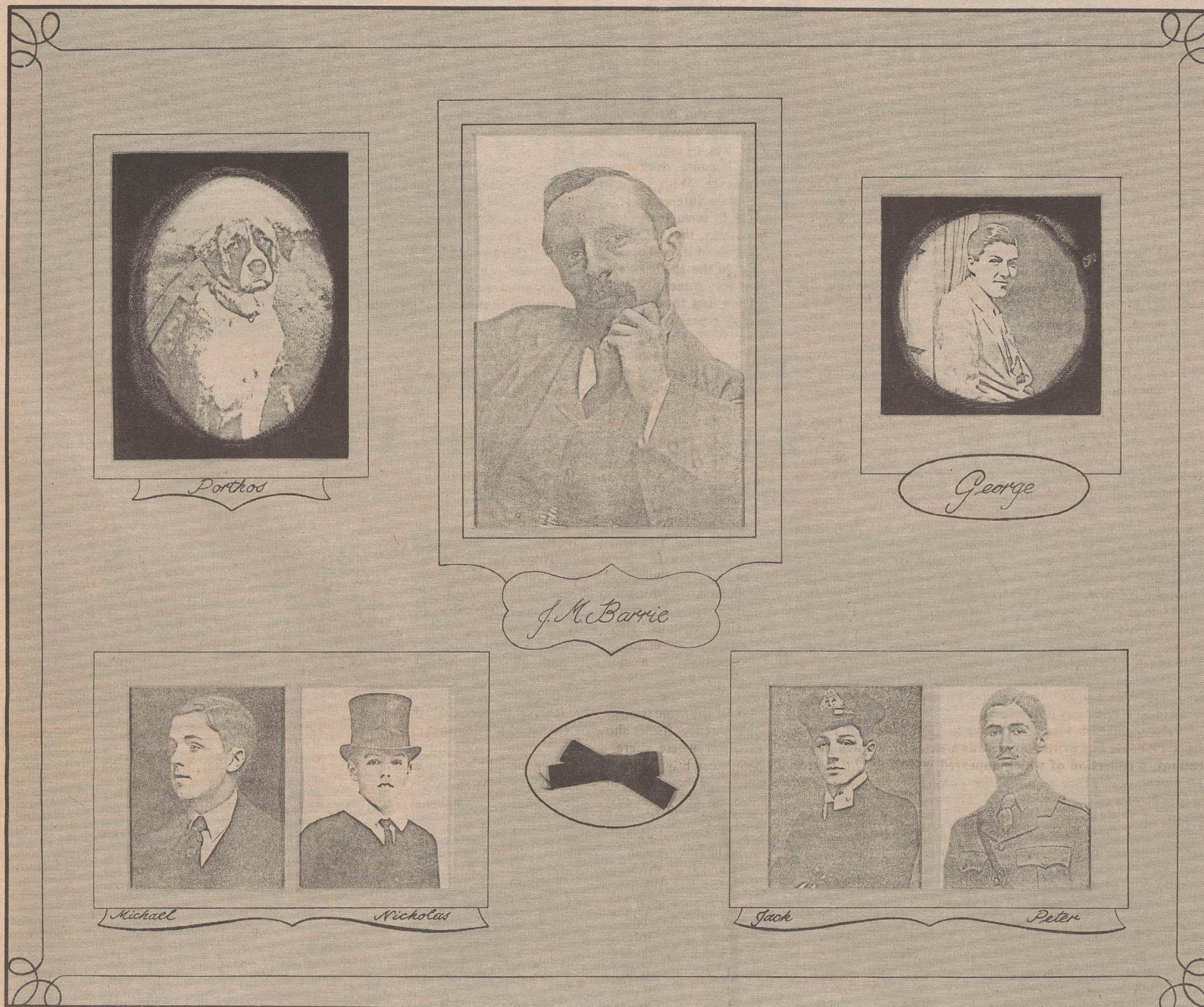


# BOOK REVIEW



## If You Believe in Fairies . . .

### J.M. BARRIE AND THE LOST BOYS

By Andrew Birkin  
Crown Publishers, New York  
323 pp., \$14.95

Reviewed by Michael Bronski

**J**M. Barrie, as a writer and personality, has been long out of fashion. His style and sentiment seemed very Victorian to the England that dealt with the First and Second World Wars; in their pursuit of modernity they mistook his simplicity for naivete, his obsession with youth for innocence. His well known fondness for little boys made him into a kindly uncle, polite and passionless, a relic of a faded gentility. Andrew Birkin's book gives us a full picture of Barrie — and his relationship of more than twenty years with five brothers — that sheds new light on both the man and his work. Although Birkin comes to some wrongheaded conclusions, he supplies enough first person original source material for any reader to construct his/her own scenario.

