that point in their life together. Of course the Hansons regard the lovers' sexual relationship as "nonsense." All of this hogwash and selective treatment of subjects adds yet further delight to the openness and ecstasy communicated by Murat and Gunn, in the present work.

Rimbaud was virtually unique in the history of literature. His writing began as a teenager, and yet at twenty-one Rimbaud gave up poetry forever, to become alternately and occasionally simultaneously a business man and soldier of fortune, usually in Africa. Yet even then, as during his earlier years, this tormented figure constantly retreated again and again to his mother, aptly called "devouring" by Murat and Gunn. He died in agony in Marseilles, following leg amputation and subsequent cancer spread in 1891, at the age of thirty-seven.

The last many years of Rimbaud's life were apart from the company of Verlaine. The two lovers had undergone the most disastrous of many tempestuous interpersonal episodes in 1873, during the course of which Verlaine shot and wounded Rimbaud. The result of this was that Verlaine was imprisoned for two years. The letters and

court documents concerning the incident are to be found in the Schmidt translation, and make fascinating reading.

Verlaine, ten years the senior of Rimbaud, was a man tormented by what to him were the ambiguities of his conventional heterosexual marriage and his Catholic faith. At a time of early rising eminence as an author, Verlaine fell madly in love with the unkempt, rude and perverse teenage peasant lad, Rimbaud. Soon the two were cut off from both the respectable and the avant garde literary communities. Yet rather because of, or in spite of, the tragic lives of the two, their lives and their relationship produced some of the greatest poetry of all time.

There will be many levels on which a gay or straight reader will be able to relate these selected poems in this outstanding rendition. The intellect, the feelings, the viscera—all will respond. One need not be gay, nor oriented to reading classical literature, to appreciate and enjoy this work. Any person in close touch with his own reality will find not only immediate satisfaction in reading these verses. He also will find himself swept up into images and experiences which will stay with him, long after he puts down the text. Furthermore, he will find his own identity as part of a tradition well demarcated by Verlaine in this incomplete and undated poem, translated by Murat and Gunn as *The Gay Heritage*:

*We don't belong to the herd:
That's why we play the while
Far away from shepherdesses,
Without falsehood or guile.*

*Lovers who would be friends—
Without vows, always true,
Free-hearted, without promises—
Such are we and our virtue.*

*We count an illustrative lineage
Of princes and sages,
Of heroes and demigods,
At all times, in all ages.*

*In days of brilliance and of woe
Great Glory granted us her grace;
Our strength was her vanity,
The proud laughter on her face.*

*In the baths of ancient Rome
We flowered in deference;
Poets on each and every side
Celebrated us with such eloquence!*

*Among the moderns we have
Our Shakespeares and our Fredericks.
Our hosts, rank upon rank,
Have gone forth to conquer bailiwicks*

*From the realms of medieval law,
When jealous people, hard Jehovahs,
Killers of men and women,
Fell upon our Sodoms and Gomorrah...*

This book is available by mail from Gay Sunshine Press. See price listing elsewhere in this issue.

A Call To Gay Brothers

It is in the air. Heard everywhere. At the World Symposium on Humanity the talk is about "New Age Politics"—beyond Left and Right—a synthesis of the political and spiritual movements of the past two decades. Sitting in the Kiva at Lama, high in the Sangre de Cristos Mountains of northern New Mexico, Ram Dass talks about the need for "conscious beings" assuming responsibilities for social and political change—a radical Circle of Dharma. In the holy halls of academia, the temple prostitutes are whispering about a "paradigm shift"—something new is happening in our society with more and more people living and perceiving their lives differently—and they haven't figured out yet how to contain it. Deep in Oregon's lush Umpqua forest, at the annual fairy-like gathering of the Rainbow Family Tribe, late into the night people talk about the merging of political consciousness and spiritual consciousness—an interest in healing society rather than championing exclusive claims to "rightness."

