

# GCN

## BOOK REVIEW

Gay Community News

### LAVENDER CULTURE

Edited by Karla Jay  
and Allen Young  
Jove Book, \$2.50, 485 pp.

Reviewed by George Michaelson

IN ONE of the best essays in this anthology, Fran Koski and Maida Tilchen discuss the images of lesbians in the "trash novels" of the fifties and sixties. Often written by men for a male audience, almost always edited by (straight) men to conform to the straightimage of lesbian perversity, these novels nevertheless were, as Kate Millett wrote in *Flying*, "the only books where one woman kissed another, touched her, transported to read finally in a book what had been the dearest part of my experienced recognized at last in print." Many were in fact written by women, and though the editors usually made sure that the lesbian character ended up mourning her perversity, or happily converting to heterosexuality, images of strong, self-assured woman-identified women did appear from time to time.

Koski and Tilchen believe that many of the novels' descriptions accurately reflect the bar scene and the experience of coming out in the fifties and sixties. The novels certainly reflected straight male society's attitudes toward homosexuality, and point to the internalization of those oppressive attitudes by many lesbians. The authors of the essay cite as typical the following passage from *After School* (Satan Press: 1966) by Donna Powell:

We'd enjoy ourselves, and that was that — it was over and done with. No regrets. No shame. No guilt. It had been a natural thing, occurring because of natural desires, and now it was natural to be talking and laughing and drinking together like three natural human beings.

And then Doris sort of dropped a word — 'lesbian' — and in a flash my brain completely convoluted. I looked down at my hands and they looked all ugly and yellow. I smelled one hand and nearly retched. I wiped my mouth hard on my arm.

I undressed, got in the shower. ... Then I scrubbed myself. Everywhere ...

"Lesbian! Lesbian! Lesbian!" I repeated, beginning to cry. And then I got sick, and threw up all over my legs and feet ...

The fate of this character, and of the novel itself, says a great deal about the emergence of a lesbian and gay male identity — and culture — in recent years. The British historian, Jeffrey Weeks, has analyzed the development of a "medical model" of homosexuality in the mid-nineteenth century (see Joseph Interrante's informative review of Week's book, *Coming Out*, in GCN, Vol. 6, No. 33). This changed the social concep-

### Lavender Culture . . .



### Whose Culture?

tion of homosexuality from that of a sinful behavior in which anyone might participate to that of a congenital disorder characteristic of a certain, identifiable few. Weeks argues that this eventually changed the self-concept of women and men engaged in homosexual behavior — that they came to think of themselves as distinguished from others and characterized by their homosexuality, as if they formed a distinct category of humankind. "Lesbian." Faggot." Instead of just "doing it," one "became it." And given pervasive social hostility, to discover oneself as "gay" or as "lesbian" often led to the feelings of self-hate and desperate isolation expressed so melodramatically in this 1966 novel.

Not only the character, but the novel itself, is significant in terms of our recent cultural history. Until recently, we could not speak directly to each other, for ourselves, but were hidden in and by straight culture. There were the novels like this one, in which lesbian self-hatred was emphasized. There were the novels, the poems, the paintings, in which our love was disguised to pass as straight, so that one now needs

het-to-homo dictionaries to translate Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, and others. There were other works such as Forster's *Maurice*, which were never published during the author's lifetime. Several of the essays in *Lavender Culture* guide one's appreciation of these earlier works, so long interpreted by straights.

What this book celebrates is the emergence of gay and lesbian cultures that are no longer defined by others. The lesbian and gay liberation movements are struggling to create the free space in which we can be homosexual, in which our homosexuality can be integrated into the "rest" of our lives. These movements seek to break down the isolation to which we've so long been condemned, to give us our own voice. And to a remarkable extent, we are succeeding. We no longer have to look to the trash novels, to the occasional references in the straight press, to the double entendre of a song's lyrics, to the homophobic, straight "helping professions," for traces of our culture or for help in understanding ourselves. To an unprecedented extent in this country, a sense of pride, power,

and solidarity is emerging in our community; we are beginning to develop a culture that is more truly our own.

*Lavender Culture* is an important book, both because it documents the historical development and recognition of that culture, and because it will serve to introduce many still isolated lesbians and gay men to it. Like most of the people with whom I've discussed this book, I like it. I find it interesting — often exciting — to read. And though I ultimately think it falls short of its ambitious purpose, I recommend it. My criticisms in some respects severe, are tempered by my appreciation of the book's many strong points, and the fact that it exists at all.

This is the third anthology edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young (*Out of the Closets* was published in 1972, *After You're Out* in 1975). Its 43 essays seek to discern traces of a gay male or lesbian "sensitivity" in the cultures of the western past, to explore how our culture has been defined and controlled — when not wholly suppressed — by others, and to document the emergence, in recent years, of an autonomous, self-defined and highly visible cul-

ture. The editors understand "culture" to refer both to the arts and to patterns of social behavior and organization, and they have wisely chosen in their selection of essays to give equal representation to both. The trouble as I'll explore later is that they fail to document either very systematically, and there's no excuse for some of the most gaping holes.

Many of the essays can serve as guides to people interested in pursuing traces of gay and lesbian culture. Tilchen and Koski's article on lesbian pulp novels, Ian Young's review of the poetry of male love, and Don Shewey's short, but comprehensive, look at gay men in theatre all serve this purpose well.

Shewey gives an interesting account of the struggle to develop an outlet for gay-identified gay male theatre Off-Off Broadway as well as a hurried review of traditional plays which use homosexuality for sensationalism. However, other essays could have probed much more deeply into the economics and sociology of their subjects. Some of them, like Tommi Avicolli's review of "Images of Gays in Rock Music," read like laundry lists, but even here a gay radio show could easily base a few interesting programs on his article.

Appropriately, a major subject of the anthology is the bar scene, that center of both lesbian and gay male sub-culture — the only center for many. Two of the essays briefly re-create the men's bar scenes of Cleveland and Worcester in the forties and fifties. The bars were owned and controlled by straights; behavior and dress were strictly regulated; alcoholism was encouraged; and the bars were subjected to frequent police raids — and yet, despite it all, or simply because it was so much worse outside the bar walls, a nostalgia pervades these first-person accounts. This is not so in Felice Newman's sharp attack on the bar scene today ("Why I'm Not Dancing"), which points out that not much has changed. (With a few notable exceptions, who owns Boston's bars?) The police raids aren't so frequent anymore; homosexuality is tolerated as long as it's off the street, expressed as consumerism. "I went to the bar looking for relief from heterosexuality," she writes. "Instead I found a parody." We no longer just reproduce the straight bar scene, she continues; we inspire it (disco!, as *Time* so graciously acknowledges), but we don't CHANGE it. To an awesome extent, we have bought whatever level of social tolerance we now enjoy, by buying into the system.

Several essays argue that this consumerism marks one of the major differences between lesbian and gay male cultures. Because as a group of gay men have higher

Continued on page 5



# Gay Community News

## Book Review

August 1979

Volume 7, #3  
22 Bromfield Street  
Boston, MA 02108  
(617) 426-4469  
(617) 426-8752

### NON-FICTION

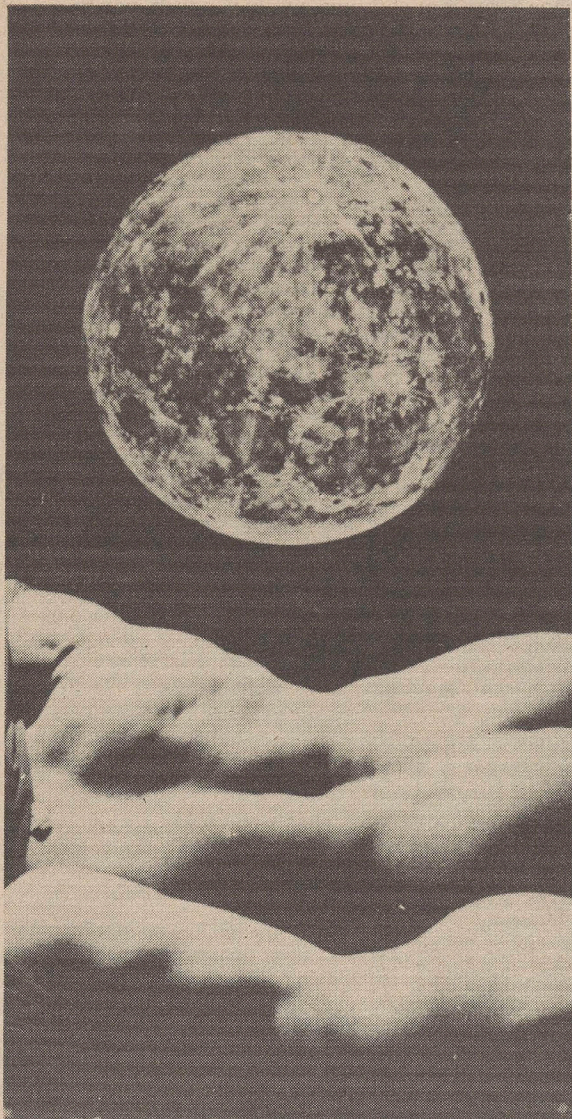
**GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS.** *By Erving Goffman.*  
**LAVENDER CULTURE.** *Edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young.*  
**THE LESBIAN PRIMER.** *By Liz Diamond.*  
**THE SADEIAN WOMEN.** *By Angela Carter.*  
**TERRORIST CHIC.** *By Michael Selzer*

### FICTION

**THE CATCH TRAP.** *By Marion Zimmer Bradley.*  
**GAY PLAYS: The First Collection.** *Edited by William M. Hoffman.*  
**KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN.** *By Manuel Puig.*  
**LOVE STORIES BY NEW WOMEN.** *Edited by Charleen Swansea and Barbara Campbell*  
**NATURAL ACTS.** *By James Fritzhand.*

### POETRY

**MISGIVINGS.** *By Richard Howard.*  
**NOTHING IS LOST.** *By Beatrice Hawley.*



### CONTRIBUTORS

Managing Editor  
Features Editor  
Design Director  
Advertising Manager  
Illustrators

Richard Burns  
Amy Hoffman  
Eric Peterson  
Neuma Crandall  
Michael Brodeur  
Perry De Vecchis  
Doug Law  
Roxanna McKinnon  
Patrick Maloney  
Christopher M. Morrissey

