

BOOK REVIEW



Notes on Notes on Notes

HOMOSEXUALITIES AND FRENCH LITERATURE

Edited by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks
Cornell University Press
385 pp., \$18.50

Reviewed by Mike Riegle

There is also a terrorist dimension in writing . . . a communication with the reader in order to take power over him or her. For psychological reasons. One needs that to compensate for something, one needs power. . . . It seeks to establish a power it doesn't admit. I think it's an erotic relationship in the sense of dominant/dominated.

Christiane Rochefort, in "The privilege of consciousness" (in *Homosexualities and French Literature*)

Ten years ago this book would have been titled *Homosexuality and French Literature*. So the editors of *Homosexualities and French Literature* express the spirit of this collection of original essays that explore the question: Is there a "homosexual (aesthetic) sensibility"? Are all those queers really so "creative"?

This question is immediately complicated by one of the main themes of these essays, which is that the category "homosexual" (and especially in its simple-minded opposition to "heterosexual") may be lumping together sexualities that are actually quite different from one another. (Gide, for example, may have had more in common, as far as the relation of sexuality to the rest of his life is concerned, with Balzac than with Gordon Merrick.) Unfortunately, the 20-odd essayists included in this volume examine only "literature" in their exploration of the relations between sexuality and language.

One of the things that these writers agree on is that certain (not-so-old) stereotypes (e.g. 'homosexual'/'heterosexual') no longer capture the diversity of human sexualities. Some concentrate their attention on breaking down the old stereotypes, while others (mainly women) try to construct new viewpoints, often in the form of a new lan-

guage. The writers' backgrounds are diverse (historians, psychoanalysts, authors, critics), though one limitation of the book is that all are intellectuals, mainly interested in the power of words and their interaction with emotion and action. And "serious" words at that: *Literature*. No real attempt is made in this collection to relate 'literary' language to more everyday language in the mass media which relates to sexuality, or to the language in (verbal) "pornography" and "erotica". Ignoring this language implies that there is no interesting relationship between "literary" language and "pornographic" or mass media language. This is surely short-sighted.

And let the reader be warned: taking words as seriously as some of these essayists (and the authors they discuss) do puts one in the position of simply substituting a new set of stereotypes for the old.

In spite of this, *Homosexualities and French Literature* is fascinating. The problem of a special gay/lesbian "sensibility" (style? content? logic?) is a many-headed beast. If this sensibility can be said to exist, how does it develop? To what extent is it built into our physiological plumbing and to what extent a cultural product of the particular historical conditions in which the writers (and readers!) live? (These writers, unfortunately implicitly more than explicitly, make an interesting case for modern France as a culture with an unusually rich homosexual — mostly male, but not exclusively — literature. But they never really ask, "Why France so much more than America or England or Italy?") And does this "sensibility" apply only to writing or to artistic work of all sorts? Has the recent activity of feminists and gay activists influenced how people write (and read)? What are the effects of the dominant sexual ideology/imagery on writers?

While it's unfortunate that none of these questions are dealt with at any length, at least most of the essayists don't pretend to have the last word on all the ins and outs of sexuality, nor to understand sexuality's relations with thought and language. So what follows are mostly just notes (mine) on notes made by the essayists, mostly on the "notes" (poems, novels, etc.) of French authors who have written about sexualities, in general, and homosexualities, in particular. (The emphasis in my notes will be more on what

they have to say about sexuality than what they say about French literature.)

What follows falls more or less naturally under three basic questions. What is *sexuality* all about (anyway)? How does it relate to our other (nonsexual?) *behavior*, in particular writing? And what have the sexual *politics* of writing been? (Shades of Michel Foucault's attempt to demonstrate the important interconnections between sex and language/knowledge and power in *History of Sexuality*. See GCN Book Review, Vol. 6, No. 33.)

Sexualities/Homosexualities

First then, sexuality. Is it really all its made out to be? Is it the *core* of our "humanity"? This depends, of course, on what you count as "sexual". Felix Guattari, in one of the best essays in this collection, "A Liberation of Desire", is provocative regarding the alleged importance of 'sexuality' (as narrowly defined) for "liberation":

All forms of sexual activity are minority forms and are not reducible to homosexual-heterosexual oppositions. The problem isn't sexual liberation but a liberation of desire. Once desire is made specific as sexuality it enters into forms of particularized power, into hierarchies of styles and sexual classes. The sexual liberation, for example, of homosexuals or of sado-masochists, belongs to a whole series of liberation problems among which there is obviously some solidarity and need to cooperate. But that's not a liberation of desire as such, since in each of these groups and movements you find a number of repressive elements.

And in another piece, on "Cocteau's Sexual Equation", Rene Galand notes that "Freud considered the sexual drive to be the inner fatality by which his patients were governed. This, according to Cocteau, was his mistake. He failed to see that sexuality is only a tool of a higher power which it masks." (Or reveals?) "If Freudian psychology," says Galand, "cannot account for the stripes of a bee or of a tiger, it can hardly claim to plumb the mysteries of human behavior."

In Paul Schmidt's "Visions of Violence: Rimbaud and Verlaine", we find their (homosexual) relationship to be one of a number of "disorderings of the senses" by which they wanted to free themselves of everyday conventional (rigid, habitual, etc.) perceptions. Homosexuality is a radical "disordering" for all of us, in fact, because it makes us

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NON-FICTION

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HEAVENLY BREAKFAST.

By Samuel Delany

HOMOSEXUALITIES AND FRENCH LITERATURE

Edited by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks.