The term 'spiritual' represents the accumulation of all experiential consciousness from the division of the first cells in the primeval slime, down through all evolution, to your and our latest insights of Gay Consciousness just a minute ago. What else can we call this overwhelmingly magnificent inheritance—other than spiritual.

Harry Hay

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE FOR RADICAL FAIRIES

Does all of this political/spiritual ferment have any relevance to gay men? Is there a gay vision of New Age society? Is a "paradigm shift" in gay consciousness also manifesting itself? The answer to all the questions is: YES! And many gay brothers are feeling the need to come together...

To share new insights about ourselves;
To dance in the moonlight;
To renew our oaths against patriarchy/
corporations/racism;
To hold, protect, nurture and caress one another;
To talk about the politics of gay enspiritment;
To find the healing place inside our heart;
To become Inspirator/Listener as we share new
breakthroughs in how we perceive gay
consciousness;
To soar like the eagle;
To re-discover/re-invent our myths;
To talk about gay living/loving alternatives;
To experience the groundedness of the calamus
root;
To share our gay vision;
To sing, sing, sing;
TO EVOKE A GREAT FAIRY CIRCLE.

The Call goes out to gay brothers everywhere—poet, Sufi, musician, revolutionary, shaman, heretic, community organizer, farmer, artist, healer, city dweller, Buddhist, dancer, magician, political activist, yogi—whoever you have become since the last time we came together.

The Call goes out to all who know that there is more to us than hetero-imitation, to all who are ready to move on To all who have broken through and are ready to share those breakthroughs with your fairy brothers.

The gathering is to be called, among other names, *A Spiritual Conference for Radical Fairies*. It will be held over the Labor Day weekend, August 31 through September 2, 1979. The conference site is an ashram in the beautiful Sonora desert of southern Arizona, near Tucson. There will be a conference fee of \$50 to cover the cost of vegetarian meals, lodging and other incidental expenses. No one will be denied participation in the conference because of inability to pay. Pre-registration is required in order to participate. Please send a note with your name, complete address and phone number to:

Spiritual Conference for Radical Fairies
PO Box 1414
Los Angeles, Ca. 90028.

A \$25 deposit is requested with your pre-registration. More detailed information about the conference, schedule etc. will be provided upon pre-registration.

Books Received

Poems All Over The Place, Mostly Seventies by Allen Ginsberg, Cherry Valley Editions, 1978 \$3 paperback.

Duplicate Keys Poems by Jon Bracker, Thorp Springs Press, Austin, Texas 1977, \$3.50 paperback.

Rat & The Devil Journal Letters of F.O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney, Ed. by Louis Hyde, Archon Books, Hamden, Ct. 1978, 408 pp. \$17.50 hardcover.

Isherwood A Biography by Jonathan Fryer, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. 1978, 304 pp. \$10 hardcover.

Black and Queer by Adrian Stanford, Good Gay Poets Press, Box 277, Astor Station, Boston, Mass. 02123, 36 pp. \$2.50 paperback. Gay poems written from a black consciousness. *Recommended.*

Oscar Remembered. A Play by Maxim Mazumdar Personal Library, Suite 1607, 145 Marlee Ave., Toronto, Canada M6B 3H3, 1977, 71 pp. A one man show on Oscar Wilde & co. by a young Canadian actor, of Indian origin.

Friends and Friends of Friends Photos by Bernard Pierre Wolff, E.P. Dutton, Co. N.Y. 1978, 124 pp. (10" x 9"), \$8.95 paperback. *Very sensitively and beautifully photographed.*

The Pied Piper (novel) by Robert Paier, McGraw Hill, N.Y. 1979, 230 pp. \$9.95. *Pure trash.*

Loving Fruits Poems by Jeff Keith. \$1.40 postpaid (paperback) from 4600 Springfield Ave., Philadelphia, Pa 191433.

Peckerman Country Selected Poems of Walt Curtis, Mr. Cogito Press, PO Box 66124, Portland, Ore. 97266 (Fall 1978 special issue of *Mr. Cogito*)

Lover John, a novel in poetry by Emanuel Ro. Panhandle Press, San Francisco, Ca 1978, 116 pp., \$4.50 paperback.