## Ourselves to See

### GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS

*By Erving Goffman*  
*Harper and Row, New York*  
83 pp., \$4.95

Reviewed by Mel Horne

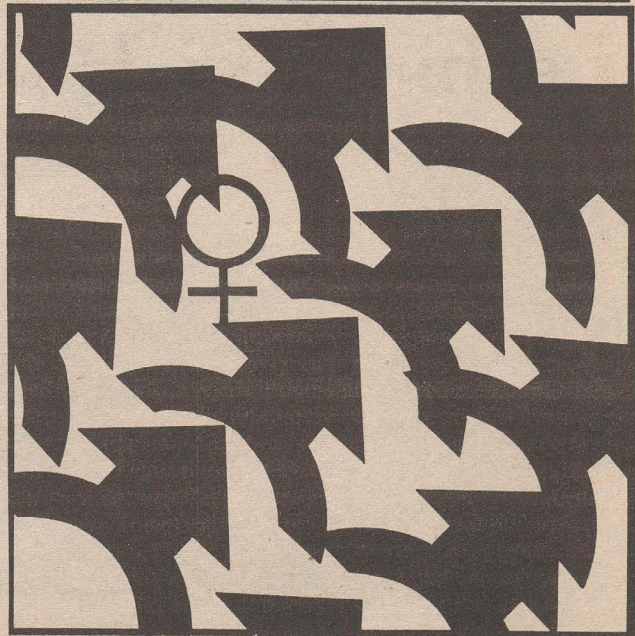
**F**OR THE past twenty years Erving Goffman has been observing the construction of social reality directly from the building site: the arena of "mutual monitoring" known as social situations wherein we create, present and manage a self in interaction with others.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), in *Asylums* (1961), and in *Stigma* (1963), as well as in other works, Goffman has pursued the insights of the pioneer American social psychologist, George Herbert Mead. For Mead, the social situation, or "social act", to use Mead's term, was the fundamental unit of society. It is, after all, in social situations that most of the world's work gets done: business transactions, wars, weddings, dinners with friends, shopping, falling in love, parenting. An analysis of social situations then "... in all of their multitudinous variety, their variable connections, and their complex networks ..." reveals the ongoing life of a society.\*

In *Gender Advertisements*, Goffman raises the question of how it is possible that commercial advertisements which give us mere glimpses of social situations using models, photographic technology, and props can convince us of the "rightness" and "naturalness" of scenes that we know to be staged. It is possible, Goffman argues, because "... the job the advertiser has of dramatizing the value of [a] product is not unlike the job a society has of infusing its social situations with ceremonial and with ritual signs facilitating the orientation of participants to one another." In short, both commercial advertising and participants in real-life social situations draw upon the same "... institutionalized arrangements in social life which allow strangers to glimpse the lives of persons they pass ..." and which allow for the quick-as-a-flash comprehension of scenes depicted in advertisements.

The institutional arrangements in social life of which Goffman speaks are dominance, subordination and hierarchy. These facts of our social life are affirmed in social situations through the use of behavioral displays — stylized indications of social identity, mood, intent, expectation and attitude. For example, when you have an interview with your boss, it is unlikely that you will preface the interaction with a statement of your intention to behave as a subordinate. Instead, you will act out (as will she or he) the nature of the relationship between dominance and subordination on the "microecological" level of display. The two of you will conspire to affirm a basic social arrangement.

Goffman does not deal with the question of how gender and its display became a fundamental determinate in the institutionalization of power in society. The merit of Goffman's analysis in *Gender Advertisements*, and its most stunning revelation, resides in his discovery that the parent-child relationship complex provides the source of gender behavioral imagery which both expresses and constitutes the relationship of dominance and subordination among adults and most specifically between men and women. "Ritually speaking," says Goffman, "females are equivalent to subordinate males and both are equivalent to children. The extensive collection of advertisements which form the final section of *Gender Advertisements* bears out this contention. Women are depicted in spatial positionings and with attitudes about themselves and the social situations in which they are involved, in ways that make sense only by reference to the child-parent complex as the source of ima-



gery for subordinate female gender display. As Goffman comments on one set of advertisements showing women in "puckish" behavior displays: Given the subordinated and indulged position of children in regard to adults, it would appear that to present oneself in puckish styling is to encourage the corresponding treatment. How much of this guise is found in real life is an open question; but found it is in advertisements.

However, these enactments of dominance and subordination as encoded in masculine and feminine gender displays are not immutable. Goffman rejects the doctrine of natural expression which maintains that differential gender displays are the essential and innate expression of maleness and femaleness. "Expression," says Goffman, "is not instinctive but socially learned and socially patterned; it is a socially defined category which employs a particular expression, and a socially established schedule which determines when these expressions will occur." The problem is that these expressions, like dogshit in Boston, are scheduled for appearance everywhere. As Goffman states "... intimacy certainly brings no corrective. In our society in all classes the tenderest expression of affection involves displays that are politically questionable ... Cross-sex affectional gestures choreograph protector and protected, embracer and embraced, comforter and comforted, supporter and supported, extender of affection and recipient thereof; and it is defined as only natural that the male encompass and the female be encompassed. (O)ther disadvantaged persons can turn from the world to a domestic scene where self-determination and relief from inequality are possible, the disadvantage that persons who are female suffer precludes this; the places identified in our society as ones that can be arranged to suit oneself are nonetheless for women thoroughly organized along disadvantageous lines."

Goffman warns against drawing too easy a political lesson from the functions of gender display in the continued subordination of women. "Gender stereotypes," contends Goffman "run in every direction, and almost as much inform what supporters of women's rights approve as what they disapprove." Nevertheless, *Gender Advertisements* should be essential reading for feminists and gays plotting strategy for their movements. It is a substantial contribution to our understanding of how we maintain the system of male domination and female subordination. It will only be through our mutual understanding of the pervasiveness of this situation that we will be able to take the concerted action necessary to end it.

\*See Herbert Blumer, "Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead," *The American Journal of Sociology*, LXXI (March, 1966) pp. 535-544.

## Virtue Avenged, Vice Rewarded

### THE SADEIAN WOMAN

*By Angela Carter*  
*Pantheon Books, New York*  
154 pp., \$7.95

### TERRORIST CHIC

*By Michael Selzer*  
*Hawthorn Books, New York, 206 pp.*

Reviewed by Michael Bronski

**A**NGELA CARTER, in *The Sadeian Woman*, has written an important piece of cultural criticism that bases itself in an analysis of Sade's pornographic writings but moves far beyond its original inspiration. First published by Virago, Ltd. (a woman's press) in London, its approach and tone is close to that of English feminist Juliet Mitchell or the socio/philosophy of Norman O. Brown. In examining the Marquis' writing, Carter meditates upon roles and the connections between tyranny, sexuality, terrorism, religion, violence and brutality in the culture and the individual.

Carter is a staunch materialist and bases her analysis in the real rather than the speculative world. This is especially true of her examination of the images and relationships between the sexes, which have long been obscured by myths. "Myth deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances." She is also against the revival or discovery of "new" myths (or "consolatory nonsenses" as she

calls all myth) and warns: "Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives women emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place."

This attitude is integral to her approach to pornography in general and Sade in particular. Most pornography is merely the re-creation of the basic myths of male and female sexuality and thus avoids the "real conditions of life." She admires the frank sexuality of pornography. At several points she states that the problem with pornography is that its primary function ("basically propaganda for fucking") is at odds with our sex repressive and warped culture, "with its metaphysics of sexuality." She also likens the notion that pornography can never fall into the abstract, "art for art's sake", since "honourably enough, it is always art with work to do."

Most pornography is written by men for a male audience. It may be about, but always excludes, women. (Carter, quite sensibly, makes little mention of homoerotic pornography, since it is based upon an entirely different system of dynamics). This usually leads to the fact that pornography almost always serves the *status quo* of sexual relations. The main portion of her text is devoted to a defense and analysis of Sade as a *moral pornographer* — a pornographer who would work in the service of women by exposing and critiquing the true nature of the relationship between the sexes, or by projecting a world of absolute sexual license for both genders. Such a pornographer would be, essentially, a political writer, whose concerns are not only sexual, but political and intellectual, freedom.

Continued on Book Review page 7



# Lesbianism 101

## THE LESBIAN PRIMER

By Liz Diamond  
Illustrations by Carol Arber  
Women's Educational Media, Inc.  
P.O. Box 533, Salem, MA 01970  
\$2.95

Reviewed by Lisa Nussbaum

OF THE LESBIAN non-fiction titles to come out within the last few years, I can think of no worthier or more welcome addition to a bookshelf than *The Lesbian Primer* by Liz Diamond.

By turns informative and entertaining, this book will thoroughly disarm you from beginning to end, no matter what your sexuality. Devoid of all hints of condescension or rhetoric, it's meant to appeal to lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals alike. In it, the author debunks some tiresome myths and fears about the lesbian lifestyle (as, for example, that lesbianism is a crime against nature or that lesbians are child molesters). This debunking consumes a lot less space than I would have liked to see. But, considering that an entire book could be devoted to each myth, it's clear to see that Diamond had to hold the discussions to a reasonable length so as to be able to move on to other topics in the book.

*The Lesbian Primer* also unequivocally affirms lesbianism as a positive choice and acclaims the continuing growth of lesbian culture. As Diamond explains in the foreword to the book, "I began to want a 'Lesbianism 101' book, a starting place to share who I am with people in my life — a book that reflects the truth, strength and also humor in the lesbian culture I had become a part of. My goal in writing this book is not only to educate heterosexuals, but also to give lesbians a tool to help reach their families and friends, and provide a source of validation and support for lesbians. To accomplish these, the format of *The Lesbian Primer* is informal to help break down the stereotypes that surround us as lesbians. The illustrations are to reinforce the thoughts expressed as well as to entertain, and make the book an addition to lesbian culture."