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TALES OF NEVERYON

By Samuel Delany

WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD

By Suzy McKee Charnas

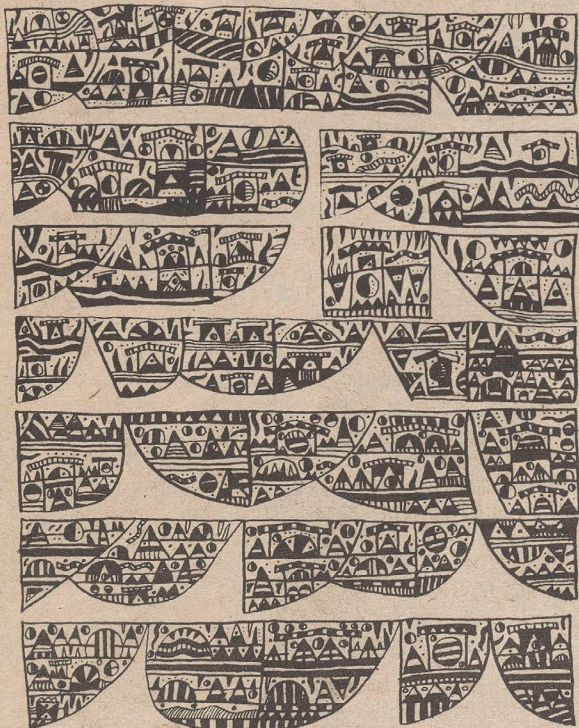
POETRY

A LOVER'S COCK AND OTHER GAY POEMS

By Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine

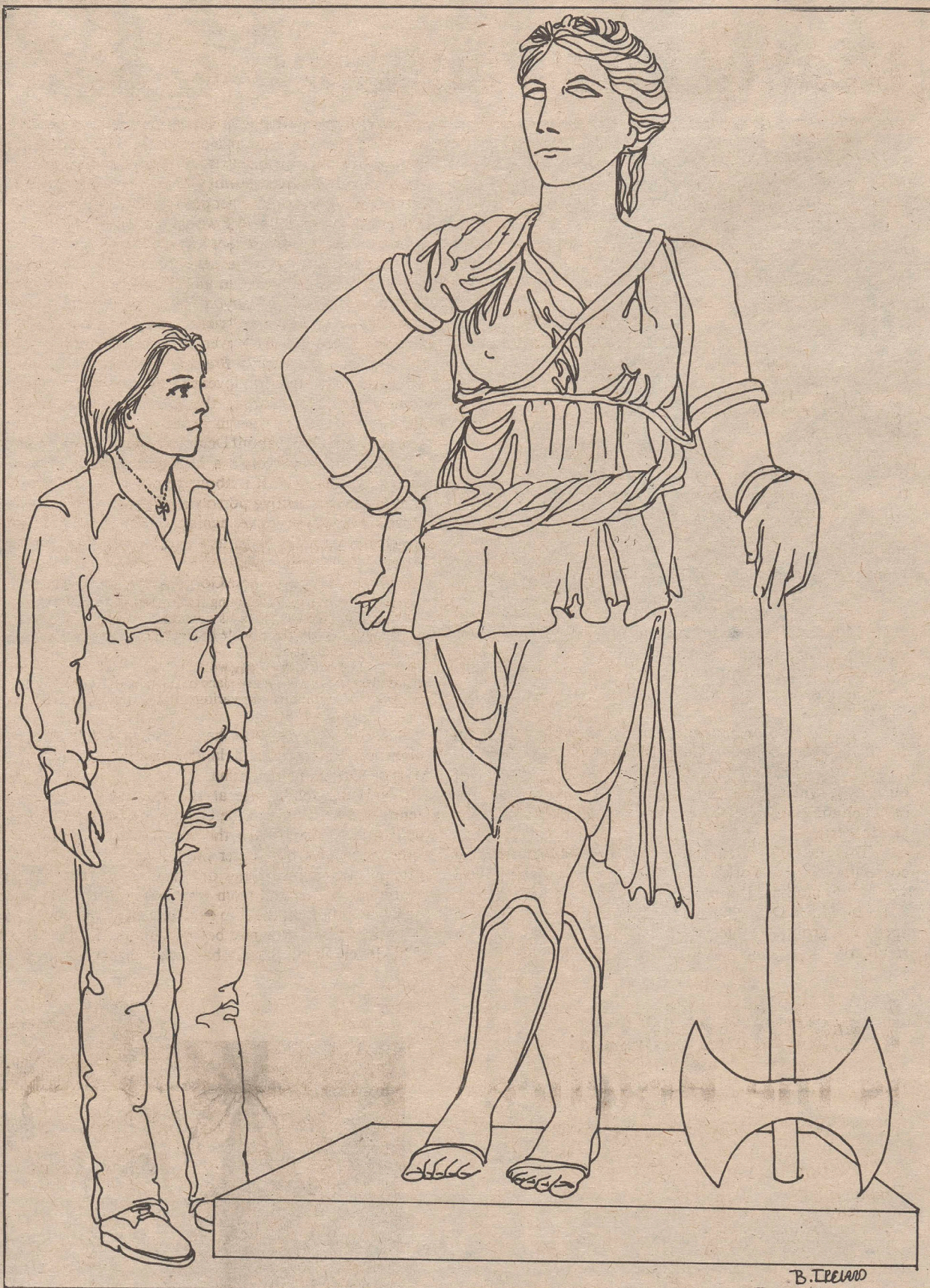
TAKE ME LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH

By Chocolate Waters



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Dictionary Definitions

THE LESBIAN PEOPLES: MATERIAL FOR A DICTIONARY

By Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig
Avon Books
170 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by Paula Bennett

A dictionary, according to my dictionary (*The Shorter O.E.D.*), is a "book dealing with words of a language, so as to set forth their orthography, pronunciation, signification, and use; their synonyms, derivation, and history or at least some of these."

In fact, however, a dictionary is not a book at all. It is a map, a map to any given culture, described through the language, the words, that culture employs.

Words are signs. As signs, they encode reality. They do not substitute for reality; words are not things. They merely articulate aspects of it, flag them, as it were. Reality, if you think about it, is nothing more than an amorphous, unintelligible mass of sensations and perceptions. In itself it is meaningless. But because we have language, we are able to pick out from this unintelligible mass the ideas, perceptions, entities, "things," we wish to recognize and deal with. We give them names and, by naming, make them part of our culture and our lives.

Thus, for instance, in one of the linguists' favorite examples, Eskimos have many more words for snow than we do. For the Eskimos, discriminations between various kinds or conditions of snow: snow falling, snow on the ground, snow iced over, etc., are a vital part of reality, even a matter of life and death. They know snow, therefore, in ways we do not. Their language reflects their knowledge. Their knowledge is their reality; their reality, their culture. A dictionary devoted to Eskimo language would merely map this reality out. What would be excluded from such a dictionary (words, say, for water-skiing or sunstroke) would be as important as what was included. A culture is the sum total of what we choose to recognize and what we select (deliberately or in ignorance) to ignore. To under-

stand any given culture, we must take both its omissions and its commissions into account.

Monique Wittig, author to date of three linguistically experimental novels of extraordinary brilliance, cannot be faulted on her understanding of what a dictionary really is. Her latest work, *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*, co-authored with her companion lover, Sande Zeig, makes no attempt at being a dictionary-definition lexicon, or at being "complete." Like the culture it describes, "The dictionary is . . . only a rough draft." "The arrangement [that is, the authors' selection of words] could be called lacunary."

"Lacunary," what an apt word! As Wittig-Zeig note again and again, the culture of lesbian peoples from the amazons to our own day is riddled with gaps, or lacunae, and with distortions. It is the history of strange eruptions and frustrating dead-ends. The authors' task, as they conceive it, is to fill in the gaps, rectify the distortions and ease the pain we feel at so much loss. Their hope is to clarify (and, I believe, to celebrate) our history from the Iron Age to the Glorious Age, by which they mean, now, and to give us a map or plan for the future to come. What they put into the dictionary and what they leave out is, therefore, equally important, "acting on reality," as they remark, in equally significant ways.

All of which may sound very heavy, but in the hands of Wittig-Zeig, it is not. *Lesbian Peoples* is a surprisingly delightful, frequently outrageous, and often very witty book. It recalls for us ancient companion lovers (Demeter and Persephone, Circe and Medea, Christina and Ebba Sparre, Joan of Arc and Haiviette) and ancient amazon tribes (the Carians, the Danaides, the Thermodontines). It describes our pets (bed animals and others), our countries, our customs, our bodies, our selves. It contains myths, fables, stories, poems, jokes, puns, prophecies, some excellent translations of Sappho, and bits of history and pseudo-history from here and there. (The co-authors' debt to Helen Diner's *Mothers and Amazons* is strikingly apparent everywhere.)

Where no good words exist for the things that matter

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Reality into Fantasy

HEAVENLY BREAKFAST

By Samuel Delany
Bantam Books, New York
127 pp., \$1.95

TALES OF NEVERYON

By Samuel Delany
Bantam Books, New York
264 pp., \$2.25

Reviewed by Dan Daniel

Delany's newest literary offerings give the reader two very different matters for consideration. *Heavenly Breakfast* is an autobiographical work. *Tales of Neveryon* represents a significant break from Delany's other science fiction works in that its substance has a primitive, almost historic quality as opposed to the otherworldly, "futuristic" visions presented in previous works.

Heavenly Breakfast is an essay which bares some of the roots of Delany's fiction. It consists of recollections, musings, and snatches of journals in which the author reflects on his life in the winter and spring of 1967-68. Appropriately enough, it opens with a quotation from Heidegger's *Being and Time*: "We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed." The author dedicates the book "... to anyone who ever/ did anything/ no matter how sane or crazy/ whether it worked or not/ to give themselves/ a better life."

The concept of humanity analyzed with an eye to creating a better collective life is Delany's passion. *Heavenly Breakfast* is his attempt at isolating a small segment of humanity, which includes himself, and examining the way in which the people involved relate to each other and to the larger world.

The *Heavenly Breakfast* is the (fictional) name of a commune in New York's East Village where Delany lived for several months. It is also the (fictional) name of a rock band in which Delany played. The band's need for time spent as a group was the genesis of the commune. It is as a result of this living situation that Delany feels "the

standard bohemian/liberal education teaches you quickly not to take offense at someone else's desire. If it pleases you, you move toward it; if not, you sidestep politely as your individual temperament allows. . . . I learned to move within the circle of other people's desire, and be at ease as I generated my own. And I would strike one of my senses before I would part with that knowledge."

Homosexuality, dual sexuality, and androgyny are strong, positive elements in all of Delany's fiction, and no less so in *Tales of Neveryon*. *Heavenly Breakfast* reveals some of the author's experiences which readers of his fiction will recognize. However, *Tales of Neveryon* remains elusive, for in *Heavenly Breakfast* we see no experiences which relate to any of the events depicted in *Tales*. Only the homosexuality of Gorgik, the great bear of a man who plays one of the key roles in *Tales*, remains consonant with what one may learn about Delany from the essay.

Tales of Neveryon is a high-consciousness social critique and fairy tale. It is about power and those who hold it. It is also a sensitive portrayal of those who are without power. The action moves against a background as stark as hopelessness and as lavish as a fine brocade; yet, even in its extremes, all is primitive.

In Kolhari port where Gorgik grew, he learned.

Adolescence spent roaming its boisterous backstreets, its bustling avenues, with its constant parade of strangers, taught Gorgik the double lesson that is, finally, all civilization can know:

The breadth of the world is vast and wide, nevertheless movement from place to place in it is possible; the ways of humanity are various and complex, but nevertheless negotiable.

In Kolhari port, after having been made a slave in the mines of Neveryon and later rescued by the Vizerine, Myrgot, Gorgik met Norema.

Norema, made wise at the knee of the old woman Venn, fled her home in the Ulvayn islands after seeing the men of her village burn the strange red ship which had come to their harbor. Later she learned that the ship had a crew of women, carrying one man as a talisman, as is customary in the land from which they came. The men of the Ulvayn thought the ship evil, and therefore destroyed it.