Born in Scotland in 1861, James Barrie lived his first six years in the shadow of his older brother David, with whom his mother was obsessed. When David was accidentally killed, James spent his childhood attempting to replace his brother and console his mother, always failing. Following the usual middle class childhood Barrie went to a private academy and then to University where he graduated but remained a shy, retiring youth, whose only ambition was to become a writer. Within a few years he had moved from writing for a provincial paper to living and writing in London. In 1888 his *Aulde Licht Idylls* (based on stories his mother used to tell him) garnered him praise from both the public and the critics. More novels and then plays followed and he became a literary sensation, praised by such notables as Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas Hardy. In 1894 he married

Mary Ansell, an actress in one of his plays, and although the marriage was apparently never consummated, they remained together until they divorced in 1909. During the early part of the marriage Barrie had met Sylvia Llewelyn Davies at a dinner party. She turned out to be the mother of two small boys that Barrie had recently befriended in Kensington Gardens. He was soon to become closely involved with the entire family, spending most of his free time with them, going on vacations with them, and generally insinuating himself into their lives.

Sylvia was fond of Barrie, though she thought him a little odd, and her husband Arthur found him somewhat of a nuisance. This didn't bother Barrie, however, for although he was very fond of Sylvia, his real interest was the boys (The Llewelyn Davies were to have three more sons in the following years). Birkin has recorded the history of these relationships and gives a detailed account — much of it in Barrie's own words and the letters between the boys and their self-adopted uncle. Barrie doted on the boys — indeed, they became his whole emotional life — and they, in turn, were to become (economically as well as emotionally) dependent upon him.

In the height of their relationship, Barrie began writing a play that was both immediate to him and a highly complex piece of stagecraft, more complicated than anything else in recent English theater. It was the story of Peter Pan, a boy who wouldn't grow up, and who lived in a fantasy world of Never Land (the second, more final Never came when he novelized his play in *Peter and Wendy*). Barrie had incorporated adventures that he and the five Davies boys had had together and tried, as much as possible to give Peter lines that the boys had actually said. Two years earlier, on a vacation, Barrie had taken a series of photos to illustrate some of the stories that he had told the boys. He had published them in a small letter press book called *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island* and this was to be the basic outline of the Peter Pan story. He had two copies of the book printed

and gave one to the boys' father who promptly "left it on a train" (Barrie's response to this is unrecorded, although he did use Arthur Llewelyn Davies as the prototype of the awful Mr. Darling/Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*.)

*Peter Pan* was a huge success in both England and America and Barrie was happier than ever. Tragedy, however, was about to strike his surrogate family and change the lives of everyone concerned. In 1906 Arthur died of sarcoma and Sylvia was left with five sons to care for. Barrie immediately stepped in and helped with their daily life as well as their financial well being and future. Four years later Sylvia herself was to die of cancer and James Barrie was to become the guardian of the boys he adored.

Like any parent Barrie fretted about the boys going off to school, growing up, and joining the army. And as the boys grew older so did he; it almost seems as though he maintained his high spirits and youthfulness from theirs. In 1915 George, to whom Barrie was very close, was killed in the trenches on the Western Front. The shock shattered Barrie. In 1921, Michael — Barrie's favorite of the five boys — drowned while swimming with a friend. Although ruled to be accidental, there was some question that it may have been suicide. The effect on Barrie was enormous and close friends were worried that he would take his own life. Barrie spent the next 16 years a broken man, still famous and somewhat active as a writer, though not as prolific as he was in his youth. He felt his life was pointless without the five boys he had loved and who had left him by either dying or, unlike Peter Pan, growing up.

Birkin tells Barrie's story with an eye for detail and good sense of drama. He makes little editorial comment, letting much of the first person material speak for itself, and this is just as well. In his preface he warns against making judgments about Barrie's sexuality and gives