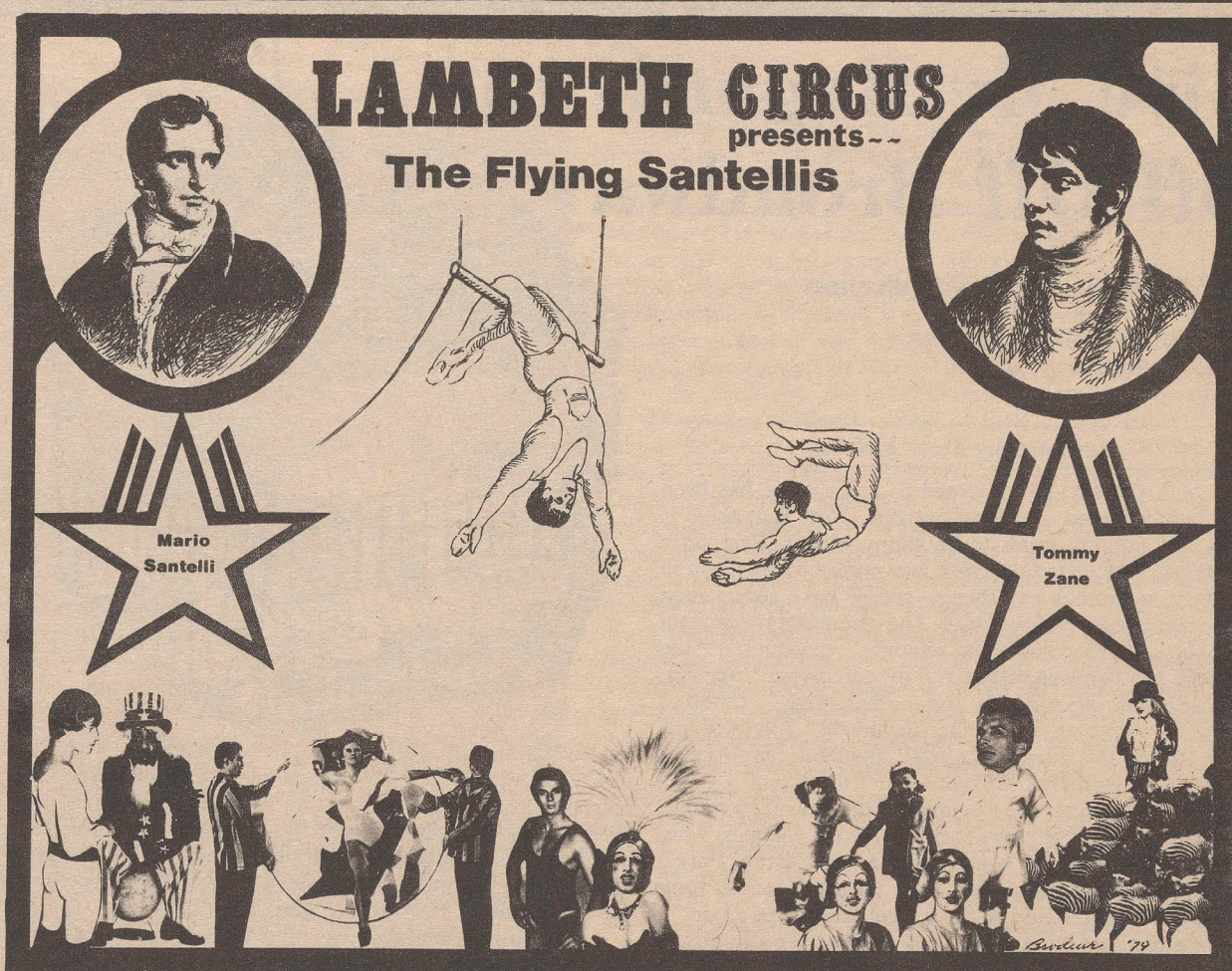
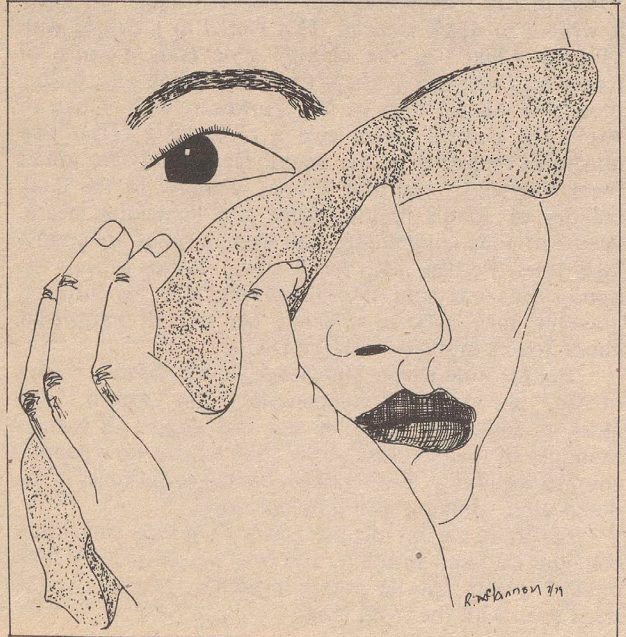
Laced with humor that lampoons and ridicules, but never nastily so, the book challenges long-held and in many cases, wrongly-held, assumptions. In the unit marked "Put The Shoe On The Other Foot Department," the author turns the tables. Supposing that 90% of the population is now gay, and you, the reader, heterosexual, she presents a series of situations for the reader to consider. Award of the "Heterosexual Privilege" degree to Samantha Straight in another section may also make you laugh. However, it will also make you aware of the ubiquitous oppression practiced upon straight women no less than lesbians.

Carol Arber's illustrations beautifully enrich the book not only by reinforcing the text, but also, because of their ability to translate meanings visually. They multiply the impact of the book's written content.

Diamond blends different voices and kinds of material into the book, striking a balance that neither overloads with information nor overpowers by opinion. Beside her own commentary, she freely cites outside sources for support and documentation, and quotes from personal interviews. She paces the material well, so that, at 82 pages long, *The Lesbian Primer* is a very brisk read. And while the units follow each other in numbered sequence (this organization fits in well with the educational intent of the book), do not feel compelled to read them in that order. Since one unit does not depend for its context on the unit preceding or following, you may skip around and reread sections as often as you like.

*The Lesbian Primer* does not profess to cover every conceivable aspect of lesbianism. But for someone trying to get or expand knowledge of the subject, this book provides much good grist for the mill. For exposure to different expressions of lesbian culture, Diamond prints an annotated listing of lesbian records, books and periodicals. And by way of referral for further information or contacts, she includes a state-by-state list of gay civil rights groups, lesbian organizations and women's centers.

Written with humor and packed with delightful line drawings, *The Lesbian Primer* is a loving, compassionate book. With this volume already out, I only wish that a "Lesbian Primer II" will not be far behind.



## Anything a Man Does

### THE CATCH TRAP

By Marion Zimmer Bradley  
Ballantine Books, \$10.95, 589 pp.

Reviewed by Rob Schmieder

TOMMY ZANE, a junior member of Lambeth Circus, has just been jeered at by his friends for taking the place of an injured female aerial performer — skirt, wig, and all. Asked for advice, his flying trapeze teacher, Mario Santelli, replies: "You are what you think you are. [...] Anything a man does is manly, isn't it?" A few months later Tommy has become one of the famous Flying Santellis, living in the big house where the family does its winter training. Within weeks he is discovering, with Mario's assistance, a whole new set of manly arts, and before the winter is over the two are lovers.

At this point it is 1945, Tommy is 14 and Mario 21. Eight years later, after a succession of disasters and brief periods of happiness, the two are reunited, apparently for good, as flying partners and as lovers. Tommy sums up both relationships with a single image: "We have only one heartbeat."

This is essentially the story of the quickenings and arrests of that heartbeat over those eight years. Nonetheless, Bradley's story is preceded by a family tree, which means that the adventures of more than a dozen other Flying Santellis will be brought in to complicate matters. While the problems that beset Tommy, Mario and the other Santellis may sometimes seem overly familiar from other circus novels, it is a familiarity that springs from truth. The sexual rigidity of the era spares no one — the Santelli women must struggle within the confines of marriage and inevitable child-bearing to keep their flying careers; the men rebel against the expectation that they will uphold the family name as flyers; and Tommy and Mario of course pay re-

peatedly and heavily for their most circumspect of love affairs. Blacklisting, fear of prosecution for sodomy or child molestation, and homophobia within the family are among the problems they face.

Through all this the power of love triumphs, for it is the love the Santellis have for one another that makes the flying act work. For all her other faults Bradley's book is redeemed by the eloquent case she makes for love. Most of the faults are not grave: it is probably impossible to write a circus novel without including the sort of hackneyed characters that are endemic to the circus itself. A writer who has made a career of churning out thick novels may be expected to write too quickly to notice that patches of her writing are unbearably purple, or that she has already provided a given piece of information in the chapter before, and the one before that. The one truly major shortcoming is that in 600 pages we get only a very shaky idea of what Tommy and Maria actually do in bed. When it comes to love scenes, Bradley excels at soft-focus photography. As she lets us know every step of every flying act the two perform together, and is constantly hammering home the connection between flying and sex, this seems a strange oversight.

Perhaps it is simply that Bradley isn't really sure what gay men do together. At any rate this specific blind spot doesn't affect her ability to create a convincing picture of the homosexual world of the early 50's, with its paranoia and self-hatred. Tommy and Mario, with no public example to follow, must devise their own approach to life and love, and their apparent naivete — at the age of 22 Tommy has never had another male lover and never heard of sadism — makes it all the more touching.

Ultimately this is not just another thick novel; a lot of new ground is covered in these pages. But true to the genre, the story of the family and of the two lovers, and the portrait of an era and of the trapeze artist's world, make a satisfying and easily digested meal. One could choose worse for a beach book.

## Fit For Parenthood

### NATURAL ACTS

By James Fritzhand  
Signet Paperbacks, New York  
308 pp., \$2.50

Reviewed by Tommi Avicoli

LITERATURE does more than reflect contemporary problems — it puts them into perspective. Sometimes, it even has an influence on the resolution of a problem, or the way in which people view a certain type of situation. *Gentleman's Agreement* (by Laura Hobson) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (by Harper Lee) stand out as two of the finest treatments of prejudice in contemporary American literature. They're certainly the best known; and they have probably influenced more people in their attitudes towards blacks and Jews than any other works of fiction this century. Now, a third work comes along — *Natural Acts* by James Fritzhand — a concise study of homophobia which, like the former two examples, deserves to be translated onto the screen. It's a quality work, smooth, factual, moving; a fine selection for high school literature courses. Of course, I doubt that many schools would risk assigning it to their students. Though I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in high school, (and probably only