Many years transpire before Gorgik, in the company of his lover, Small Sarg, a barbarian prince whom Gorgik

rescued out of slavery, finds himself aboard a ship with Norema, bound for the south and the ominous Vygernangx Monastery. On board, all three come into contact with Raven, the masked woman warrior from the mysterious Western Crevasse, where women are noted as superior warriors, workers, and weavers of tales. Raven is implored to tell a story on the ship, to pass some of the long hours at sea, and she tells the story of the Creation.

God, in her diversity of interests, had placed on earth the first two creatures in her own likeness, and these were Eif'h and Jevim, who were instructed by god to praise "the difference and diversity of god by which the act [of creation] is manifest." Eif'h went overboard in her praise and god saw fit to punish her for her impiety, beating her "across the loins; and across the breasts; and across the face" with the trunks of two trees which god had pulled from the ground.

Then god said to Eif'h: "Eif'h, I have beaten you until you are no longer a woman. For you can no longer bear, nor any longer suckle. You have praised neither me nor the act well." Eif'h, her spirit and her body broken, "bowed her hairy face and covered her poor, rosey genitals, and was called no longer woman, but 'man, which means broken woman. And she was called no longer she, but 'he, as a mark of her pretention, ignorance, and shame."

Delany's portrayals of people he perceives as oppressed — gay people, women, poor people — are strong and positive. He is empathetic with the plight of these people, and his empathy shines in the way in which he draws his characters. More often than not, they are portrayed as victims of rampant ignorance and scrambling for power by those who would keep others down in the muck of life.

Samuel Delany is a powerful writer, a student of words and of philosophy, a master of his craft. In his foray into fantasy, he surpasses others whose skill in the genre has been long acknowledged. There are times when the action is slow, sometimes even plodding, but it reflects, in a fashion, the pace of life itself, which is never constant. Although *Tales of Neveryon* is fantasy, it consists of finely drawn, credible and creditable parallels between the worlds it depicts and our own.

Lesbianism is the Practice

TAKE ME LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH

By Chocolate Waters
Eggplant Press
P.O. Box 18641
Denver, CO 80218
48 pp., \$4.00

Reviewed by Pat M. Kuras

Chocolate Waters tries to cover a lot of bases with her second book of poetry, *Take Me Like A Photograph*; most of the time, she is successful. A very prolific poet, her work has appeared in many small press magazines. One of the first examples of her work that I found was the poem:

THIS IS IMPORTANT REALLY

A poem should never be longer than two lines.
That was the first and this is the second.

Waters takes delight in this pull-the-rug-out-from-under-them type of humor; it crops up in many of her shorter poems. A friend of mine, upon glancing through this book, commented that Waters says things that no one else has said before. I wouldn't completely agree with that statement; rather, Waters has a unique style. She takes brave stands with autobiography, particularly in a piece on Elvis Presley:

. . . In the fifth grade I slicked back my hair
practiced Presley's grin

lifting up my upper lip/thinking to myself that I was him.

Further on, she identifies the actual source of her admiration/envy:

. . . I think it was

all those lovely women/always at his fingertips. . . .

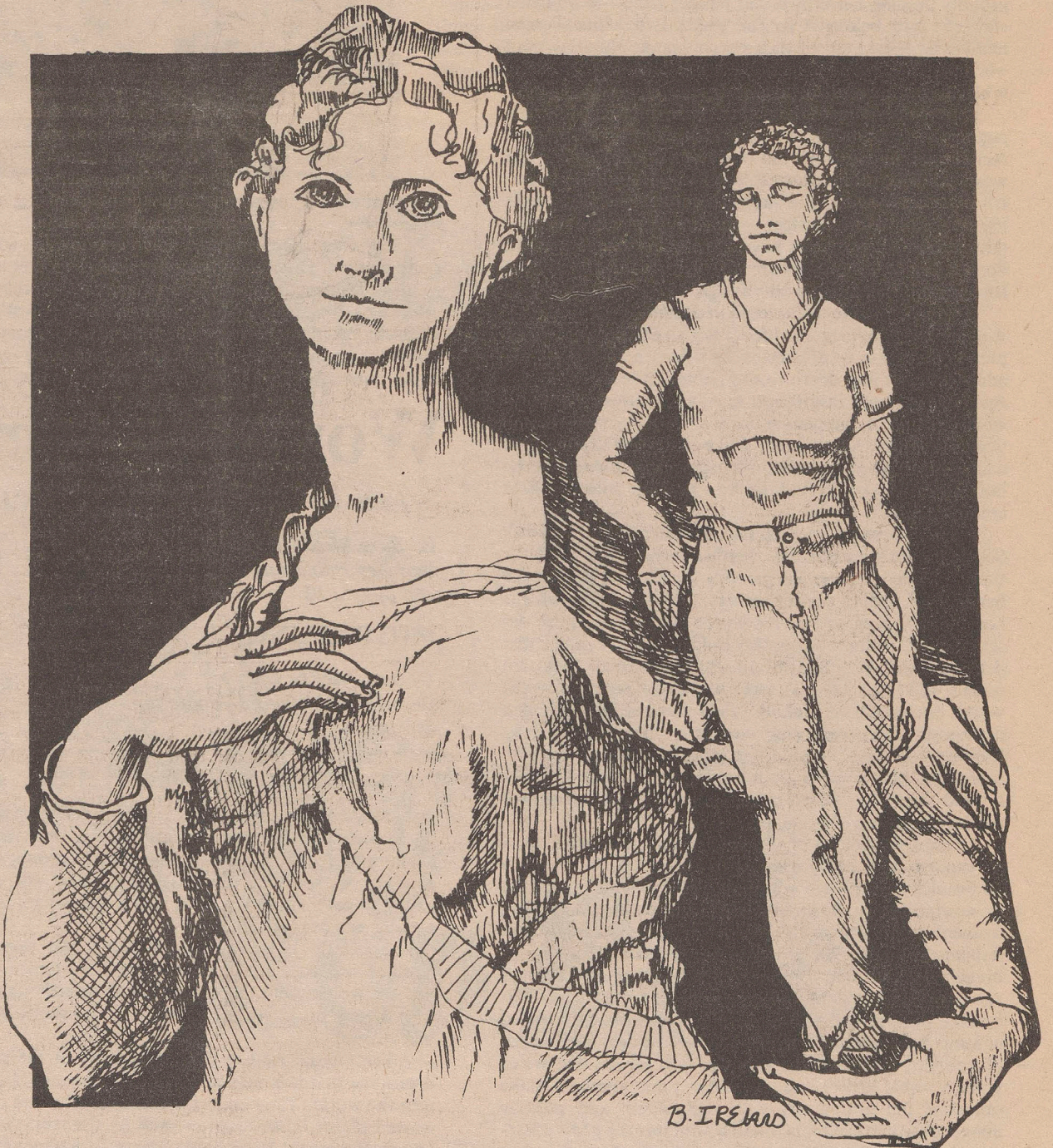
Which explains why Waters wanted to be Presley. No doubt, this admission of Waters will have an infuriating effect on some lesbians. But it is essential that we note what Waters is telling us with her rare and vulnerable move: some lesbians (dykes, if you will) are, or have been, very caught up in the fantasy of mimicking (straight) male superstars. They couldn't care less about feminism or politically-correct ideals. They long for scores of women (groupies? harems?) to find them attractive. Like Presley. Travolta. Redford.

Another of Water's unique factors is her willingness to write hot poems. I have often thought that gay men put too much emphasis on sex while lesbians didn't put enough. Waters does her best to remedy this situation. Read the very spunky, straightforward poem, "Now That's Love":

I think I could
pick out your crotch
in a crowd
(dressed)

Other hot poems, like "She", are more idyllic and gently flowing:

. . . She comes to me at night
Her tongue glistening
Her body tuned
Like a fine violin. . . .



Most of Water's hot poems are a relief from those poets who would rather wax political rhetoric in their poems. However, the poem, "I Wanna," is a disappointing one. It sounds like a swarm of insults flying from street corner boys.

Waters includes a couple of rape poems that are nightmarish in their intensity, showing how easily women can become powerless. Elsewhere, her two prose pieces aren't as polished as her poems. "A Lesbian Fable" is redundant and quickly loses its comic punch. "Leaving" is

bitter, self-pitying and violent — the actions and emotions in this piece happen too quickly; it may have worked better as a short story rather than in its vignette form.

Waters is a unique autobiographical poet. Her main strength lies in detailing the lives of good ol' backwoods dykes, unhampered by feminist or separatist theories. (Living their lives as dykes, they are nevertheless revolutionary women.) With Chocolate Water's help, they won't be a dying breed.