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# GAY COMMUNITY NEWS

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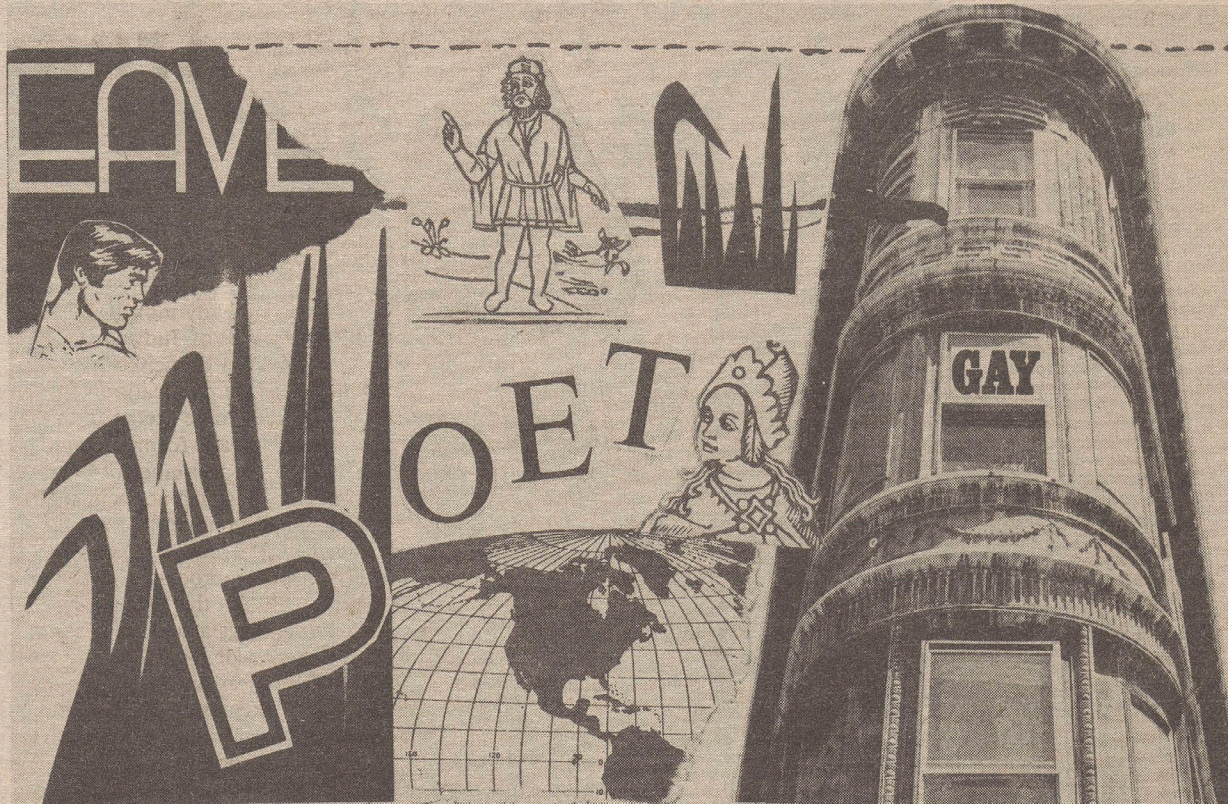
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## The Good Grey and Great Gay Poets

### THE HOMOSEXUAL TRADITION IN AMERICAN POETRY

By Robert K. Martin

University of Texas Press

258 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper

Reviewed by Rudy Kikel

**T**he *Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* is an extremely important book, its long-awaited publication an event that will have far-reaching consequences in the halls of academia — and in all of our lives as well. Like Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History*, published a few years ago, it brings to light records that have lain overlooked or "buried". Martin discovers literary evidence of a significant thread in American literature that has actually been *binding*. Katz not only provided a boost to scholars in his field: he opened up a new field. Martin's book, I suspect, will do the same. It is the answer to a call — two calls, really — sounded by Louis Crew and Rictor Norton in the 1974 "homosexual" issue of *College English*, the publishing of which was in itself, an event of some importance. Crew and Norton hoped for both a "balanced appraisal" of homosexual themes in Whitman's poetry and an "equally important study" of the homophobia in the criticism concerning the poet and his work. Martin has admirably answered those calls, but he has done more. After laying bare the real and thoroughly homosexual Whitman, he has proceeded to trace the influence of our Good Grey and Great Gay Poet in the work of Hart Crane, and to show how both Crane and Whitman have been pillars, bases, foundations, reservoirs of both allusion and concern, in the poetry of six gay male poets now writing: Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, Thom Gunn, Edward Field, Richard Howard, James Merrill, and Alfred Corn.

Before the *real* Whitman could be apprehended, and with him the tradition at the head of which he sits, Martin realized that he would have to remove from about his work the scales, the incrustations, that have appended themselves to it in the form of homophobic or embarrassed critical commentary. One of the great strengths of this book resides in the certain terms with which Martin claims there is something rotten in the heart of academia: "The record of lies, half truths, and distortions is so shameful as to amount to a deliberate attempt to alter reality to suit a particular view of normality. If Whitman is to be a great poet, he must be straight. If the poetry shows something else, Whitman must be made to alter his own poetry, censor himself." As Martin makes clear, Whitman did censor himself often enough, changing pronouns in some passages, excising others (which this critic reclaims), learning, in short, the "strategies of concealment" forced on him by the nineteenth century. None of these obliterations, however, can excuse the endeavors of literary critics, who have tried to deny the importance of "sexuality" in the poetry by focusing on its "mystical" (James Miller) or its "universal" (Walter Lowenfels) aspects. Others have simply larded their commentary with oppressive remarks, such as this by Mark Van Doren: "Manly love is neither more nor less than an abnormal and deficient love." Martin cites the example of one critic who, having discovered in 1920 that, in its original version, one poem of Whitman's was addressed to a man and *not* a woman, even overlooked, six years later, in another piece of criticism, his own discovery.