# Give My Regards to Off Off Broadway

## GAY PLAYS: The First Collection

Edited by William M. Hoffman  
Avon, New York  
493 pp., \$3.50

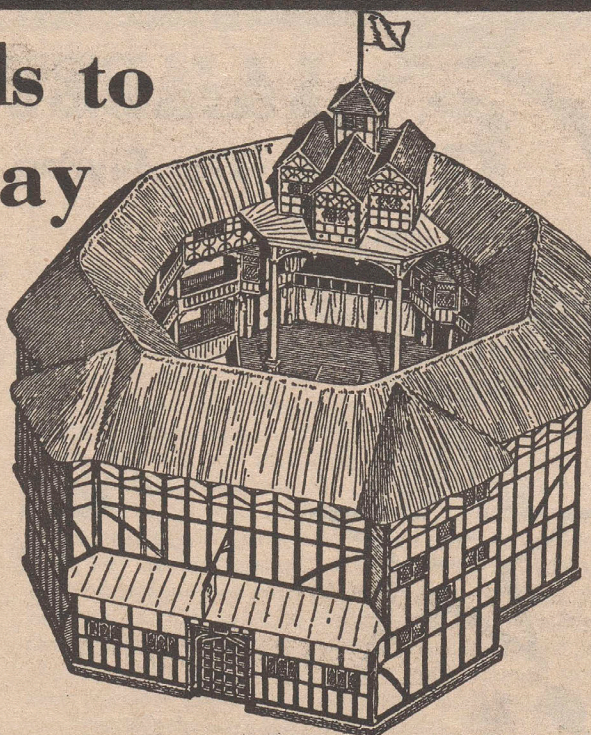
Reviewed by Terry Helbing

AN ANTHOLOGY devoted to gay theatre has been much needed and long overdue. Now that there is one, nobody seems to be happy with it. Ever since *Gay Plays: The First Collection* was published by Avon in February, numerous gay theatre people have commented on the inadequacies of the book. The comments range from "the plays aren't commercial enough," (producer); "the plays are too lightweight and full of stereotypes," (critic); "the selection of plays is too conservative," (another critic); to "why was *that* play included?" (playwright); "why *wasn't* this play included?" (another playwright); and "what's with that introduction?" (director). I don't think these comments are examples of that chronic gay sub-cultural problem, "gays are their own worst enemies," but instead represent what I would call the "MacArthur Park" syndrome. ("I don't think that I can take it/'Cause it took so long to bake it/And I'll never have that recipe again.") Interpreting those lyrics in terms of gay theatre anthologies, because this book was so long in coming, everyone wants it to be perfect, and be all things to all people. I think they're also afraid that there won't be another gay anthology after this one and *Gay Plays* will be the only book to represent gay theatre.

Let's be optimistic: after all, this book isn't called *Gay Plays: The Last Collection* (more on the title below) — it is the first time a publisher in the United States has recognized the importance of gay theatre. We have to believe that both gay people and gay theatre will be around from now on, and that playwrights will continue to be able to use gay people for major themes in their writing. In that case, there will be other gay theatre anthologies after this one. Realistically, of course, the quality of this one — and how well it sells — will determine how soon another such anthology will be commissioned.

About the title: technically, this is not the first collection of gay plays. Another collection, entitled *Homosexual Acts*, was published by Ed Berman and the Almost Free Theatre of London in 1975. It contains the five plays performed by the Gay Sweatshop theatre group during its first season. But its distribution in this country has been limited. *Gay Plays* might more properly be subtitled *The First U.S. Collection*.

The plays themselves have generated the most controversy about the book. My major objection to the plays selected is that three of them are readily available elsewhere. Lanford Wilson's *The Madness of Lady Bright*, Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and Frank Marcus' *The Killing of Sister George* are available either individually or in other collections. (Robert Patrick's *T-Shirts* was also published in a condensed version in *Gaysweek: Arts & Letters*, but that isn't quite the same thing.) Hoffman has said he included these plays to show that gay theatre has been around for awhile and isn't strictly a 1979 phenomenon. However, he does this in his introduction, tracing the gay



presence in theatre from Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* in 1591 to Mae West's 1927 script, *The Drag*, and on to the appearance of gay characters and themes beginning in the 1950's and becoming frequent by the 1960's. The point is clearly made; instead of repeating it by including already available plays, some of the many other good gay plays that are around could have been chosen.

Of those remaining, two plays treat lesbian themes: *Confessions of a Female Disorder* by Susan Miller and *A Late Snow* by Jane Chambers. Hoffman has admitted the difficulty of finding plays about lesbians, so it is encouraging to see these two included here.

Image is currently an important subject to gays, particularly gay theatre people. What is the "image" that we as gays project to the rest of society? Is it "politically correct"? In other words, is this the way that we want to be seen? That has become an important consideration — and an objection — to the plays in this collection. Many of the plays, particularly the older ones ("Lady Bright," "Sister George," "Mr. Sloane") show gays in a negative light. Hoffman says he put Robert Patrick's *T-Shirts* in the book because it is "a crash-course in what it's like to be a sophisticated gay man in any big city in America right now." Yet, to straights, the characters are the "promiscuous, loveless, lonely homosexuals" they always thought we were, and so on down the line with the other plays. The important fact to remember when faced with such "image-consciousness" is that, in each case, it is only *one* writer's vision of how *some* gay people live their lives — these characters can't possibly represent us all. Gay people are also *human*, with human faults, problems and weaknesses, who have the right to live their lives as they damn well please, without having to conform to an image that may or may not be useful to show straight society. The only thing necessary for us to show straight society is the multiplicity of our lifestyles, and the characters in these plays need only, ultimately, be real, believable and true to themselves.

*Gay Plays: The First Collection* is, to use a favorite reviewer's term, a "flawed" work — the eight plays included may not be pleasing to everyone, either because of their quality or their politics, but the book includes an important (though not all-inclusive) bibliography of gay plays and articles about them. Even with these qualifications, it is a relevant book for anyone interested in gay theatre.

# Stopping Short of Self-Awareness

## LOVE STORIES BY NEW WOMEN

Edited by Charleen Swansea and Barbara Campbell  
Red Clay Books  
6366 Sharon Hills Road, Charlotte, NC 28210

Reviewed by Linda Stein

I WAS VERY intrigued by the introduction to *Love Stories by New Women*. In it the editors gave some reason why they compiled these short stories, raised some critical questions, discussed answers they sensed in the stories, and mentioned such important insights as, "... the consequence of a mother who does not love is finally more than psychic pain; it is the demise of society's structures." However, after reading the collection I felt a gap between what I had just finished and what I had expected from reading the editor's comments. Thus, my criticisms here mostly center on the collection's overall content rather than individual pieces, which were generally very well written.

I felt short-changed in the theme of "self-discovery." The stories definitely treat this theme, but don't, as the editors claim, generally move from "acceptance of self to a conviction of self worth." Rather, the characters in most of the stories never come to self-affirmation. *Awareness* of self was a prominent theme but most of the women protagonists were either silenced by men and/or their own passivity or, if they did air their grievances and insights, they often remained in stifling relationships that made me shudder imagining them.

In fact, only two out of the eighteen fiction pieces seemed optimistic. Many of the others struck me as either

neutral in their resolution of conflicts or quite depressing, with little glimmer of change or positive alternatives.

*Learning to Meditate*, a journal-like piece by Helen Barolini, is one of the two optimistic stories. A strong woman of forty-seven reiterates forcefully that finding and connecting with herself is more important than having a lover. Her sense of aloneness is full of clarity and humor. I believe her when she says:

But I don't want to be a sexual port; I want to be a whole person. And that's something I have to do alone... When I'm free I won't have to absorb other lives. I'll have mine... If only I can connect, I know my aloneness is not a sore, but sacred.

The ending is beautifully poetic, insightful and uplifting.

*Nina*, the last and longest story in the book, is also empowering even though the plot focuses on the pains of separation. Nina will not allow herself to remain in a stifling marriage. She struggles to convince her adolescent children she is still their mother. She stands up to her cold father. Towards the end, however, there was too much activity for the story to be believable even if it is true, which my intuition tells me is so. However, I found myself engrossed throughout. Author Irene Tiersten's sense of humor was crucial and successful in this wrenching account. Her honest depiction of mother/child neuroses was skillful. I gained a sense of expansion from *Nina*, in contrast to the claustrophobia I acquired from many of the other pieces in which, more often than not, the focus was on anxiety and depression rather than a growing sense of self-worth and possible new directions.

Another theme mentioned in the introduction which was successfully revealed in the stories was the ambiguity that can accompany freedom from sexist roles. Does this

Continued on Book Review page 6

## Parenthood Continued from page 2

because I was in the top track academically), I don't think even the most progressive schools would touch *Natural Acts*. And the reason? The book is about homosexuals or homosexuality and children (or even teenagers) — the tender spot in the civil-rights-for-gays argument. Even liberal straights sometimes succumb to the irrational fear that their children (or teens) are going to be corrupted or converted by a homosexual influence (be it a teacher or a book).

Consider the plot of *Natural Acts*. A dying woman leaves guardianship of her 11-year old in the hands of her two best friends — a homosexual couple. Knowing she is dying, the woman plans to marry one of the men and then have him legally adopt the child. But her sudden death leaves only the will as evidence of her desire to have the two gay men raise her daughter. The child's aunt and uncle, two rather typically conservative do-gooders, contest the will on the grounds that the homosexuals are providing an immoral environment for the child's upbringing.

Reading *Natural Acts* is an emotional experience. Not only are the descriptive scenes, both of the mother's death and the court battles, painfully detailed and discomfiting, but the dialogue is real enough to make you envision the characters as real people, as people you've known and loved (or hated, as the case may be). Fritzhand's remarkable ability to bring his characters to life is important in the last chapter, as the book takes an unexpected turn. Only a skilled writer could handle the last few pages of the book with the controlled pacing that Fritzhand does. There are moments when you wish that he had skimmed on details, particularly, if you're like me and you tend towards hypochondria. The depiction of the mother's illness is far too graphic for me — I found myself getting sympathetic headaches and even thinking that I had better get that check-up I've been promising myself for the last few years.

The book is a landmark for gays. Not only does it argue the case for gay parenthood exceptionally well, but it creates sympathy for the two men not just by telling us that they're the good guys, but, primarily by showing us their humanity and their fitness to be the child's parents.

While it would have been convenient and simplistic for Fritzhand to paint the aunt and uncle as the bad guys (black hats and all), he chooses, instead, to relegate them to the lesser position of the misinformed. They're not altogether heartless villains. Though you find yourself foaming with anger at their bigotry, it is Fritzhand's intention to eventually lead you to see their humanity.

After all, Fritzhand seems to be saying, what else do we have but our humanity? It is this humanness which eventually decides the outcome of the book.

## Documentary Poems

### NOTHING IS LOST

By Beatrice Hawley  
Applewood Press  
Box 2870, Cambridge, MA 02139  
61 pp., \$3.95

Reviewed by Pat M. Kuras

IN HER second collection, *Nothing Is Lost*, Beatrice Hawley's poems have no constant theme. But many of her poems draw on women's lives and these lives shift and dazzle, blur and change as though seen through a kaleidoscope. Hawley's women are all different, with their own unique strengths, quirks. "Zhenia" is cunning and bold and acts on whims. "Rebecca," only an infant, has her own assertiveness with "a terrible new smile."