Lesbian Family Album

EYE TO EYE: PORTRAITS OF LESBIANS

By JEB
Glad Hag Books
P.O. Box 2934
Washington, DC 20013
\$8.95

Reviewed by Tia Cross

"Lesbian reality is not visible in the mass media. We cannot find positive images of ourselves in most magazines, on television or on the movie screen. Lesbians have battled false and heterosexual images with personal snapshots, giving photograph albums a place of honor in our homes. . . ."

—Judith Schwarz

JEB (Joan E. Biren) a feminist photographer from Washington, D.C., has created a family album for all of us, and the quality of her photographs gives us all a place of honor in "the world." We will be seen and heard. JEB's book, *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians*, the first collection of its kind, is a very fine album.

Most photography books have black, white or grey covers. *Eye to Eye* is bright scarlet, with a dramatic photograph of two older lesbians looking deeply into each other's eyes—touching, close, intense. JEB makes a direct statement here. It cannot be misread or overlooked. These women are real. These women are lesbians. Lesbians are portrayed in the book working, playing, celebrating and having hard times, just like heterosexual people. But our lives are difficult and more complex. We deal with not only sexism, classism and racism, but heterosexism: the oppression of us all as woman-loving women.

JEB has captured moments of our lives and various aspects of our unique reality as lesbians in some forty of her black and white photographs, taken during the last eight years. The images illustrate the incredible diversity of our lives: three Native American women sitting together after completing The Longest Walk, an elderly black woman proudly holding her crown and banner from the women's club she had belonged to for years, two white women hauling an engine out of their car, a woman shooting pool whom you know has red hair even though the photograph is black and white.

The images are laid out, usually one photograph on a page, accompanied by an appropriate quote set on the facing page. Sometimes the quote is a statement by the woman pictured, sometimes it is taken from a favorite text. It's unclear who chose the quotations, JEB or the women in the pictures. It's also unclear—and I found it disturbing—that several of the images have no companion writing. We don't know why the pages are blank—surely each woman has something to say or a quote to go with her image.

JEB does, however, succeed in combining printed texts with most of the images (which is not so easy to do!) which present us with more dimensions of these women's lives and add a richness and depth to the photographs. And *Eye to Eye* gives us both inspiration and information. When we wonder what is happening in a picture—who is this woman? What is she doing? I'd like to talk with her. . . . we can turn to the section called "Notes on the Quotes" at the back of the book and find out how to make some of these connections.

Joan Nestle's perceptive foreword and Judith Schwarz's introduction add further insight and food for thought. The introduction presents a brief overview of the herstory of lesbian photographers. Since so much of our herstory has been lost or hidden or destroyed, Judith describes some of the women who had the courage, pluck and determination to step out of the prescribed Victorian female role, not only as lesbians but as women of the world: documenting, "taking" their views of the world and presenting them, recording women's work and lives by learning the very complicated chemistries necessary to reproduce reality into a picture using light, and by carting around the 50 to 100 pounds of photographic equipment needed to create a photograph.

Today we women photographers have a better time of it: cameras and equipment are cheaper and more easily accessible; we can wear whatever clothes (pants especially) we need to wear to be mobile on the job; we have a growing women's movement to support, nurture and inspire us. But lesbians especially have an enormous task before us of breaking down and exposing the violence perpetuated against us as gays and as women. In the media, on billboards, in advertising. We live in a very visually oriented culture. And everywhere we look we see women humiliated, objectified, exploited and violated. It is crucial that we as women visual artists and as lesbian photographers make ourselves felt graphically with real, direct and positive images of women to replace and counteract the gross misrepresentations pushed by money-hungry and violently sexist people. JEB's book of portraits of lesbians is an important contribution to this fight. By supporting the work of feminist and lesbian artists we can join them in taking a stand.

I showed *Eye to Eye* to a friend of mine, a straight woman photographer. For her, the portraits expressed "emotions that are clear enough that I can see what I have never seen before." She felt that she learned a great deal about the experiences of lesbian women that she had been unaware of before, and she particularly appreciated the



information and resources found at the beginning and end of the book.

The photographs are varied: some are fun, some are quite moving. Out of all the millions of moments in thousands of lesbians' lives, JEB has done a remarkable job of selecting strong and poignant images, which evoke many kinds of reactions. As JEB says at the beginning of the book, the photographer sees with a selective eye as we try to make some sense of the chaos of life around us and

communicate that sense to others. One problem with *Eye to Eye*: the overall structure of the layout isn't clear and one tends to wander through it. We don't know why JEB sequenced the pictures the way she did. Perhaps if she had organized the book so that we moved from private expression to public scenes, or from individual portraits to group portraits, we could move through the book with an even deeper understanding. A book's structure conveys

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World of Men, World of Women

WALK TO THE END OF THE WORLD

By Suzy McKee Charnas
Berkeley Publishing Corporation
246 pp., \$1.95

MOTHERLINES

By Suzy McKee Charnas
Berkeley Publishing Corporation
246 pp., \$1.95

Reviewed by Melissa S. Green

In *Walk to the End of the World* and *Motherlines*, Suzy McKee Charnas follows in the footsteps of other authors, again proving to us science fiction's amazing capacity for speaking out on current social and political issues. What's more, she does it in a way which is neither preachy nor dogmatic.

A nuclear holocaust, the Wasting, has ravaged the world. Only some are saved—a few government officials and the women that they, rather as an afterthought, bring with them into the shelters they had built against the possibility of war.

Years pass. At last the descendants of the survivors determine that it is safe to leave the Refuges and go again into the world. They build the Holdfast, the one city on a wasted planet inhabited now only by the men themselves and their women, a few hardy plants, and mutant humans and beasts, which the men destroy as they find them.

The men recall the carnage of the Wasting, and they feel guilty. In the characteristic fashion of the perpetrators of a crime, they take the guilt from themselves and place blame on their victims. The Beasts, who killed men and ate their food. The Dirties, whose colored skins distinguished them from "real men," who are white. The Freaks, whose soft-mindedness weakened the world and ultimately destroyed it. The youths, who rebelled against their fathers. And most of all the women, the "fems," who greedily and

deviously worked to undermine the power of the Ancients with witchery. Of these "unmen," only the fems and youths remain, necessary evils. But the men do all in their power to lessen these evils.

Out of their distorted hatreds the men build a new culture in the Holdfast. They segregate themselves from the fems, whom they use only for slaves and for breeding machines. They segregate adult men from boys, until each boy has matured properly. They build up a new set of taboos. It is a perversion for a man to have sexual intercourse with a fem outside the duty of the Breeding Rooms. It is a perversion for a man to cross the age-lines in a love relationship with another man (or boy). It is even a perversion for a man to know his son's name, or a son his father's.

In all the Holdfast, no blood-ties were recognized. All men were brothers—that was the Law of Generations—though some were older brothers and some younger. Thus, men avoided the fated enmity of fathers and sons, who once known to each other must cross each other even to the point of mutual destruction. The sons of the Ancients had risen against their fathers and brought down the world; even God's own Son, in the old story, had earned punishment from his Father. Old and young were natural enemies; everyone knew that. To know your father's identity would be to feel, however far off, the chill wind of death.

In this strange culture we find Alldera, a fem who has heard the myths of the free fems, fems who have escaped from the Holdfast to live away from the brutal mastery of men. Alldera travels throughout the Holdfast with three men, Captain Kelmz, d Layo the DarkDreamer, and Eykar Bek, in a strange quest: to find the man who has broken taboo by learning the name of his son, Bek. But Alldera, unknown to the men, has her own motive for traveling with them—to escape and join the free fems, to enlist their aid in liberating the rest of her people. *Walk to the End of the World* culminates in her successful escape from her male traveling companions.

Alldera's story continues in *Motherlines*, where she and an unborn child are saved from starvation by the Motherline Tribes, nomadic women on horseback who,

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Uncontrolled Fantasy

THE SECRET WITCH AND THEY MET THE WHO-EVER-IT-WAS

By Linda Johnson Stem

Illustrations by Valerie Pinkerton Thio

Metis Press

815 Wrightwood

Chicago, IL 60614

Reviewed by Carrie Dearborn

Mean kids are a fact of life for small children. Bullies tease, punch stomachs, squirt water all over new clothes, and generally make for miserable moments in a child's life. In *The Secret Witch*, Jess is bullied by a boy named Chuck, and one day she tells him that if she were a witch she would turn him into a toad.

As it happens, her friend the oak tree hears the wish and magically turns Jess into a witch, with expected results. Jess's wishes turn bad, and she must repair the messes. This could be an amusing story, but unfortunately, *The Secret Witch* wobbles uneasily between fantasy and non-sexist literature, never quite becoming either.

I am totally in favor of fantasy in children's books. Witches, ghosts, and things that hide under the bed are very real for many children, and I think the controlled fantasy found in books by Lewis Carroll, C. S. Lewis, or in fairy tales is one way for children to test the world they inhabit. But implicit in these books is some separation between fantasy and wishes and the "real" world. People cannot fly, turn themselves invisible, or make inanimate objects move at will (at least not the people I know).