The critics leveled, the veils lifted, the miasmas cleared away, Whitman stands clearly as America's *first* homosexual (drawing on "existentialist" distinctions between "doing" and "being," Martin claims that "Prior to Whitman there were homosexual acts but no homosexuals"), and his poetry is complete with scenes of

cock-sucking (in the 1855 version of "The Sleepers"), masturbation and anal intercourse (in "Song of Myself"). These "scenes" are not revealed for their own sakes — Martin's introduction warns the reader that he is not concerned with studying "homosexual incidents in American poetry, in the manner of Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*" — but because Whitman's "sexuality" is essential and not accidental to his vision: "Sexuality, in Whitman, is not a metaphor but an act; its value comes both from its inherent pleasure and from the spiritual growth it can bring."

Pulling curtains from about the bed in Whitman — or seeing what is happening out there on those beds of grass! — Martin uncovers a "vision" more subversive than any critic of the poet, I suspect, has yet allowed, and one which is rather marvelously in accord with the "radical" content of "gay liberation." Heterosexual love is found by Whitman, and presumably by Martin as well, to be based on inequality. The "Calamus" poems are found to say "He loves him," whereas heterosexual literature, at least since Virgil, has always said "He loves her" and "He kills him!" For Whitman, then, "the aggressive impulse of man is rooted in competitiveness the basic form of which is the search for a bride to provide property both now and in the future." And Whitman "like Melville, is suggesting that only when men accept their innate homosexuality can there be any real change and a final victory over the aggression, acquisitiveness, and death-drive which, he believes, are rooted in heterosexuality. This is indeed a revolutionary idea; no wonder, then that some critics have been so alarmed that they have been unable to address it."

From a study of Whitman's ecstatic affirmations of his own sexuality and American homosexual possibilities in general, Martin turns to a study of what he calls the Genteel Poets, "homosexual" writers operating *within* Victorian conventions (Fitz-Green Halleck, Bayard Taylor and his Circle, George Santayana): Martin is as gentle as he can be with these poets, pointing out the delicacy and "purity of language" in their work but also the "fatal indirection" their art took — toward "Platonism," idealization, "repression" and "elitism" — in contrast to that of the sustaining, and more carnal Whitman. And even Hart Crane, "a product of the fin-de-siecle mood, with its emphasis on hopeless love and the alienation of the artist," cannot match Whitman in the intensity of his self-affirmation or in his messianic role, although Martin shows how, particularly in "The Bridge," he tried. Still Crane is important. Where Whitman provided a vision and a clear voice, Crane gave depth and complexity to the developing tradition: he "enlarged the possibilities of homosexual poetry, by extending it beyond 'mere' subject matter."

What place does a woman have in this world of male homosexual lovers? Martin points out not only the penises — as "wildflapping pennants" or "timid leaves" or "Sheathed hooded sharp-toothed touch" — which spangle Whitman's poetry, but the essentially phallic nature of the vision: "Out of the cycle of the penis is born the cycle of the soul; out of his erections, ejaculations (the pun is crucial), and reerections comes Whitman's faith in a cycle of the world which will comprehend and conquer death." This will sound pretty silly to some women, I think. But the vision Martin sketches for us is also essentially "matriarchal," and the self that is uncovered in Whitman is vaster, more humane, and finally more "feminine" than the one Whitman, as one of the "roughs," drew of himself in his work. Crucially, Whitman always defended women's rights, whereas one of the Genteel Poets, Bayard Taylor, was opposed to



them on the grounds that emancipation for women "would bring about a decline in femininity." This issue — Whitman on Women — is one of many that I think Martin's book will open up.

One problem with *The Homosexual Tradition in American Literature* (Martin is solely concerned with gay male writers, trusting that lesbian writers such as Amy Lowell and May Sarton will be treated in a separate study) is that there are not places in his book in which he deals conclusively with some of the issues his "readings" in the poetry call up: the influence of Platonism, Greek Literature in general, the conflict between "love" and "promiscuity" in Whitman, erotic imagery, to name some. His fascinating reflections on these subjects and others pepper his book, which is itself structured not by topic but by his "readings" of individual poems, long and short. So subjects come up over and over. That said, I think there is every defense for Martin's method: he "reads" poems so well, poems that in many instances critics have not really up until now read at all! I can't imagine anyone saying more or anything more interesting about "Episode of Hands," the poem that gives a "first indication of the young Crane's interest in Whitman." And one is always interested in Martin's "free associations" — to Melville, for instance, or the "Leander" strategy, as he calls it, in Marlowe. The particular skill of this critic lies, I think, in uncovering what he calls "inter-textuality," "the ways," as he defines it in his introduction, "in which texts build upon other texts," the writings of one poem in the light of another. We are always illuminated by Martin's "inter-textual" readings, particularly in his "centerpiece," his brilliant treatment of "The Bridge," wherein, after rejecting the rival influences of Eliot, Melville, Cummings, Poe, and Coleridge — influences revealed to us only perhaps on account of Martin's detective work — Crane "becomes Whitman's 'camerado,' taking his hand, accepting his word, sharing his triumph." This loving literary *tryst* — one with immense implications for the American literature that has come after and that is still to come — is at the heart and provides the dramatic climax of this book.