To sidestep for a moment, in popular fiction there is a new genre, heralded as "the documentary novel." An author dips into an actual event which has happened to real people and romanticizes the true facts into a novel. May I steal some establishment thunder and refer to some of Hawley's work as "documentary poems"? With "Flower Child", Hawley serves us a glimpse of a vulnerable woman caught up in a terrible magic. She is portraying the psyche of Linda Kasabian, who acted as look-out during the Tate murders.

Another of Hawley's "documentary poems" concerns the martyred Joan of Arc. (Herein lies a criticism.) With "Joan of Arc," as well as with "Flower Child," the poem is written in quick stanzas. This works to a degree with "Flower Child" as the choppy style adds a sense of fragmented mania — perhaps true to Kasabian's life during those late August days of '69. However, with "Joan of Arc", the clipped verses give a zig-zagging effect that punctures the power of the poem. Hawley's poem jumps from reveries of youthful lesbian sexuality to the dank realities of Joan's imprisonment and impending death. Scenes of Joan communing with women saints are annoyingly brief. Perhaps with this brevity, Hawley expects the saintly visits to remain ethereal and enigmatic; her curtness, however, may only be revealing her lack of knowledge about Joan's intimacy with the Divine.

But for what Divine knowledge Hawley lacks in "Joan of Arc," she more than compensates for in "Angels." She gives us definitions of good and bad angels, as well as examples of their radiant power. She tells us how people, coupled with faith "have walked, bandaged for miles in the desert after speaking with only one angel."

On more earthly plains, Hawley's poems sometimes confront classism. In the far too brief verses of her "Joan of Arc" poem, Hawley sneaks in humor, juxtaposing the peon Joan with the royal king:

Continued on Book Review page 6



# Howard's Way

## MISGIVINGS

By Richard Howard  
Atheneum, New York  
77 pp., \$4.95

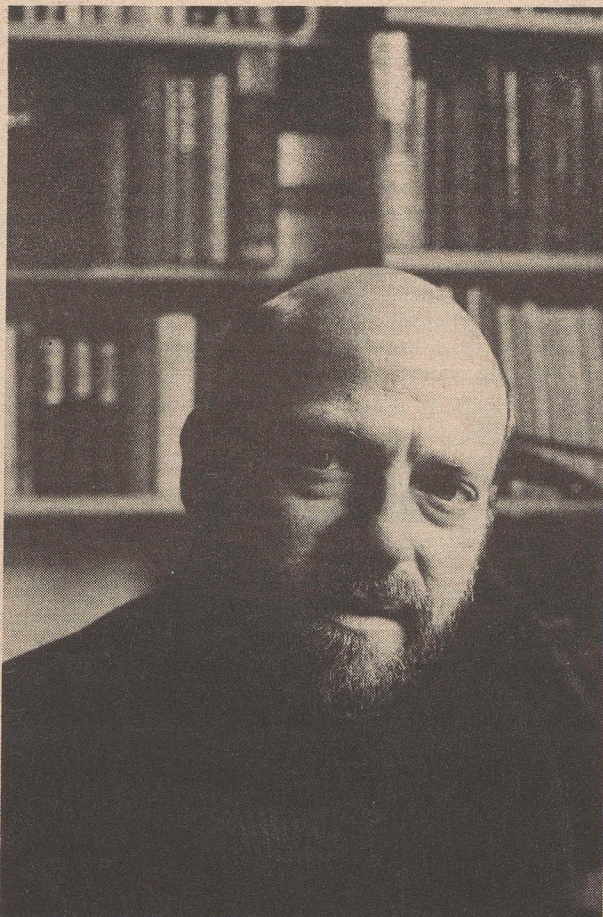
Reviewed by Rudy Kikel

IN A POEM from Richard Howard's last book, *Fellow Feelings*, he represents himself as having bolted from a showing of some erotic home movies. The "actors," who when the lights come on are discovered to be in the room, seem to the poet among other things to have foregone "identity" for the sake of "one more obscene performance." Safely down on the New York pavement, Howard resolves mysteriously to continue moving "by darkness" as stars in the sky "move by light," defining his, in contradistinction to theirs, as "Howard's Way." For me, it is difficult not to see in "Howard's Way," as the poem is called, a measure of the distance in which this poet stands in relation to some notions cherished in contemporary gay male society — and sanctioned by its poetry — as well as one key to the undertakings in *Misgivings*, his most recent book.

After all, Howard lectures George Sand in *Misgivings*, and in so doing questions some of the ideas of Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown that are said to have filtered into movement rhetoric: "releasing/inhibitions is quite as compulsive, repetitive, and hysterical/ an operation (and opus)/ as repressing them." And he has said, or had Robert Browning say, in a dramatic monologue published in *Findings* and based on the English poet's experience: "I am not interested in art./ I am interested in the obstacles/ to art." Howard, then, may be something of an anomaly. He has forged a poetry that is witty, intelligent, and beautiful — and mannered, some would say — a poetry in which tension is delicately sustained between muffled depths and ornate surfaces, though those surfaces seem in recent years increasingly to have made allowance for what the book jacket in hand calls a "culminating intimacy." The most elegantly learned poet we have had in the language since Browning, he is, along with James Merrill, a contemporary master of the high or "mandarin" style. But at a time when our counterculture quarterlies are full of poetry that can look and read like so much emotional spillage, he is at a clear remove from some openly gay male poets of his generation and the many more that have come after them, in extending neither carte blanche to behavioral "release" nor to the unrestrained expression of that "release." If theirs is an art of "facts that harass/ like flies, buzz but do not sing," Howard always sings.

Furthermore, forging and not foregoing "identity," moving into darkness ("opacity being a great discoverer"), making contact with "Something that is greater than what we see/ and that we don't want to face/ all the time" — and that may be just the Self — is what beneath their sometimes glittering exteriors these poems are all about. And Selfhood, at least as Richard Howard understands its acquisition, comes of choosing to make ourselves vulnerable to Mutation, "the only god whose name/ we know," allowing time, consciousness of the body's deterioration, and the realities of other people to make their incursions into our lives. The reward of choosing this course — do we have a choice? — is paid out in a continuing capacity to confront the world, and only in such confrontation is there the hope of our somehow influencing or changing it. A continuing peril, however, is that we can be stopped by our own faint hearts at any point along the road, get frozen into place, and turn into monsters of egotism — become madmen of a sort. Howard's Herod is such a creature, surely — the figure in "A Commission" who kills the whirling Salome for "turning/ into Herodias" — for changing, that is — and "not for that business with the head, about which he couldn't care less." And in the light of these scrupulous demands, which of us does not at times become a monster? "Man is mad," Howard has said, "as the body is sick, by nature."

Two of the paths along which Selfhood can be discovered particularly interest Howard — that of the artist, and that of the lover. The pursuit of those interests are about equally distributed in his books. American painters are encouraged here, for instance, to make their art vulnerable to "litter: leaves, straw, floating/ bottles and boxes," and through the aesthetic transmuting process transform American life: "We change, and ourselves changing, change what we see . . ." Dorothy Ruddick is addressed as a representative artist for her having imported into stitchery the patterned record of loss which, the poet declares, can be read in "material things" — earth, air, fire, water. But it is the French photographer Nadar and twelve of his illustrious sitters to whom the lion's share of *Misgivings* is devoted. Nadar is a likely subject for the poet. Engaged in capturing and delivering over to us moments in the lives of his 19th-century subjects, moments which we are free to consider thereafter in the light of earlier or later recorded history, he is like the Howard who, in *Untitled Subjects*, did as much for selected British Victorian creators. Nadar is an archetype of the artist, in Howard's view, as "demiurge," the little god concerned to speak the "fiat lux or fiat nox" ["Let there be light or let there be night"] that reflects an already established incarnation, to have his portraits mirror the "chaos and cosmos" and their shifts one into the other that are to be found in "nature." The



Richard Howard.

"center/of our appetites" is, for Howard, "in its metamorphosis," and a chief concern here — reflecting how surely the poet has himself been open to Mutation — are just such shifts: the chaos out of which cosmos comes (Bernhardt, Baudelaire, Cautier), the brooding backgrounds where one would have thought to detect only "light" (Hugo, Daumier), the doom and the success which, accidentally, it almost seems, succeed each other, sometimes, as in the case of one of Howard's two gay subjects, Gustave Dore, who had "prevailed on the world/to see its classics" his way and "blew up, eclipsed by (his) own garish luck," almost because of that success.

The gnostic meditations in the Nadar poems are perpetually being broken in upon by wit, the sparkle of Howard's word magic, and, particularly in the Gautier and Sand pieces, by exasperation. The emotional crisis which *Misgivings* most vividly records, however, occurs in "With the Remover to Remove," one of the stunning gay love poems with which the book concludes, and which records a temporary blockade on a course of sustained self-construction. Seasonal succession, the Sunderings of love affairs — time, that is, and other people, two of the prime facilitators in Howard's world of Change — all seem to the narrator too much: "another month of metamorphosis/ would move him to an immolation/ in his own apartment, pyre and all!" "He" takes a cruise ship to the tropics, dons flippers and a diving mask, and enters a world that would seem wholly divorced from that of Howard's poetry in general — a hushed, hieratical world of museums, libraries, lovers' beds — did we not remember a fascination in his other books with fabulous land and sea creatures. In an underwater experience that I will not try to describe and that seems both mystical and parodic of conventional mystical experience, he finds himself reconciled to the New York City life (and social swim?) he had left behind:

there would no longer be any need  
to secede. So he might recover  
the great city, which is where we are  
most vulnerable, and times to come  
find him smiling at even younger  
faces of boys he barely knew, though  
patient with their mortality and  
his own not-to-be-helped completion  
as he stroked, with an odd significance,  
a talismanic stalk of coral,  
apparently untroubled by the turn  
and turn about of the latest screw.

In *Fellow Feelings* Howard had taken pains to make what had been implicit, explicit, to name what had not yet been named. Does not the title do just that? Perhaps the third person singular pronoun ("he") in which "With the Remover to Remove" is written suggests another "remove," another alteration, a decision to make sure it is the experience itself and not who is having it that receives our attention. Coming after *Fellow Feelings*, *Misgivings* may reflect a veering off, a synthesis between an old and a new self, more than any reinstating of the recently discovered one. In it, that is, the poet has himself, again, submitted to Change, chosen to go "Howard's Way." And, as one of the two or three best-known gay male poets in America — editor, translator, critic, winner of a Pulitzer Prize for poetry — he may be in the peculiar position of being able to help us all plot a safe course between conflicting extremes, avoiding on the one hand the stubborn choice of cushioned self-satisfaction that could cut us off from communal ties — for after all, "as long as some reality remains outside us, we are still alive" — and on the other that seductive immersion in the mass — movements, military "maneuvers," disco "madness"? — wherein we no longer know ourselves and something larger than ourselves for its own good, not ours.