In *The Secret Witch*, Jess has some fun with her powers, and she does learn from her mistakes. This is all very nice, but she does not un-become a witch at the end of the book; thus the story slips out of the realm of fantasy and bumps its way into some as yet undefined category. Which is not so bad, I suppose, but this is a book from a press that defines itself as feminist. I always thought that onepurpose of feminist literature is to present alternatives to people caught in a patriarchal society. If this is one woman's alternative to the problem of mean boys (who, I imagine, are simply younger versions of leering men on the street, faggot baiters, and bosses who are unable to differentiate between the office and their bedroom), then it is not a book I would read to my child.



Tacked on to this book is a shorter story written by the author when she was twelve, called *They Met The Who-Ever-It-Was*. Apart from the fact that it is typical of a child's story telling style — breathless, confusing, with a rushed ending — it also falls far short of being feminist. Once again, a young protagonist in conflict starts to use her own powers (wit-power this time, not witch) but luck, in the form of a policeman, steps in and saves her. Granted, the author was only twelve years old, but in later editing the police officers could at least have been changed to females.

Writing stories for children is hard enough — the stories have to be short because of limited attention spans yet dramatic enough to justify children's listening to them — but writing non-sexist children's books requires that the author redefine society for her or himself and then offer different solutions to the conflicts she or he writes about.

In Praise of Young Men

A LOVER'S COCK and Other Gay Poems

By Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine

Translated by J. Murat and W. Gunn

Gay Sunshine Press

P.O. Box 40397

San Francisco, CA

63 pp., \$3.95

Reviewed by Rudy Kikel

Plastered across the cover of this book of poems by Rimbaud and Verlaine — a good four or five inches in height and three in width (I took a ruler to them) — is an uncircumcized, flaccid cock and balls — in a sketch, by Nuki, which is as sure to raise eyebrows in Peoria as it has raised them here in Boston among those who have seen copies of *A Lover's Cock and Other Gay Poems*. A first query: Is such "flaunting" necessary? A second thought: As an introductory illustration, how appropriate to poems almost all of which are about not gay love so much as the validity of gay male existence itself, an existence in honor of which the naked cock, in this volume "a smaller heart/With its point in the air," is allowed gallantly to stand as a "Symbol proud and fair"!

Feisty, ambitious, a poetic genius (as the city was quick to recognize), and freshly arrived in Paris in 1871 at the age of 17, Rimbaud proceeded to precipitate the collapse of Verlaine's marital menage, and with it his social position. Treated as pariahs in 19th-century society, the two of them, as the introduction to this little book tells us, "defiantly lived together . . . for twenty-two months in Paris, Brussels, and London" before their separation. Their story, replete with gunshot wound, Verlaine's prison term, and Rimbaud's eventual voluntary exile in Africa, became a "central legend in the turbulent emergence of gay liberation in the nineteenth century." If Oscar Wilde succeeded in delighting and titillating the London public he also teased, Rimbaud and Verlaine had equally subversive but more directly aggressive literary intentions. A central one during the time of their union and, for Verlaine, long after (Rimbaud stopped writing altogether at the age of 21) was "epater la bourgeoisie": to knock, to stun, thoroughly to shock the conventionally minded. Joined in their opposition to a society which made them outcasts, their strategy seems to have been to turn society's arguments against it —

Continued on Page 6

Parents of Gays

MY SON ERIC

By Mary V. Borhek

Pilgrim Press

180 pp., \$8.95

Reviewed by Andy Beck

The inspirational biography has long been a popular form with contemporary fundamental Christians. Dale Evans, Catherine Marshall, David Wilkerson, even Anita Bryant, have all recounted how emotional and physical hardships were overcome through the development of personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

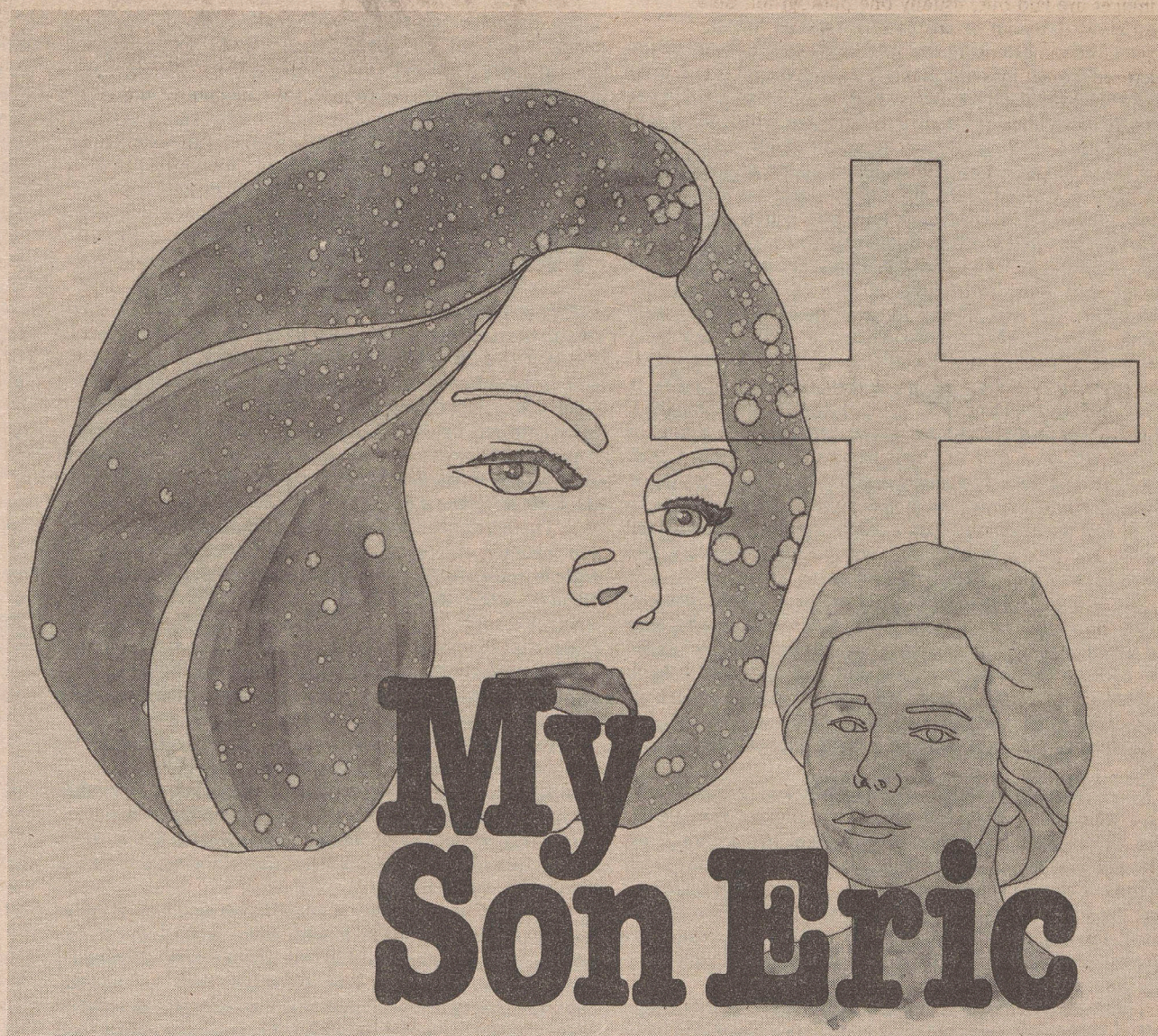
Mary V. Borhek's *My Son Eric* adheres to many of the conventions of the genre: plentiful Biblical quotations, simple-minded religiosity and, of course, the personal crisis that brings the author closer to God. But Borhek departs from the others, for what she must confront is her own son's homosexuality.

Borhek's son's revelation forces her into a confrontation between her strong spiritual beliefs and equally strong (if not down-right forceful) maternal instincts. Her unwillingness to write her son off as "sinful" and "damned" as her religion would demand leads her to reexamine the tenets of her brand of Christianity. What she ultimately does is prove it possible to be homosexual, to accept homosexuality and, in some cases, practice homosexuality, while at the same time not losing the love and acceptance of God.

That's quite a journey for this mother of three, divorced from her minister-husband several years before her story begins. She was, at the start, a steady member of Minneapolis' fundamental Community of the Resurrection, who accepted the literalness of the Bible and considered homosexuality an "abomination."

As she struggles to accept her son and his lover, as she devours nearly every book on the subject of homosexuality, she must seriously reevaluate her thinking. "If," she says, "The Bible is, as I believed, 'without error in all that it affirms,' and if homosexuality is the result of forces over which a person has little or no control, the gay person lives in an impossible bind. God, it would seem, had left the gay and the lesbian in a limbo from which there is no exit."