However, another problem may spring directly from this connection. And it is one certain — at least within the gay male writing community — to make Martin's book controversial. *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* depicts, is about, and is finally perhaps somewhat torn by tensions: between "vision" and "form," between Whitman and Crane, or between, perhaps, just such qualities as Martin mentions in regard to a Richard Howard poem on Rodin: "sensual energy" vs. "classic control." Martin tries to maintain a balance, walk a tightrope, even, between these forces, responding at once to Whitman's outspoken "radical vision" but also to the Crane who gives us more than "mere" homosexual subject matter." He is careful *not* to say, in his Conclusion, which of two theories is "right": one that claims "homosexuality is different in its essence from heterosexuality" and may lead to a vast reorganization of society (as Whitman hoped), or one that claims "homosexuality is not *per se* an interesting subject" and that eventually, with the elimination of prejudice, the gay "warp" will become absorbed into the larger "fabric of American life."

Actually, I think, Martin tips his hand, resolves this tension by taking a side. For one thing, he complains of "an enormous crudity about Whitman, a magnificent tastelessness that in the end leaves the reader weary." And yet, we do not come across a complementary if very different complaint about Crane's style or content. Specifically, I should like to have seen Martin take up a possible relationship between the density and obscurity of Crane's poetry and the dividedness he felt about his "gayness." But I suspect it is just that density and complexity which Martin appreciates, who proves himself adept at shedding light where others have found darkness. Richard Howard himself exclaimed in his poem on Crane, whom he calls "a genius in need/ of a little more talent": "I still do not/ understand you . . ."

Then there is this comment in Martin's introduction to his final section on "Some Contemporary Poets": "Being homosexual is no longer likely to make one lose one's job; as a result gay poets have no longer felt the same impetus to establish a connection between their sexuality and their political views. While this may have resulted in a loss of political fervor, it has also meant an extension of the forms of gay poetry." Well, I'm not so sure homosexuals don't still lose jobs, or that connections are not still being made in the manner of Whitman between sexuality and politics. Martin asserts that his criteria in choosing contemporary poets for analysis have been "personal preference, inherent interest, and inter-textuality. . . ." I would not argue against anyone's "personal preferences." (Let me tip my own hand: in large part, Martin's agree with my own. Only perhaps in discussing Duncan and Ginsberg do I find Martin abandoning his objectivity — paraphrasing Duncan in the grand California shaman manner of that poet himself; and treating Ginsberg rather severely.)

I submit, however, that the "loss of political fervor" Martin discovers in contemporary gay poetry may result directly from his having preferred formal "extension" to political fervor. Where is there mention of Paul Goodman in this book, for instance, a political poet whom Howard, in *Alone With America*, has called "more than any American poet alive, the true heir and disciple of the Good Grey Poet"? And I hesitate to allude to those "gay" anthologies and periodicals that have in the past ten years made their appearances on our "scene" (*Gay Sunshine*, *Mouth of the Dragon*, *Fag Rag*, *Angels of the Lyre*, *Orgasms of Light*; *The Male Muse* is referred to in a note, by the way, as being "extremely

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# The View from the Kitchen

## THE DINNER PARTY

By Judy Chicago

Doubleday/Anchor Press, New York

Reviewed by Alice T. Friedman

This review is being written so many months after the much acclaimed appearance of Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and so long after the publication of the book by the same title, that many people are no doubt already familiar with the piece and have formed their opinions of it. In the spring of 1979 a number of periodicals and newspapers carried articles which acquainted the general public with Judy Chicago's unique project and its message about women's history. Her book (which has sold very well) describes the arduous process of creating the work and introduces the reader to the 39 women guests — symbolized by place settings around a triangular table measuring fifty feet on a side — and to the 999 female presences whose names appear on porcelain tiles on the "Heritage Floor" below. Representing the course of women's history (Chicago has called it "a reinterpretation of the Last Supper from the point of view of those who do the cooking"), the 39 guests include such figures as Sappho, Isabella d'Este, Anne Hutchinson, Sojourner Truth and Georgia O'Keefe. Each woman was carefully chosen from history or mythology for her accomplishments and/or spiritual or legendary powers.

*The Dinner Party* includes color reproductions of the plates designed by Chicago for each of the guests; each plate is accompanied by a biography and a short discussion by Chicago of her reasons for using certain images and colors to represent each woman. The sheer volume of information, drawn together by eight research-

ers, is overwhelming. The piece took five years to put together and involved more than 400 men and women. Chicago's own presence as an artist can still be felt as one reads the text or looks at the pictures, but generally speaking the work of art itself seems to get lost among the names, dates and ideas discussed in the book.

The book leaves a false impression of the piece, however. In a recent lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Judy Chicago discussed her career as an artist in the years before she began working on the "Dinner Party" project, and she talked about the piece itself, showing slides and commenting on her own work. Chicago is an impressive speaker — she is articulate, intelligent and funny — but best of all she is an artist of considerable merit. Her slides show "The Dinner Party" as a whole and the plates in their places on the table: for each guest there is a painted plate, a goblet, flatware and a napkin set onto a sewn runner. In most cases, the runners incorporate needlework techniques of the time in which each woman lived. The "butterfly" imagery of the plates with its obvious suggestion of vaginal imagery grows out of Chicago's own developing symbolic form-language of women's art, but the runners are more narrative, using pictures and words to offset the plates and tell us something about the women who are represented.