**Culture** Continued from Book Review page 1  
incomes than lesbians — without children we have all that "disposable income" — gay male culture has been much more catered to by commercial establishments than has lesbian culture. There are more bars, more baths, more magazines for men, and the businessmen, often straight, who own these institutions make millions off us. They also are in a position to manipulate our culture. The relative lack of commercial interest in lesbians has meant that what lesbian culture is emerging is really *their own* in a way that gay male culture is *not* ours. Perhaps the most exciting cultural development of the seventies has been stimulated by lesbian feminism: the feminist presses, record companies, musicians, conferences and concerts. These are only faintly shadowed in the gay men's movement (as demonstrated by the unsuccessful efforts of this year's Boston Lesbian and Gay Pride Week Committee to find male performers for the rally). As Lynne Shapiro's article on the economics of women's music notes, "no one makes an easy living from women's music"; perhaps one reason lesbian feminist culture has not been co-opted.

I wish the editors had included more articles on contemporary lesbian feminist culture: we read about lesbian images filtered through the trash novels of earlier decades, how about a review of the current literature? Karla Jay's introductory review of lesbian culture is very suggestive in this regard, and it's disappointing that more of these themes aren't pursued.

Really excellent are the sections of essays on young gay people, challenging macho norms, and aging. "Growing Up Gay: Where were you in '62?" is a devastating reminder of what it was like, not so long ago, when young people were regularly expelled from school, institutionalized, subjected to shock therapy, and led to commit suicide because of their homosexuality. That such outrages are less frequent 17 years later indicates how far our movement has come — but they do still occur, with more regularity than we'd like to imagine. Blynn Garnett's wonderful article on being a lesbian's lesbian daughter also points to the way our lives — as individuals, as a people — have changed.

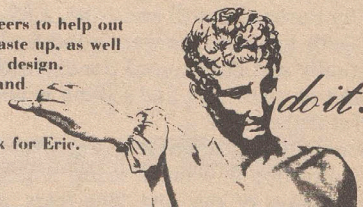
I also want to mention "A Spy in the House of Sex," Karla Jay's account of the forty years of thankless effort behind Jeannette H. Foster's monumental study, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, which discusses references to lesbianism throughout western literature. The essay's title refers to the job Foster took for three years as librarian at the Kinsey Institute, in order to get access to its vast collection of rare books. In 1956, Foster had to use a year's salary to subsidize the book's publication (only 3500 copies were printed), and she never recovered this investment. For years the book was available only in a few libraries and rare book shops. It's a massive volume, full of evidence of the long herstory of lesbianism; its creation was a long and isolated struggle. Its recent herstory is indicative of the growth of our movements: Diana Press re-issued the book in '75.

Although there's much that I like in the anthology, I'm troubled by the book's serious omissions. To a surprising extent, the culture it reviews is that of the cities, indeed, of white, upper-middle class, men who live in cities. I wish more attention had been paid to the mass media. Why not a review, for instance, of the rapid change in our representation on television — surely more significant to most lesbians and gay men than our image Off-Off-Broadway — and the difficult struggle involved in improving it? An exciting aspect of this anthology is precisely that it reprints essays from small gay presses in places like Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh — why not an article on the growth of the gay press throughout the country?

This fault extends to their treatment of our daily culture as well. Though one of the editors, Allen Young, is personally committed to rural living, and has written at least one lengthy article for *GCN* about gay male culture in Western Massachusetts, none of the essays in *Lavender Culture* document the networks rural people have developed outside of the bars. Why not, for instance, an essay on the Metropolitan Community Church as a social network, providing, as it does, the *only* organized alternative to the bars for lesbians and gay men in literally scores of small American towns? Even the treatment of the cities has startling holes: no essay examines the phenomenal growth and implications of identifiable gay ghettos in major cities throughout the country. Nor do the essays adequately examine the tensions caused by the class divisions within our community: the significance, for instance, of a place like The Pines, where a few, rich gay men can buy a bit of freedom for themselves; or the relationship between conformity in behavior and dress amongst gay men and the development of gay capitalism, epitomized by "The Advocate Image." And perhaps most disturbing is the lily whiteness of the anthology: only two of the 43 essays are written from an explicitly third world perspective.

"Lavender Culture" — whose culture?

GCN needs volunteers to help out with layout and paste up, as well as illustration and design. Drafting, artistic and design skills are sought. Call 426-8752; ask for Eric.





## New Women

Continued from Book Review page 4

new liberation bring "increased possibilities" or "heightened . . . anxiety"; "fulfillment or disaster"? Much of the depression I sensed in the stories derived from the pain of this two-fold freedom. Many of the authors illuminated how "changed consciousness has affected . . . our love relationships" in very poignant ways, though again I wished there were more choices offered.

In reading the introduction, I got the erroneous impression that lesbianism — never called by this name throughout the book — was going to be offered in the stories as a concrete alternative to heterosexuality. Yet out of the eighteen pieces, only three touch upon lesbian relationships, and only one of these, entitled *Losing Heart* by Tirza Latimer, deals with lesbians in the real world in a real relationship. The other two, *The Rose in the Snow* and *The Wedding Trip* are surrealistic, which is not necessarily a negative quality, of course; but I wonder why more actual lesbian relationships weren't portrayed. Further, both these abstract stories end in violence — suffocation and bloodshed.

This is not to say these stories were not well-written. I thought *The Rose in the Snow* was superb. The author, Kathryn Kramer, was very creative in combining fairy tale-like simplicity of style with surreal details, making her story subtly complex. The forces of nature is a major theme embodied in the two main goddess characters. The "northern woman" is Appollonian in her nature — cold, reserved, quiet, identified with the moon; the "southern woman" is Dionysian — passionate, a sun goddess. The play on contrasts (i.e., light/dark) and the Taoist intertwining of them is handled so well that at times the allegorical imagery reminded me of Monique Wittig in *Les Guerilleres*. I look forward to reading other works by Kathryn Kramer.

*The Wedding*, the other lesbian story by Lloyd Rose, was also well written, but the surrealism and violent ending disappointed me, as did the fact that the women's relationship was not developed. It did, however, end with a theme that was prevalent throughout many diverse stories, that "she did not want to touch him," and vice versa, that she didn't want him to touch her; an admission I respect these women for having the courage to divulge and break one of our many silences.

Quantitatively at least, lesbianism was not given much voice, though in the introduction the editors place this first on their list of authors "heretofore unspeakable conclusions." Any lesbian or other woman interested in reading about lesbian relationships that read the introduction, bought the book and then curled up with it at home would probably feel disappointed, if not ripped off.

Some other recurring themes in the collection included: aloneness/isolation — both positive and negative feelings; passivity and violence, and the oftentimes hairline interface between them; women's insights and understanding of complex interpersonal dynamics and men's ignorance and repression of these interactions, oftentimes due to their huge egos.

I think the themes were quite universal for women who have ever related intimately to men. In a way, I feel this is also a book for men who are courageous enough to read and see what intensity and intelligence were/are behind those silences with their women friends.

Two stories, *The Arm of Her Chair* by Ann Taylor and *The Granny* by Pamolu Oldham are mother-daughter love stories with undertones of sexuality. Both vividly portray the delicacy, warmth and obligations of these ties.

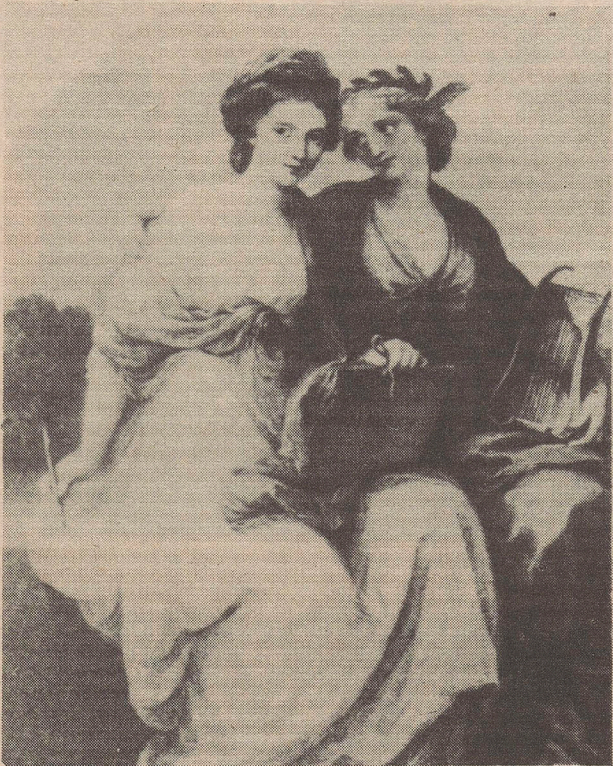
I don't think any of the stories were written by women of color. I do think a few were probably written by working class women. One story, *The People of Color* by Jean Thompson, deals with race directly. I admired the honesty with which she reveals the protagonist's racism and her ensuing friendship with a black woman. She makes some good connections between black and female oppressions. The plot itself is depressing — woman-beating; but it was also because of the men in the story, both black and white, who were so sexist and racist, and because the women's friendship didn't seem to work out in the end because of racial differences, that I left the story feeling dejected and hopeless.

The wide range of characters and, I imagine, authors as well, is a tribute to the diversity of the collection. As a woman in my mid-twenties, I learned a lot from the older women's accounts, and I hope older women find some valuable knowledge here also.

One of my growing stylistic peeves in women's writing is the author's editorial comments that are sometimes found interspersed within a story. In them, an author tells us how and why she wrote the story, as if she needs to give a justification for writing it. Perhaps it is a reflection of women's respect for honesty and directness or merely a stylistic device that some like and others don't. Maybe though, it derives from a sense of insecurity and a lack of self-affirmation that is deeply rooted historically and psychically in many women. We are struggling, often successfully, to break through this paralysis. In the stories which used this editorial device, *A Woman in Love With a Bottle* by Barbara Lovell and *Nina*, I felt it detracted from them. Both these stories were good both structurally and contextually and didn't need the explanations. The stories can stand on their own and I think would have been more powerful if they had.