Through a positive relationship with a marvelous female Christian therapist, Borhek begins to sort out her own problems and prejudices. Through contact with gay people practicing their Christianity and worshipping a God they feel accepts them, she redefines her notion of God and develops what she believes is an even firmer belief. "Who knows?" she asks. "Perhaps God is confronting the church with the present crisis over homosexuality not in order to demolish the church but because God is saying 'Grow or die.'"



The book, however, is clearly aimed at Christian readers — with the hope that they will change their thinking. Knowing the stubbornness and adamancy of born-again Christians, they're more likely to write Borhek off as "fallen," and accuse her of succumbing to the arguments of Satan. One problem is her theology. She parts with those Christians who believe in the literal infallibility of the Bible, in order to reinterpret such classic condemnations as Leviticus, Paul, and the Sodom and Gomorrah story. Fundamental Christians will find it hard to accept such a move, while serious theologians will bemoan the lack of scholarship to back up her reinterpretations.

She does discover some positive religious writers who bolster her changing religious views, notably Troy Perry, Norman Pittenger, and Clinton Jones, all ordained ministers. In fact, Perry's 1972 piece, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, helps her form the basis of her new outlook.

Unfortunately she also encounters some questionable theology and psychology surrounding homosexuality — and although she eventually rejects these opinions, there's a real danger that a susceptible or inattentive Christian reader might accept some of these views.

Continued on Page 6

Polyester Lesbians

THE BRA-STRAP BAR AND GRILLE

By Donna Camille
Can be ordered from Donna Camille
P.O. Box 12171
El Cajon, CA 92022
212 pp., \$6.00

Reviewed by Maida Tilchen

The bar scene has been a recurrent device in gay male and lesbian novels. In gay male novels, the bar has often been portrayed as a decadent microcosm of gay life, and its habitués are there for casual sexual encounters, hustling, and violence. In recent lesbian feminist novels, the once ubiquitous bar scenes have been replaced by that more politically correct hang-out, the women's restaurant or coffeehouse. However, despite these literary attempts at condemnation and extinction, gay bars continue to flourish around the country and the world. In this unusual first novel, Donna Camille takes a new look inside a gay/lesbian bar, and she finds, not decadence or political incorrectness, but friendship, support, and fun for both women and men. Her book is a collection of vignettes about a segment of the gay/lesbian community which is highly recognizable but lacks a label. Reading her book, I knew exactly the type of gay folks she was describing, although I can't recall much discussion of them in either fiction or non-fiction. They are working class gay men and lesbians who are neither radical nor decadent. At our local gay bar in Bloomington, Indiana, they hang around the pool table and drink beer after a shift at the RCA plant or the stone quarries. The men drive pick-up trucks and wear baseball caps to cover their bald spots. The women drive pick-up trucks and seem more at ease in double-knits than dyke chic. They smoke dope, get rowdy at drag shows, and are admirably resourceful at providing support for gay liberation activities. Reading Donna Camille's book may give you a good introduction to a fine bunch of people for whom the gay bar is not debauched, but neighborly, and who prove that lesbians and gay men can be friends.

Life at the Bra-Strap Bar and Grill is the center of the book. Most of the characters are introduced by a brief glimpse of them in the bar, which is followed by a more detailed character sketch or anecdote that builds them into real, unique, and significant members of the community. The book has a nice tone of questioning but also tolerating the various trips gay folk get into. It describes a gay man: "His real name is Larry but he's very butch and almost chauvinistic when it comes to effeminate men. Just to tease him, because he's so adamant about his masculinity, we always call him La-La and he always responds good-naturedly." (p. 41). There's a memorable Christmas story about a boy for whom Santa left lots of "shiny black locomotives, bright red fire engines, guns and holsters, etc.," but never any "books, paints, dishes, or dolls." (p. 43). A lively lesbian wedding held at a nude beach is described, plus the reception: "As an added attraction, a group of fairies, led by a pair of twins impersonating Julia Child, prepared and dished up gastronomic delights." (p. 61). A pleasant day with one's lover is described: "All as well with Carla and me again and that made everything right with the world. We stayed in bed the whole day watching TV and figuring out what we wanted to eat next." (p. 68).

The author makes some clever statements about relationships. "I wasn't about to go back with Carla just because I'd invested five years and now I was going to be penalized for early withdrawal as if our life together was a bank account." (p. 118). Somewhat contradictorily, she later says, "Somehow I found it difficult to view our marriage as a product with a shelf-life and a built-in obsolescence." (p. 118).

Gay liberation is by no means forgotten in this novel. The characters are not activists, but they are supportive, and benefits for the gay center are held at the Bra-Strap Bar. Harassment of gays by straights is described. The main character mentions her involvement in gay rights marches, and her volunteer work on a gay crisis phone line. In one scene the main characters visit a leather bar where an effeminate man is harassed. A plea for tolerance within the gay community is made.

The author self-published this book. She describes herself as thirty-two years old, and a long-time resident of San Diego. She has several college degrees and is currently working as a medical technician while studying for a master's degree in counselling. She wrote *Bra-Strap Bar and Grill* as a form of self-therapy after her lover's suicide. She says of her novel, "I used no other book as a model and am not aware of any other book like it. I do think it can appeal to gay men as well as lesbians but I wrote it as a lesbian love story. It is intended for a gay audience and I think it covers an area that will appeal to some elements of the gay culture and probably not to others." The printing and cover design are exceptionally well-done for a self-published novel. On the back cover is the rather intriguing, cryptic statement: "It is by no coincidence that you are reading these words."



Photos

Continued from Page 4

meaning. I think the diversity of the images themselves makes a strong statement of how varied we are. That statement would be better enhanced by a presentation of the images which maintained some continuity, provided some guidelines for us. I also found it distracting that some pictures have a black border and others do not, with no clear reason why. I think continuity and clear presentation are important to communication.

JEB is to be highly commended for her ability, as a photographer, to respond to her different subjects and situations, and to take photographs accordingly, communicating a sense of the person that is appropriate and unique to her. Some images are close up and direct. Others show us women in their own environment or moving through the world. We need to see images of women touching, kissing, being intimate and loving with each other — lesbians, being. This book is successful especially I think because we end up feeling "More! I want to see more!" JEB has put a lot of work into giving us back to ourselves — reclaiming our herstories and chronicling our current realities. As we see the lesbians in these photographs eye to eye, we see ourselves eye to eye.

Women's SF

Continued from Page 4

due to experiments performed by the last scientists before the Wasting, breed without men. Alldera is not the only fem to have been saved by the women. Through them, she finds what she so long sought, the free fems. In the end, after conflicts between the fems and the nomadic women, after conflicts with herself, she and the fems prepare for their return to the Holdfast, in what they hope will not be an ill-fated rescue attempt.

There are, of course, some difficulties with this story. For instance, the reader might well doubt a world in which male homosexuality is the norm, and heterosexuality a perversion, when that culture is initiated by world leaders whose homophobia is so well-documented. The reader also hopes that somehow the antagonism between men and fems can be resolved, that somehow the sexes can be reconciled, although certainly with acceptance of homosexuality, both male and female, left intact.

Nevertheless, Charnas is hugely successful in creating not only one, but two, worlds (the Holdfast and the Motherline Tribes) which are rich in complexity. And while Charnas could have let these worlds overwhelm her characters, she has not. The characters are as rich and as complex as the cultures in which they live — they are real people with believable motivations.

Charnas also displays a remarkable understanding of human nature, both in its individual and its collective senses. She demonstrates to the reader how a people's assumptions, no matter how distorted, lead to and perpetuate the very behavior they wish to deter. She shows that fears and guilts, when repressed, induce even worse fears and guilts; that only by confronting them are they successfully vanquished. She seems to subscribe to the feminist theory that the oppression of women is the fundamental oppression from which the other oppressions she speaks of — ageism, racism, the rape of the earth — stem. However, throughout the two novels she is nonjudgmental. She presents each character with her/his virtues and vices, each situation with its goods and bads, then proceeds to tell the story matter-of-factly. She allows the reader to judge, giving her/him a freedom that too many authors ignore.

But the best part is that Charnas leaves the reader lusting for more. We can only hope that she gives it to us.

Son Eric

Continued from Page 5

Like Laura Z. Hobson's *Consenting Adult*, Borhek's book focuses on a mother's struggles and difficulties in accepting her son — resulting in little room for character development for the son. Annoying in Hobson's novel, that lack is glaring here: an accurate portrait of an apparently positive relationship could have strengthened Borhek's position. As is, we're left with the characterization of Eric and Brian as notorious oversleepers — and that's about all.