Homosexualities A Study of Diversity Among Men & Women (Kinsey Institute) by Alan P. Bell & Martin S. Weinberg, Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 1978, 505 pp., \$12.95 hardcover. *Pomposities and statistics.*

The following books are from Talonbooks, 201/1019 E. Cordova, Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6A 1M8 (all paperbacks): *Poems for Yoshi* by Bill Bissett; *Sailor* (poems) by Bill Bissett; *Love & the Waiting Game*, Eleven Stories by David Watmough; *Ashes for Easter & Other Monodramas* by David Watmough; *Durer's Angel*, a novel by Marie-Claire Blais; *Some Angry Summer Songs*, plays by John Herbert; *Hosanna*, a play by Michel Tremblay; *La Duchesse de Langeais & other plays*, by Michel Tremblay; *Wrestling the Angel*, poems by Stan Persky (*Persky's work appeared in the gay poetry anthology, Angels of the Lyre.*) *We highly recommend Persky's new book.*

Haakon, a novel by C.F. Griffin, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., N.Y. 1978, 296 pp., \$9.95 hardcover. *Poor.*

The Praise Singer, a novel by Mary Renault, Pantheon Books, N.Y. 1978, 291 pp., \$8.95 hardcover. (*This novel about the life of the 6th century Greek poet Simonides is much weaker literarily than the last two—Alexander—novels by this writer*)

Brief Encyclopedia of Homosexuality by Stephen Wright, N.Y. 1978, 144 pp., \$5.95 paperback.

King's Don't Mean A Thing, The John Knight Murder Case by Arthur Bell, William Morrow & Co., N.Y. 1978, 228 pp., \$8.95 hardcover.

The Advocate Guide to Gay Health by R.D. Fenwick, E.P. Dutton Co., N.Y. 1978, 240 pp., \$10.95 hardcover.

The Ugly Unicorn written and illustrated by Russell Rinehart, Illusive Unicorn Pub., San Jose 1979, 54 pp., \$6.25 paperback. *Overpriced.*

Kindred Poems by Richard Ronan, illustrated by Bill Rancitelli. Audit/Poetry, Buffalo, N.Y. 1978. *Recommended.*

Animals Poems by Kirby Congdon, Kastle Press (170 Broadway, NYC 10038) 1979, 32 pp., \$2.50 paperback... Poems by Brooklyn poet whose work has been anthologized in the two Gay Sunshine anthologies. *Recommended.*

A Gay Diary 1933-1946 by Donald Vining, Pepys Press, NYC 1979. 500 pp., Hardcover: \$14.95; Paperback: \$9.95.

The Gold Diggers A Novel by Paul Monette. Avon Books, NYC 1979, 373 pp., \$4.95 paperback. *More trash*

The Spiral Stair by John Bentley Mays, The Coach House Press, Toronto, 1977, 170 pp. paperback.

Ikagnak: The North Wind, With Dr. Kane in the Arctic. A Verse Sequence by Robert Peters, Kenmore Press, PO Box 773-C, Pasadena, CA 91104, Hardcover \$50 (limited ed. of 100 signed copies). Handsomely produced book by a poet whose work we recommend highly.

Mala Noche by Walt Curtis. Boylove story. 1977

The Potency Clinic by Bruce Elliot \$3 paper. Bleecker Street Press (463 West St. D518, NYC 10014) 1979. Tale of a young Hollywood psychiatrist, husband and father, who "comes out" in NY.

If I Could Crown Your Hills With Gold by Lawrence Reh. Atlantis Rising, San Francisco, 1979, 82 pp., \$5.95 paper;

The Queer Dutchman by Peter Agnos. Green Eagle Press, New York, 1979, 144 pp., \$4.50 paperback; \$8.90 hardcover. Story of Jan Svilt, accused of homosexuality and marooned in 1725 on a desert island.