Generally I think this is an important book and is moving in a direction in which a sequel might provide the missing alternatives of this one. The fears, anger, excitement, courage and insight in these stories rang true in very personal ways for me as I recalled various stages in the development of my feminist consciousness. However, I think it is essential to include more stories in which women are

not so entrenched in old roles and patterns. In the collection as a whole, I got the feeling that current heterosexist roles were the prevailing standard for intimacy. Although I fully acknowledge and support the need to express the intense pain women experience, we cannot stop with the release of it in a collection of feminist love stories. We also need to write about the strengths we've gained, the new support and value systems we're forming. It is crucial that we hear this from each other now to validate each other's inklings and experiences that there are more satisfying and viable ways to develop intimacy than the sanctioned ways we've been told, which often fail.



## Hawley

Continued from Book Review page 4

Staying a virgin  
turns out to be easy;  
I am ugly and healthy.  
The silly king himself  
hates my peasant breath:  
garlic is a useful plant . . .

Then, from the reverse angle, in the form of a "Letter From the Colonies," Hawley exposes the colonists' patronizing attitudes and exploitation of the natives:

. . . There is some food.  
The savages have tamed the ground  
enough for that, we profit and learn;  
we are angels beside them.

Hawley tends to keep blatant humor to a minimum. In her first book, *Making The House Fall Down* (Alice James Books, 1977), she mainly restricted it to the poem "Rules For The Cleaning Lady," in which, with regard to the bathroom, she instructs, "Sit nowhere else." In *Nothing Is Lost*, humor is tightly drawn in the unusual poem, "Sarah's Place," in which the friends of a dead tomboy continue to include her in their games by using her grave for third base.

Beatrice Hawley's poems tend to be short, often less than half a printed page in length. Yet this does not deter from their strength. Highly unique, all her poems maintain their own individual merit and polish.



## Portrait of Repression

### KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN

By Manuel Puig

Translated by Thomas Colchie

Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York  
281 pp., \$8.95

Reviewed by Jim Marko

**K**ISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN is a marvelous book — a ghastly portrait of political and sexual repression. Using his finely honed style of objective reportage, Puig injects into the narrative the cold and analytical police-state surveillance document. Puig has given us a stark, spare tale rife with scenes of repression.

Two men share a cell in an Argentine prison. Molina is a window-dresser who faces eight years for "corruption of minors." Valentin is a rhetoric-spouting Marxist. A "revolutionary" who is eleven years Molina's junior, he is being detained for inciting union disturbances.

Molina entertains himself and his fellow prisoner by telling Valentin the plots of his favorite Hollywood movies. Indeed, as he did in *Betrayed* by Rita Hayworth and *Heartbreak Tango*, Puig uses the artifice of films, their campy, popular mythology, to move the narrative through, and almost past, the chilling aspects of oppression.

But oppression is there. Both men feel it at all times in their small, cramped quarters. Both men attempt to come to terms with their own oppressions through their discussions. As they live through their collective and individual crises, the two come to form a profound relationship based on understanding and mutual respect.

The relationship is threatened when the authorities attempt to enlist Molina to spy on his cell mate. It is a self-assured Molina who is able to outwit the oppressor in this instance. While never informing on Valentin, Molina protests during his own interrogations, "Excuse me sir, I only want to cooperate."

In their small, controlled existence, Molina and Valentin devise a truly revolutionary manner to circumvent the will and power of the jailer. "Our relationship isn't pressured by anyone," Valentin tells Molina.

In a sense we're perfectly free to behave however we choose with respect to one another, am I making myself clear? It's as if we were on some desert island. An island on which we may have to remain alone together for years. Because, well, outside this cell, we may have our oppressors, yes, but not inside. Here no one oppresses the other. The only thing that seems to disturb me . . . because I'm exhausted, or conditioned or perverted . . . is that someone wants to be nice to me, without asking anything back for it.

The nearly exclusive use of dialogue by Puig lends a cinematic quality to the narrative, and yet the quickly paced account is interrupted by a number of footnotes. This authorial conceit does not stop the story, so much as telescope the narrative line.

The footnotes are a formal discussion of the origins of homosexuality. Interpreting the work of writers from Freud and Marcuse to Norman O. Brown and Dennis Altman, Puig presents the reader with information which he finds "denied" to people.

In a recent interview [*Christopher Street*, April 1979] Puig defended the use of these analytical notes on the theory that the information has been "denied violently to people."

" . . . you must remember that my novel was destined, first of all, for a Spanish-speaking reader," Puig continued. "So I said to myself, 'Well, the information's been violently denied, so I'll violently incorporate it into the narration; it will be there as an explanation, a footnote, having nothing to do with the text' — the literary text, I mean."

I would suspect that many movement types may find this book not to their liking, partly because of Puig's use of the footnoted information (which many may find gratuitous). Neither character is presented in an especially flattering light. Molina is easily a stereotypical queen. He is trapped with the delusion that "men" are responsible and strong, while faggots are dependent and vulnerable. Valentin is the dogmatic, fervent "revolutionary" who must suppress his longing for ordinary bourgeois amenities.

I would also suspect that neither character is especially liked by Puig. His task seems not to present us with heroes or anti-heroes but, rather, to coldly delineate both the overt and covert oppressions raging against political and sexual freedom.

As a statement of political and sexual change in a police state context must, *Spider Woman* ends tragically; yet there is the final conceit that both characters "escape" their enforced fates.

The worst thing  
is for a person — knowingly or not —  
to carry prison inside himself . . .

—Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet  
from "26 September 1945"

Molina and Valentin have their senses of self and loyalty tested by the powers of the oppressors. In this gracefully and powerfully told story, Manuel Puig allows hard won "victories" to the sexual and political outcasts.



# Sade

Continued from Book Review page 2

For Carter, Sade has all of the qualifications of this type of writer. His imagination allowed him to see the world in totally sexual terms, this explicitness showing the true nature of male/female relationships. His republicanism during the French Revolution allows him to see the immediate evils of the political world; and his atheism (perhaps his most salient belief) allows him to understand the basis for all oppression and tyranny. In Sade's vision "it is possible to radically transform society and, with it, human nature, so that the Old Adam, exemplified in God, the King, and the Law, the trifold masculine symbolism of authority, will take its final departure from amongst us. Only then will freedom be possible; until then the freedom of one class, or sex, or individual necessitates the unfreedom of others."

French philosopher Michel Foucault postulates that "sadism" is not a name given to a specific set of sexual practices but a "massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the end of the eighteenth century: . . . unreason transformed into the delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite." This is the subtext of Sade's pornographic world: unlike the usual pornographer who presents us with a glamorous, yet unreal, world of unequal sexuality, Sade pushes everything to extreme. The horror-upon-horror that Sade presents is the logical outcome of inequality between the sexes and the classes: those who claim god-given power over others. A world that permits cruelty (the executioner, the police, the wife beater) must allow all to practice these actions; in Sade's vision cruelty is limitless, tyranny is absolute.

Two of Sade's major novels, *Justine* and *Juliette*, form the basis for Carter's discussion of Sade's women. The main characters are sisters whose lives have taken completely opposite paths. Justine is the good woman in a man's world. She is determined to keep her virtue no matter what, and as a result she is faced with excruciating humiliation, torture, degradation, poverty, and mockery. Her sister Juliette has taken the other tack — exploited her sexuality — and has played the man's game so well that not only does she prosper but she acts with the consciousness and cruelty of her sister's persecutors. The books are case studies in virtue avenged and vice rewarded. It is a mistake to view this only as a perverse turnabout, a kinky reversal of cultural and literary traditions. Sade sees these two lives as the only options open to women. Sade's roots in the enlightenment are obvious: Justine has "faith" — she cannot live in the real world, but is guided by an abstract, spiritual notion of *virtue*. Juliette is guided by *sense* — she understands economics, who has power, and what she has to do to survive; "She attacks civilization with its own weapons." She represents the horror of rationalism without humanity.

Sade's world is a world of extremes. His novels are moral fables, instructional, but unsettling rather than smug. They read like the sub-text of some Grimm fairy tales, only this time the tyranny of adults over children (think of *Hansel and Gretel* or *Snow White*) is sexualized and placed into the context of heterosexual relationships. It is a world that firmly believes in God, Law, and Order and, as a direct result, in the tyranny of those in power. Grimm's tales are usually reassuring — the children, if not saved, are usually avenged. Sade's tales are warnings of the monsters that men (sic) have made of themselves.

Carter sees Sade's atheism as the fulcrum for his moral outrage. "In the Kingdom of God, man is made in the image of God and therefore a ravenous, cannibalistic, vicious, egocentric tyrant. In this world, which was made by God, sexuality is inhuman . . . a society which still ascribes an illusory metaphysics to matters . . . solely to do with the relations between human beings, the expression of the sexual nature of men and women is not seen as part of human nature."

It is essential for Sade to disprove and not believe in the existence of a god; it is the only way for humans to attain true freedom, be autonomous, whole. The cruelties in Sade do not occur because man in *by nature* base and inhumane, but are the result of a system of spiritual and political hierarchies whose bases presume the worth of some above others. Comparing Sade to another famous misanthrope, Carter notes: "Swift saw mankind rolling in a welter of shit, as Sade does, but Sade's satire upon man is far blacker and more infernal than Swift's — for Sade, mankind doesn't roll in shit because mankind is disgusting, but because mankind has overweening aspirations to the superhuman."

Until all hierarchies (belief in god being at the basis for belief in all the others) are demolished, there will not be freedom for everyone. As long as this condition lasts those who have seized power will terrorize those who don't. The German word *fleish* suggests the sexual dimensions of this subject/object dichotomy: there is a very thin line between *flesh* and *meat*, between who has the power to take and use, and who is being used. Inequality allows a select few to seek their fleshly pleasures by reducing others to and using them as meat. Carter concludes from Sade's fables that "Sexuality, stripped of the idea of free exchange, is not in any way humane; it is nothing but pure cruelty. Carnal knowledge is the infernal knowledge of the flesh as meat." The omnipotence of God produces the omnipotence of man; absolute tyranny produces absolute tyranny — sexual terrorism is the direct result. Sade widens the differences between the sexes and reveals it as an abyss. When faced with the horror of the situation, we realize that our belief in the original system (any hierarchy) has made us complicit — it is too late to quibble about ambiguities. Sade uses the function of the flesh/meat to expose the hypocrisy of a world which has refused to renounce the cruelty of all power.

*The Sadeian Woman* is not a total defense of Sade. Carter does not use him as a role model but exposes his mis-

anthropy, misogyny, and, ultimately, his mistrust and fear of sexuality. Like Pasolini's *Salo*, Sade entices us with sex and then feels that he has to punish us. Unlike other pornography there is little pretense to sexual pleasure here. What Carter has done is to reinterpret Sade in the light of twentieth century feminism, psychology, and politics.