The essentially religious nature of Borhek's struggle will probably confuse (if not bore) readers with little understanding of Christian fundamentalism. But the depth of her devastation and the lengths she goes to in order to resolve her "problem" clearly indicates that for many people — gay men and lesbians included — homosexuality creates religious confusion. Is it any wonder that, outside of political groups, some of the largest gay organizations in this country center around religion?

While hardly the finest religious book on the subject, *My Son Eric* may reach those previously unwilling even think about the subject, since it is published by a religious publishing house. It is a simplistic account (in both content and style), but most inspirational literature is hardly intellectually taxing. The significance is that this book is willing to present an alternative viewpoint. And for Bible-Belt Christians, a book written from the point of view of a distressed mother is probably more palatable than a book by a gay Christian.

Young Men

Continued from Page 5

to fight back with the gloves off. This strategy anticipates similar strategies undertaken in action at Stonewall itself, and in periodicals like *Gay Sunshine* and Boston's *Fag Rag*, although perhaps not always to the same lofty advantage of Poetry.

Indeed, all the claims in defense of homosexuality these poems make — like the claims many of us have at one time or another felt we *had* to make — can be understood as defensively asserted in opposition to implicitly held majority opinions. To the argument that, after all, "straight" life is normal, natural, and responsible for the production of children, Verlaine argues that to be merely "normal" is to be humdrum, dull, and boring, and that homosexuality is capable of emancipating "mankind from heavy nature." In the face of a culturally vaunted notion that the female form is superior in beauty to that of the male, Rimbaud writes a sonnet that repeats in effect what Verlaine insists: "in comparison to a man's ass, Hers is nothing — useful but less/Voluptuous." If homosexuals are considered unclean, as well as intellectual and social inferiors, well, then, Rimbaud and Verlaine write poetry which makes a "feast of shit and cum, of ass and thighs," and Verlaine asserts that he prefers for his lovers "manual workers, a farm hand/Now and then — no affected high society. . . ." And finally, if homosexuality is sinful and immoral, one can find within the poems evidence of a kind of blasphemous alternative religion, in which a cock is a bishop (!) who with his "pretty hood" pushed back "(gushes) anointment" — can become even "my god," and "adorable idol" celebrated and worshipped in the "High Mass" of erotic activity.

Of course — in undischarged anger, self-consciousness, and sexual obsession — such defensive strategies must, psychically, have been extraordinarily expensive for both of these poets. Verlaine speaks of the "heavenly-hellish dance" to which he's "forever tied." Perhaps, on the evidence of the poems before us here, the heaviest cost for each of them was a protective identification of their sexual equipment with their *selves* — although some readers would argue, I suppose, that both poets betray a specifically *male* concern with power games and localized pleasure. Certainly there was much in the relationship itself that, with so much energy deflected into logistic maneuvering was never, as we say in our smug modern psychological parlance, "worked out." Their translators tell us: "Verlaine was weak, demanding, vacillating, sentimental. Rimbaud was even more demanding, boorish, sullen, and finally bored." Probably they were united more in their common oppositions than in any unselfish concern for each other.

For us, the ultimate shocker the poems hold might be that such material — no longer so immoral or disgusting as it seemed to early readers — can be rendered in such faultlessly ordered, rhymed, stanzaic poetry. (Might there be a valuable classical model here for the *Fag Rag* and *Mouth of the Dragon* Poets-of-our-Contemporary-Lewdness?) The English translations, some of them published for the first time, are deftly done, colloquially rendered, and always interesting. In some cases — as in the wonderfully obscene "Shit, Cheese, and Cum" or in "A Meeting" — J. Murat and W. Gunn have discovered verse forms other than those in which poems were written but which admirably communicate the poets' intentions. I hope readers won't be put off by the lurid title (*A Lover's Cock*) and cover. If they are, they will only be reacting the way a 19th-century audience would predictably have reacted — and so make common cause with forces against which all of our early resistance, admirably exemplified here by Rimbaud and Verlaine, has been directed.

French Lit

Continued from Page 1

question one of the most basic assumptions of the social world we live in: that sex and pleasure must be justified, and that that justification must involve reproduction. "We usually say that the opposite of homosexuality is heterosexuality, but that's not quite it. The opposite of homosexuality is marriage." Marriage is one of the best schools in the world for developing habits and conventions. Unfortunately *Homosexualities and French Literature* largely ignores the phenomenon of gay men and lesbians sometimes protecting themselves by exaggerating (in their behavior and dress habits) the conventions of the "straight" world.

These speculations are meant to provoke more than to define. A slightly less speculative but related issue that comes up again in this series of essays concerns the nature (and to some extent the cause or source) of homosexualities. Aron and Kempf, in "Triumphs and Tribulations of the Homosexual Discourse", point out that until the 19th century little was said about homosexuality as such. *Homosexual acts* were described, but not *homosexuals*. The rise of academic and medical science reflected more and more interest in homosexuals as a subject. And writing and films have also taken an interest in this of late with their fashionable token homosexuals. "Homosexuality is being caught up," say Aron and Kempf, "in a network of traps; it is fashionable in some circles and at the same time strait-jacketed." Think, for example, of how limiting are those stereotypic (mostly male?) images of "ideal lovers": of a certain age, and a certain body type, and usually a certain race.

Two of the strait-jackets (stereotypes/images/roles) touched on most often in *Homosexualities and French Literature* are (1) the homosexual as social outcast/criminal (indicted by society but at the same time indicting society's norms), and (2) the homosexual as some sort of mixture of male and female (creative, complete). Both images have served as the basis at times for the (romantic?) myth that homosexuals are more creative: in the first case because they've been more oppressed and so had to learn to deal with more intense problems, had to resist more, in the case of the outcast; and in the second case because they've somewhat managed to (re)combine "male" and "female" traits that are physically present, but culturally repressed, in everyone, and so they possess the balance which most people achieve, if they ever do, only *externally* (by finding their repressed characteristics in someone else — of the opposite sex). It's interesting that those (e.g. Balzac) who portray the homosexual as outcast also tend to think of homosexuality as "caused" by social experience, while those (e.g. Proust) who see homosexuals as androgynous tend to see the source of sexuality in what's given at birth.

Eric Bentley, in the essay "We are in History", describes the passage of the "homosexual-as-outcast" image from her/his being a *heretic*, when the church's was the dominant ideology, to an image of the homosexual as *patient*, now that the dominant ideology is scientific/technological. "Fascinating [people], perhaps," Bentley notes, "but evil." Perhaps fascinating *because* "evil," that is, because they resist (like it or not) the incredibly dull "good life."

Balzac's image of the "natural person" in his immense series of works that make up *The Human Comedy*, always involves someone who operates outside repressive social laws and conventions. As Gerald Storz points out in his essay on "Balzac, Gide and Genet", "... this asocial sexuality, not necessarily homosexual, was for Balzac the only possible source of genuine humanness."

Monique Wittig adds a new dimension to this "outcast" imagery when she says that "the menace posed specifically by lesbians lies in the fact that they are living proof that women are not dependent on men for pleasure and fulfillment."

No one understands all the intricacies of how cultural roles and biological differences develop and affect each other. Often, to avoid dealing with this thorny situation, writers basically ignore it by putting practically all their eggs in either the cultural or the biological basket. Proust's imagery, as characterized by J.E. Rivers in his essay "The Myth and Science of Homosexuality", has elements of both the "outcast" and the "androgynous." One of the most striking features of these Proust characters is that they represent "a recapturing of lost time; there is the idea in Proust that there was something androgynous that preceded the divisive habits of civilization." Here and throughout *La recherche*, androgyny functions as a means of reversing, or escaping from, the forward (unnatural?) thrust of "progress." "What interests Proust about homosexuality is the paradox by which, in homosexual love, what is natural and what is against nature reflect each other; the homosexual is at the same time beautiful and grotesque, the coming together of all the unnamed and dimly imagined potentialities of nature. Each time the masculine and feminine aspects of the narrator's personality reunite he is free to begin growing again, to (re)create new beings, to realize something of what he [Proust] called 'that possible multiplication of oneself which is happiness.'"

Each of these images of the *nature* of homosexualities suggests some possible *source*. However this is something of a chicken and egg situation, especially since it's difficult to talk about where something, in this case sexualities/homosexualities, *comes from* before you know what 'it' is. **Sexualities and Literature/Language**

With all these fascinating and not well-understood questions and answers in mind, we can look more closely at the central thesis/speculation of the book, which is whether there exists something we could call a "gay/lesbian sensibility" in the arts generally, perhaps, but for our purposes

here in the writing (and reading) of literature. Unfortunately, very little effort was made in this volume to even raise the possibility that interesting complications to this whole question would be added by looking at non-Western, non-modern cultures. What little there is on these complications comes mainly from women who are seeking, in part, to create something like a new language, to (re)write history — so that women exist.