It became clear from the lecture and slide show that the reproductions in the book do justice neither to the plates nor to the work as a whole. None of the marvelously detailed needlework of the runners is reproduced (although a second volume on them is planned) and the plates cannot be read sculpturally. Subtle changes of depth in the relief surface are an important aspect of Chicago's symbolic and formal language, and thus this is a considerable loss. Further, the color in the

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## Nary a Creampuff

### AMAZONS!

Edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson

DAW Books, Inc., Bergenfield, NJ

206 pp., \$2.25

Reviewed by Pat M. Kuras

This new anthology, *Amazons!*, takes some refreshingly good turns. A prime example is the use of a Melanie Kaye poem within the front cover. The poem, also called "Amazons," sets the scene for many of the stories inside: "They came astride gray horses dappled with sun . . ." Not only is this a fine opening for the book, but it is also impressive to realize the origin of this poem. It originally appeared in *Conditions*(2), "a magazine of women's writing with an emphasis on writing by lesbians."

The stories (13 in all) are varied journeys into women's heroic fantasy. Joanna Russ, rather than submitting a story of her own, uncovered bits of phantasmic poetry by Emily (*Wuthering Heights*) Bronte. Other writers included Andre Norton and C.J. Cherryh. Some of the authors share an interest in the martial arts, which shows to a degree in their stories. Not all of these amazons are warriors; some are witches ("The Dreamstone" and "The Sorrows of Witches"), others are women coping with survival ("Jane Saint's Travails").

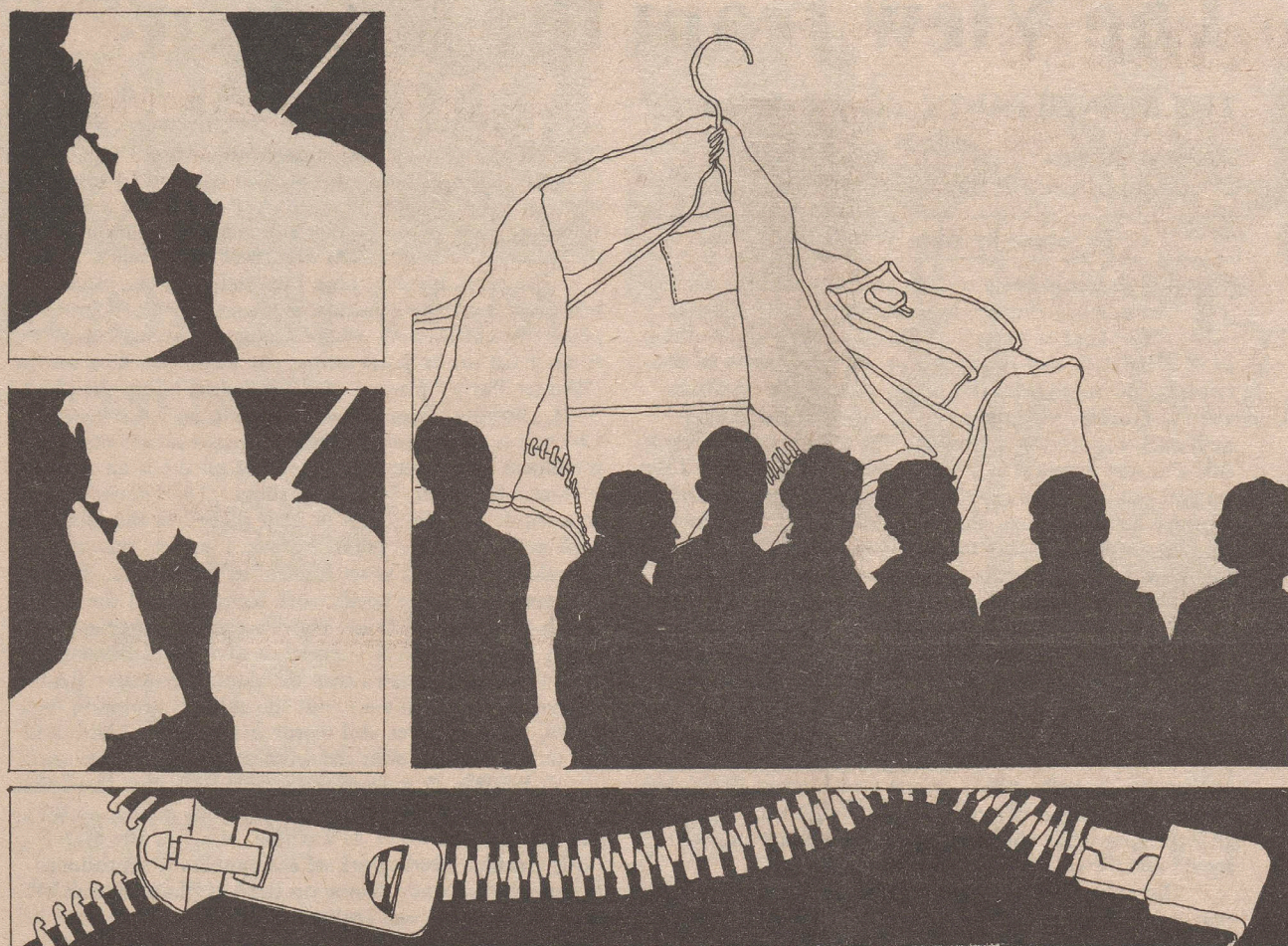
For the most part, these stories are well-written, achieving blends of the exotic, ironic, humorous and mysterious. However, some do contain flaws. The use of modern day slang in "Bones for Dulath" grates against the story's foreign setting. Science fiction and fantasy