Uranian Roses by Tom Meyer, Catalyst, Scarborough, Ont. Canada. 1977 paperback. Hardcover ed. of 50 copies. Boylove poems, highly recommended.

Minette, Recollections of a part-time Lady. Edited by Steven Watson, and Ray Dobbins. Portrait of Minette, an impersonator and an oral history of gay survival and 1940's drag clubs. Available from Ray Dobbins, 57 2nd Ave., NYC 10003

E.M. Forster and his world, with 122 illustrations, by Francis King. Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y. 1978, \$10.95 *Homage to Cavafy* Addison House, Danbury, N.H. 1978, with original photos by Duane Michals \$9.95 paper

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Correction:

Gay News (London, England) was in no way connected with the publication of James Kirkup's poem "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name" or the accompanying graphic (Gay Sunshine 38/39)

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Aaron Shurin

Delphi 6/77

RETURN TO DELPHI

the moon is a puppy in the sun's sky.
stripes & slashes of blazing
rays. Clouds hug the mountain
out of utter humility

The sun melts

fiery ore
congealing into the steel of night.

Any
goings-on in this sky
set the stage for something Real to happen.
The moon, a cloudy eye
watches obliquely.

The sun — burnt hole in space —
is absolutely direct.

Wash your hair
in the cool spring, priestess.

If you would hear words
get down on your stony knees & pray.

knees—hah! bones tremble
dissolve snake-like
onto the temple floor.

Straddle the steaming chasm
coils of python smoke
wrap the neck, throttle the logical tongue.
What she says now
comes oiled by the olive trees, sharpened
into perfect rocks by the mountain walls.
She sees

valley streaming from the navel of the world —
"omphalos" —
words pulled like a chord
from the throat of being.

golden you gold in you
beat / break / blind
aanh! fire over hill crawling on thorny legs!
aanh! rock of day dreams
piercing my throat.

Ominos Theris Naxos
Where was I when flames
shot from clouds?
Here underground working silver
beads back & forth along cold wire
choke-necklace of memory.

aanh! The heat of your thousand hands!
aanh! Your thousand hot hands!
Men! don't sail on those long ships, dead-
end sentences of forced thought—don't go! don't go!
aanh—ants over the honey-cake!
aanh—stickers in the barefoot grass!

Yellow rain. I know what I don't know.

Ominos Theris Naxos
Swallows on the home-roof, flapping of good dreams.
Mist in the long valley, sucking the trees.
Hoot-owl, foghorn of safe return.
aanh! sunlight as blowtorch on the prisoner's chains!
aanh! transfusion of bright eyes!
aanh! the heat of your thousand hands!
aanh! your thousand hot hands!

She straddles the chasm, fumes rise
as the Python of the World turns underfoot.
Sun breaks free of its mountain shade, blasting
the rocks apart
grumbling in the stomach of the earth.
Anything that appears
under this light is
classic hallucination:

golden man, braided & oiled, smiling
from the temple ledge.
He pulls his chariot over her plain voice.
Six marble columns
of song, rise into the air, smoking.