However, this is not a trendy rewrite of Sade to suit Carter's polemical ends. The anti-sexual and repressive aspects of western culture have rendered Sade one of its most maligned and misunderstood authors. With the exception of Simone de Beauvoir's essay *Must We Burn Sade?* and Gilbert Lely's massive biography, there is little of any worth written about him. His pornographic writings have been viewed solely in terms of their sexuality, not their politics or philosophy. (Many who have held him in abhorrence had never read the writings. Most were hard to come by and *The One Hundred Days of Sodom* was not even discovered until 1937). Carter has managed to recreate and reinterpret not only his pornographic writings (he was also a prodigious political writer, pamphleteer, and playwright before and after the revolution) but something of his personal complexity. Popular belief has held that the author of these novels of sexual and violent excesses must have been a monster and fiend in his own life. Yet this was the same man who was once imprisoned for refusing to give the death penalty in a revolutionary court and who was sickened by the thought of the guillotine.

Sade's moral vision and his approach in expressing it is perhaps more twentieth than eighteenth century. Carter points out that Sade's views of women's sexuality are much more advanced than Freud's; perhaps another reason for his notorious reputation. Carter's analysis illuminates both her subject and our culture.

*The Sadeian Woman* is essentially a book of social philosophy. Its knowledge, insight and wit make it quite extraordinary. One wishes that there were more concrete examples from the contemporary world: what does she think of consensual sado/masochistic sexuality; the current trends in some feminists' fights against pornography (she carefully avoids the question of censorship); the differences between intra and inter sexual relationships; and violence.

For all of Sade's insights, Carter admits that he was too mired in his obsessions to see a way clear through what he envisioned. *The Sadeian Woman* is a remarkable book. It has the passion of a political tract without the polemic; it is a work of philosophy that deals with the concrete and the immediate; it is a call to action made with honor and love.

After the lucid philosophy of *The Sadeian Woman*, one might look for concrete examples to support it in Michael Selzer's *Terrorist Chic: An Exploration of Violence in the Seventies*. But after reading it, it is tempting to view it as a work of pathology rather than a cultural analysis. Author Selzer seems to want to mix a Sontag intellect with the hip style of a Tom Wolfe. The result sounds like the rantings of a repressed puritan, attracted and repelled by his subject, or of a demented Rosanne Rosannadanna.

At first glance it looks as though Selzer has attempted a comprehensive cultural overview: sado/masochism, punk rock, *haute couture* para-military fashions, the Dracula fad, Studio 54, and actual political terrorism. It soon becomes apparent that although Selzer has a knack for identifying interesting subjects, he has no understanding of their importance, content, or nuances.

In some cases he has not even bothered to research his subject well. On the gay s/m scene he writes about going to *Badlands*, when *The Mineshaft*, the *Spike*, or the *Eagle* would all be better choices. He talks about gay men cruising on the Morton Street Pier at night: they can't since it's fenced off and locked at sunset. He talks about Arthur Tress being the leading s/m chic photographer in New York. Not true; Robert Mapplethorpe is better known, more fashionable, and consistently chooses more violent subject matter. If there are this many mistakes in a few pages, the other topics he discusses are probably equally misrepresented.

There are times when you are not sure if he is talking seriously or just being cute. His description of a party at *Le Chateau*, a heterosexual s/m club, reads like a parody of bad pornography: "Then Ritchie climbed up the ladder and kissed her while a person who can only be described as a transsexual in drag began felling the lady." The style alone is enough to strike terror in the heart and mind of a thoughtful reader.

A primary problem with the book (though hardly the only one) is that Selzer never bothers to define what he means by "terrorism". It seems to have something to do with violence, and perhaps with decadence, excesses in realms that Selzer already dislikes. His examples are a jumble of things, people and ideas. When faced with the actual political terrorism of organized groups like the SLA or the PLO, he goes completely off the wall. (More of that later.)

It would be foolish to expect Selzer to deal with any of this material psychologically — he can barely report it, never mind interpret it — but he seriously flaws even his presentation of it by refusing to place it in any historical context. The book is divided into two sections — examples and theory. The first gives the impression that preoccupation with violence did not exist before the seventies. The charges he makes can be levelled against any number of centuries or people.

Selzer makes an attempt at historical analysis in the book's second section and here is where the truth comes out. It turns out that all this trouble with "terrorist chic" comes from the sixties and, especially, the hippies. These hippies, he tells us, "were pampered, overindulged, disenchanted kids who sought radical remedies to infuse themselves with excitement and purpose, and who felt rage at the world which was depriving them by offering them so much." The ethos of "love" that they preached was only

hiding the anger they felt — and all that repressed anger is now surfacing. It is unclear if it is actually ex-hippies who are now punk rockers and Bendel window designers (although he does spot an ex-colleague who was a Marxist at CBGB's one night) or if they just set the tone for the change.

This analysis of the sixties is psychologically facile, historically inaccurate, and just plain silly. There is no mention of political activism, the many sided battle waged by the left on the war in Viet Nam, and poverty, no mention of the rise of the black movement and the fight against racism, no mention of women's or gay liberation, no mention of the ban-the-bomb and subsequent anti-nuke movements. One can be sure that if Selzer were writing this book back in the sixties, all of these would get their full due as "terrorism" and destructive anti-social movements.

When faced with a discussion of actual political terrorism, Selzer has a hard line position: "Terrorism is not, however, in any reasonable sense of the term, a political activity. The concepts of rationality and purpose that we apply in political analysis have no place in a discussion of terrorism — terrorism is profoundly purposeless and irrational." Selzer makes up his own definitions as he goes along and soon "political" and "terrorism" become meaningless words. His analysis of terrorism as *non-political* shows an appalling lack of any historical sense, or knowledge of the complex relationship between human feeling and political action.

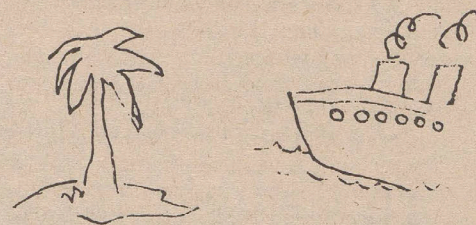
To write off the actions of such diverse groups as the PLO, SLA, IRA, and Baader-Meinhof gang as merely the actions of discontented people (and ex-hippies, most probably) is wrong-headed and myopic. It also shows a complete refusal to deal with political realities, their causes and consequences.

Selzer's stance and attitude is typical of the right: any disruption, and change, is cause for alarm. (The old "homosexuals caused the fall of Rome" line is a variation of this). The dust jacket describes Selzer as a former professor of political science at Brooklyn College. One might imagine that he was fired for incompetence and sheer ignorance. That is not the (whole) case; According to the *Village Voice*, July 2, 1979, after a furor over his alleged connections with the CIA — talk about terrorist groups!

*Terrorist Chic* is not only badly written, non-informative junk, it has a rancid air about it. Beneath its (poorly done) glibness, it is, in its own inept way, terrorism of its own sort: the "decadent" baiting that the right has always perpetrated when it was scared.

If Selzer wants to write about terrorism in the seventies there are plenty of examples: the firebombing of abortion clinics; the Anita Bryant crusade; the organized efforts of the Catholic Church to spread lies and alarm (through the use of pastoral letters read at every mass) to defeat abortion, ERA, and gay rights bills; the increase in rapes and queer baiting; and CIA interference in foreign affairs. But then, after all, one can hardly blame the hippies for all of that.

## at paperback booksmith



- B: That's right, my dove, another GCN Book Supplement deadline.  
 D: And we have nothing prepared again, I suppose.  
 B: You're so clever, Angel.  
 D: Yecch. Let's do something, though.  
 B: We will do something. The question is "what?"  
 D: Can we somehow work into it that Tom's gone and that we miss him?  
 B: Just because Tom's gay and it's a GCN ad?  
 D: I didn't know he was gay. More because he's gone.  
 B: How you love to torment me. And because he set up the Gay/Lesbian section in the first place, I get it, maybe, okay.  
 D: Can we work Russ into it?  
 B: Very doubtful.  
 D: Any fancy graphics this time, Darling?  
 B: Perhaps some of my fabulous pencil-work, just to catch their attention.  
 D: You're so talented, Fred.  
 B: Fred?  
 D: My Freddy.  
 B: Freddy??!!  
 D: Don't forget the address and phone.

516 Commonwealth  
267-7515

**paperback  
booksmith**

Dedicated to the fine art of browsing



## Twenty Reasons to Locate a Pen, an Envelope, a Pair of Scissors and a Postage Stamp

1. Andrew Holleran's ground-breaking *Dancer From the Dance*.
2. The letters of Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham.
3. A preview of Fran Lebowitz's best-selling *Metropolitan Life*.
4. Randy Shilts's exclusive interview with the President's nephew.
5. Interviews with Adrienne Rich, Gore Vidal, and Gloria Steinem.
6. Seymour Kleinberg's provocative essays on the new masculinity of gay men, gays in prison, and the coming of age.
7. Cartoons every month that capture the lighter side of gay life.
8. Michael Denny's widely acclaimed *Anatomy of a Love Affair*.
9. Randy Shilts's fascinating presentation of the life and times of Harvey Milk.
10. Edmund White's absorbing *Travels in Gay America*.
11. Richard Whelan's incisive look at the art world every month.
12. Richard Friedel's *Black Socks and Sandals*, which is establishing him as a premiere American humorist.
13. Sean Lawrence's irreverent look at disco music every month.
14. David Reed's no-holds-barred report on the use of poppers in the gay world.
15. The best new short stories of the burgeoning gay literature.
16. The diaries of Ned Rorem and Allen Ginsberg.
17. Dennis Altman's essays on the politics of gay life.
18. The poetry of Pasolini, Richard Howard, James Merrill, and Timothy Murphy.
19. NEXT MONTH: Crisis and Confrontation in Key West.
20. UPCOMING: The Trouble Ahead for Gay Catholics.

# Christopher Street

Christopher Street, 250 West 57th Street, Suite 417, New York, NY 10019

<input type="checkbox"/> Check/Money Order (Encl.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Master Charge	<input type="checkbox"/> Visa
Do not write in this box		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div>		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Year \$18.00 (Foreign \$21.00) <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Years \$34.00 (Foreign \$40.00) <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Years \$47.00 (Foreign \$56.00)		
<input type="checkbox"/> New Subscription <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Gift		
Please send gift card from _____		
Name _____		
Address _____		
City/State/Zip _____		
Account No. _____ MC Interbank No. _____		
Exp. Date _____ Signature _____		
CS is mailed in an envelope. Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. CC059		