writer Ray Bradbury once wrote that: "Good fantasy must be allowed to move casually upon the reader. . . . It must be woven into the story so as to be, at times, almost unrecognizable." With her story, "The Rape Patrol," author Michele Belling taxes our imagination from the start and, when she adds a dash of sorcery, the story is strained even more.

Editor Jessica Amanda Salmonson recognizes the need and importance for all-women's anthologies. However, for her own book, she has accepted one story and cover artwork from men. The story, "Agbewe's Sword," seems to dwell a bit too much on scantily-clad (sometimes *unclad*!) amazons, but aside from that one slip, male writer Charles R. Saunders behaves himself. Editor Salmonson readily acknowledges the scores of men who would willingly portray amazons as "sexy or 'cute' . . . dependent on men," or as ogres that "lopped off breasts, murdered men and babies and all but held their swords outward from the crotch." Salmonson's collection of amazons is well worth waiting for; these are heroic women with dignity and complex characterizations.

The only other major complaint with *Amazons!* is its cover. True, it is a striking picture with its armored amazon posed before a floating milky planet. But all that armor gives her a gaudy look and causes one to wonder whether without it all, she would really be a strong amazon. Compare her with the woman on the cover of Pamela Sargent's *The New Women of Wonder* (Vintage Books). Sargent's cover girl is simply dressed in plain jungle garb — thigh-high boots, khaki shorts, taut t-shirt. She wears a no-nonsense look, not necessarily tough, but strong. She's no creampuff, but one hell of an amazon.





## For Leathermen Who Have Considered S & M

### RUSHES

By John Rechy  
Grove Press, New York  
222 pp., \$10.00

Reviewed by Eric Rofes

When the Village People brought hypermasculinity to prime time television, complete with leather jackets, military uniforms, handcuffs and boots, the door to the secret catacombs of the Mine Shaft began to swing open. The diverse sexual practices and social manifestations of the leather scene have become increasingly conspicuous; so conspicuous, in fact, that the first major confrontation the gay community will have in the 1980s will be with a movie which distorts and thrusts into public view a world that many lesbians and gay men find dangerous, incomprehensible, and downright embarrassing. As the movement organizes demonstrations against the movie *Cruising*, it has become evident that the central issue to many people is neither violence against gay people, nor media exploitation, but the ethics and morality of sadomasochistic practices among men who frequent leather bars.

The bottom line for some people, and certainly for some lesbians, is "Why do some men enjoy giving and receiving pain and humiliation?" Unfortunately, we as a community are unprepared to deal with this question and with most issues surrounding the leather scene. As back-room bars and private sex clubs expanded beyond the New York-San Francisco-Los Angeles centers (the "Leather Triangle") and more gay men "came out" into leather and keys and handkerchiefs, there was not an accompanying rise in analysis of what the scene is all about — socially, sexually, and politically. Few writers have dared to confront the issue seriously and those who have, particularly Lyn Rosen and Ian Young, have generally done so in newspapers with limited circulation. When leathermen finally get a magazine of their own, the eighty page glossy "Drummer," the magazine is filled with hot stories and photos and allots little space to an analysis of the politics of S&M. This is not surprising. Men have a tradition of acting on their sexuality and never thinking or analyzing its ramifications. The only writer who has achieved mass readership on the subject of the leather scene is John Rechy, through his books *City of Night*, the best-selling *The Sexual Outlaw*, and now the long-awaited *Rushes*.

While *Rushes* provides impressive observations of the inner workings of leather bars, and Rechy is eminently qualified to write on "the scene," the political analysis in the book is both disturbing and, ultimately, destructive.