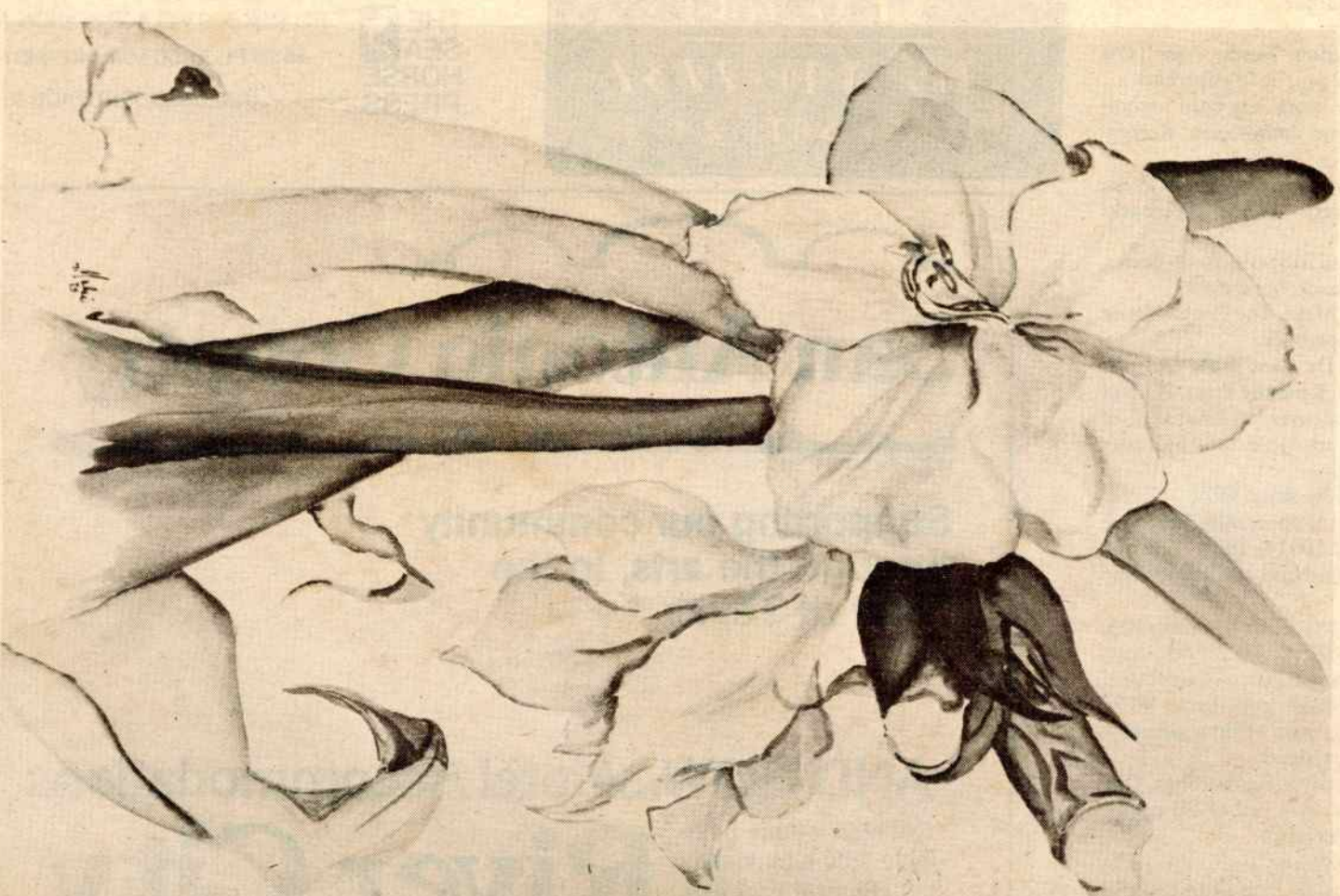
My mouth is a temple, receiving all day
herb-scented offerings of mountain air.
My eyes are temples, open to stunning vision
of orange & grey cliffs, olive-stuffed valleys.
My back is a polygonal stone wall, on which I balance
fresh figs from the bending trees.
My ears are temples for birds to nest in.
My chest a temple for tired men.
White temple of my teeth, altar for lamb & calf.
Temple of my veined legs, gripping the rocky earth, staking
a space for solitary rest.
My hair is a temple where the waters of pure thought
run underground.
My heart is a temple restored.

In the heat of day, water
springs from cold rock:
Castalia fountain
sprouting laurel & thyme.
Gently splash the stunned
face, drip over
delirious tongue.

Stolen mouthpiece
returned to ordinary lips.
Water seals the cracked shards of speech
reunion of sound & will.
Shake the hair loose
from serpent knots.
Rub from eyes
the salt of far sight.
Open your voice
to a new alphabet, priestess.
Try mouthing words
like a baby: Alpha Beta Gamma.
Gently
return to the stony knees of prayer.

GAY SUNSHINE

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