It is amazing in this regard how often the male writers (authors and critics) talk about "sexuality" when what they mean is "male sexuality." Regardless of how different or similar you may think male and female sexualities are (or could be, depending on the cultural context), and regardless of the extent to which those differences are basically physiologically pre-determined and to what extent they depend on experience during childhood (and adulthood!), in *this* modern, western culture, there do seem to be significant differences (for example, as regards the importance of age, looks, promiscuity, etc.) and these deserve some treatment.

At the other extreme, perhaps partly in reaction to this smothering of differences (and thus, effectively, to smothering the visibility of women in general), is the tendency on the part of many of the female writers to imply that male and female sexualities are intrinsically totally different. This discourages, unfortunately I think, exploring the possibility that much of sexuality is determined by cultural role/power and that as women's power increases their sexuality too may change. But I digress.

Once again the image of queers as outcasts arises, in this discussion of the effects of sexuality on writing. The most popular speculation throughout is that homosexuality functions as a "transgression", as something that "moves across the usual lines of reasoning and perpetually questions the social order" (the editors). No one says much about what might happen to this sensibility as lesbians and gay men acquire more political power and become less "outcast."

And "perpetually" is a little strong. In fact, it's the achievement of the relatively young French tradition to have brought the homosexualities discourse out of the medical/religious/legal closet and into the social/political streets. Hardly any of these essayists even ventures a guess about why this very particular literary tradition developed so much more strongly in France than elsewhere. Christiane Rochefort, however, in her essay on the "Privilege of Consciousness" does venture the following:

I think there has always been a relationship between certain literary trends and homosexuality. I can't sort it out very well. I would say that there is a difference between the literature of the dominated and that of the dominant, rather than between homosexuality and heterosexuality. There is all of black literature, and the whole of third world cultures which is a literature of the dominated. Included too is women's literature. We are obligated to use the language of the oppressor, so that it's difficult not to distort our thinking. One must almost write as if twice removed, frame everything in irony and derision, or find other forms.

Elaine Marks adds, in "Lesbian Intertextuality" that there has been a "development in lesbian writing in the course of recent history from an attempt at portraying new attitudes in an old language to an attempt at creating a new language capable of speaking the unspoken in Western literature — female sexuality with woman as namer. . . . Now, with the development of lesbian feminism, the accepted male love discourse as well as the male stereotypes about the female body are being replaced (e.g. in Wittig's *Le Corps Lesbien*) with a text (a mythology, a "naming") created by women." Bentley provides a provocative note in his discussion of western love poetry which, he says, is "as boring as one would expect from such an overdetermined situation — it is all written by heterosexual males saying how much they adore their presumably heterosexual females on the condition that the latter stay in the niches that the former have constructed for them."

Writing as a Power Trip

The critic ought to also be concerned with how the 'world' is divided, administered, plundered (in literature), and how humanity is thrust into pigeonholes so that 'we' are 'human' and 'they' are not.

E. W. Said

Stereotypes, new or old, are useful, of course, for identifying *variation*. However, as it turns out, it's but a step from there to *deviation*. It's become very fashionable for writers to be interested intellectually in blacks, women, children, gays and lesbians. But this can be misleading. "You acknowledge your interest in sexuality, for example, and the movement to liberate it, but at the same time avoid dealing with your own particular sexuality." It's often a way to distract attention from yourself by concentrating it on the movement. (This is especially evident among some male-dominated left groups.) Even the gay male movement often slips into a sort of unexpressed "separatism" of its own with its potential for slipping into complete, comfortable ghettos of bars, baths, tricking spots and even political strategies which involve little more as goals than the acquisition of "rights" in a political system that is at this point *fundamentally* sexist. It's always to the benefit of the dominant (in our case basically straight male) class to encourage stereotyping and so to discourage exploration and openness (which are the source of change and thus threaten the hierarchy). This enforcement of roles is especially true in the case of the young, who, as everyone knows, haven't yet got all their stereotypes quite down pat. Many lesbians and gay men, feeling the intensity of the desperation of the straight world about this situation ("recruitment," "boy-love," "child molestation," gay/lesbian teachers, etc.), have joined forces with them to deny any exploration at all in this International Year of the Child (they might have said of the Nuclear, Blood Based, Role-Infested Family) of the facts of childhood sexuality,

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even between children.

On the day when these movements fix as their goals not only the liberation of homosexuals, women, blacks, children, etc., but also the struggle against themselves in their constant power relations of alienation, of repression against their own bodies and thoughts, then indeed we'll see another kind of struggle, another kind of possibility. The micro-fascist elements in all our relations with others must be found, because when we do this on the individual and local level, we'll have a much better chance of defeating the fascism in the society at large.

(F. Guattari, "A Liberation of Desire")

This is not a call to isolate yourself in an attempt to clean up your "personal" act before joining others to deal with the "political." On the contrary, it is, I think, a reminder of the very intimate dialogue between our "public" movements (as lesbians and gay men, as women, as third world people, etc.) and our so-called "private" lives. And, I would add, it is important to keep in mind the power, in our consciousness as well as in our collective action, for better and for worse, of our language.

Dictionary

Continued from Page 1

most, Wittig-Zeig create them: "circulation," for the mingling of companion lovers' bodies; "cyprine," for the secretions "produced by companion lovers when they are in the state of love." Where good ideas came up first in the enemy camp, Wittig-Zeig are not reluctant to expropriate them: "ORGASM: The companion lovers of Taprobana say that on their island the blue lights produced by orgasms can illuminate the sky. Once this light or orgasmic energy was measured by Whilemina Reich. . . . Since most of the companion lovers are unwilling to use this energy other than in its immediate consumption, these measurements are no longer in use." So much for the wayward follower of Freud.

Above all, however, the authors write with an abiding sense of the continuity of lesbian life and vision from Sappho to today. In setting this sense of continuity forth, they omit from their book all that is even remotely patriarchally tinged. Reading *Lesbian Peoples*, one would never know that men existed, let alone the role they have played in the suppression of the "second sex." Not only do the words "man," "men," and the male pronoun, "he," never appear in the text, but even the words "wife," and "woman," are, according to the authors, now "obsolete." They designate "beings fallen in an absolute state of servitude," like oxen and slaves, and have no place therefore in the language of the new lesbian nation.

The only words Wittig-Zeig choose to include, finally, are those which from a lesbian point of view define (or can be made to define) some aspect of reality. If, as in a number of instances, making the word conform to lesbian reality requires that it be totally redefined in practice the authors show no hesitation in their task (see, for example, their description of "Sleeping Beauty", as one who is "forgetful of her clitoris," or "sleep" itself as a form of total communion between lovers). They are, in effect, rewriting human experience from a purely lesbian perspective; such radical re-visions are inevitable, a necessary part of the game. Fortunately, moreover, both authors have the intelligence, the passion and the verbal precision to play that game well and for the very highest stakes.

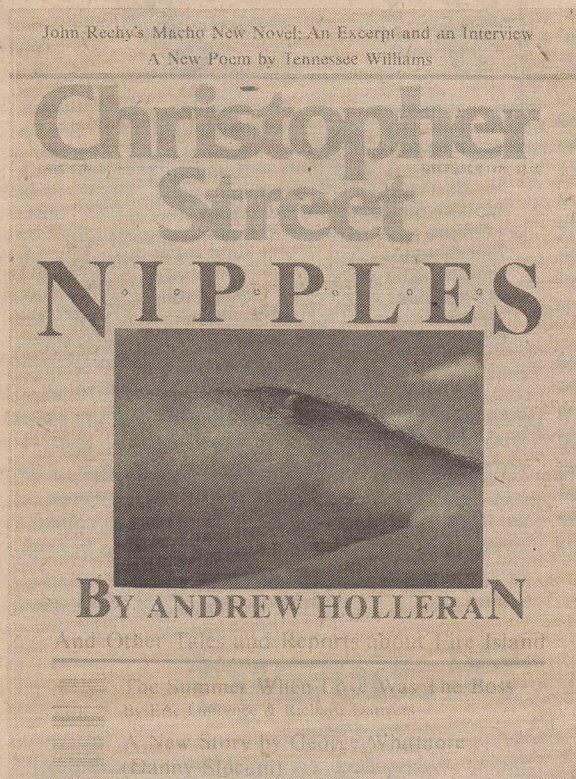
The book is in short a tour de force: the extrapolation of a single idea. As in Wittig's previous works, the author(s) bend every means to create their own world in their own words. In order to do so, they deliberately bypass, re-write, re-create, the historical and literary past and present, both of which have consistently denied them and all lesbians true being and/or linguistic recognition.

If *Lesbian Peoples* lacks the poetic and intellectual intensity of Wittig's earlier works (stylistically it is in my opinion something of a comedown), it compensates for this loss by being far more immediately accessible as a work of art. For those who have heretofore given Wittig up in frustration at her stylistic and intellectual complexities, this "dictionary" or map to her/our world should come as a welcome relief and prove a handy guide.

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