For almost twenty years, Rechy has described what many people see as the seamier side of gay life — the world of hustlers, sex addicts, sadomasochism — and over the years his perspective has changed dramatically. Rechy makes no secret of his own participation in the S&M scene — his book jackets show him in tight shirts and jeans and dark black boots — and he strategically states in *The Sexual Outlaw* that the scene continues to attract him and he still frequents the leather haunts of

L.A. He is well qualified to analyze the leather scene because he sees it from the inside and, if he is anything, Rechy is an astute observer. Twenty years of observations have brought Rechy to the belief that gay S&M is a product of the internalization of the hatred of gays by a straight society. In an interview in "Drummer," Rechy explained:

Should I take the time here to talk about what happens to me when I'm into an S&M thing? I know that there's self-hatred involved although I play the . . . "top." I know that I'm involved in a ritual of self-hatred, gay self-hatred. Because I'm gay myself, and in turning the other man into an object so that he becomes the "Queer," I externalize my own feelings. I'm saying that he's the queer; I'm gonna force him to do these acts. Hell, we're BOTH gay, and all I'm doing is involving myself in a ritual in which I let him stand for that part of myself which is still lurking with self indoctrinated gay hatred. Instead of facing myself with "Look, you're still an aspect of that straight bullshit! Deal with it," I go out with a guy that will play bottom . . .

This attitude towards S&M is the foundation for *Rushes*. The Rushes, a leather-western bar located in an unnamed American city (though clearly modeled after New York), is the setting for Rechy's study of the men who inhabit this subculture. Into the bar come "cowboys, motorcyclists, construction workers, policemen, lumberjacks, military uniformed men" who socialize, cruise, stuff poppers up their nostrils, and maul each other. Enter Endore (clearly the Rechy character in this autobiographical novel), a thoughtful, analytical journalist who knows the scene well and is both drawn into and repulsed by it. Endore joins up with a group of bar friends who become "types" for Rechy to use in his exposition of his underlying thesis: Chas, the hard-assed leatherman, revelling in his masculinity and dominance, keys chained to his left side, black bandana in pocket; Bill, the lithe, blond cowboy (keys on the right) who comes to the Rushes to have his fantasies made real; and Don, the unattractive, good-hearted older man who meets rejection and insult in the bar world. We spend an evening with these men and, through their eyes, see the world of the Rushes without the hindrance of tact or propriety.

Rechy's observations of the leather bar scene are right on target. He picks up on the "scattering of visual attention at regular intervals" whenever gay men who are not intent on making it with each other congregate in a bar, and the unconscious constant drinking of melted ice as glasses are held long after a drink has been finished. He isolates the distinction between brown leather ("the signal color of the curious") and black leather ("the initiated") and the abuse of friendship within the leather hierarchy (unattractive, older friends may be snubbed: "Outside the Rushes [Chas] likes Don. But the bar changes everything. The Rushes is for the fit warriors.") It is clear Rechy has been an inhabitant of the Rushes and knows the rules and traditions thoroughly. Only a veteran could label Last Call the time when "the hunters are released from the pretense of drinking," or isolate the hour-by-hour game plan of the leather bar.

Endore serves as the filter for our view of the Rushes, and his thoughts and remarks point up the issues Rechy intends to raise. Much of the evening he spends in debate with Chas on the merits of the leather scene, yet

he is as vulnerable to the allure of power and masculinity as Chas. Endore sees the heightened masculinity — studied and self-conscious — "as if in protection against a dreaded effeminate move." Sissies have become Bruisers and project "defiance" and "disdain" on other homosexuals who don't measure up. They form a "make-believe working-class" despite their arrival at the Rushes in "private cars, taxis, even limousines."

The sanctity of the Rushes is threatened by the arrival of a woman fashion designer and her protege, and also by a pair of transvestites who manage, after much arguing, to gain entrance into the Rushes. The book accurately captures the changes that occur when a woman enters an all-men's bar; each man reacts, psychologically and physically, with anger, ambivalence, relief, interest or hatred. Our characters display the range of reactions: Endore, although he had assailed the bars' hostility to women in a newspaper column, feels intruded upon; Don is glad; Chas is outraged — macho purity has been violated; Bill is supportive yet analytical. Rechy uses the presence of a straight woman and of transvestites to explore central issues of masculinity and of manly drag. The Unreal City of the leather bar runs smack up against reality and the "Image," the essential component of the leather scene, is shattered. The fashion designer speaks the words of Rechy when she tells Chas, "We came to watch you as you wallow in the exile we've thrust on you and you don't know it." Rechy's vision is that a hell-on-earth, manufactured as a curse for gay men by straight culture, towers above the people who are fated to inhabit it, who appear as puppets — helpless beings manipulated by the sensual aura of the leather bar.

It is folly to deny that the scenario of this novel takes place nightly in bars throughout the country. At the Spike in New York, the Gold Coast in Chicago, Herbie's in Boston, the One Way in San Francisco, Mary's in Houston, the Washington DC Eagle . . . leather master meets and initiates youngman; handcuffs bind wrists; cops, corporals, and construction workers spit, piss and ejaculate on men seeking humiliation, searching for pain.

Where Rechy goes wrong, and where critics of the leather scene consistently go wrong, is in making underlying assumptions which are too simplistic and too biased by the limited scope of personal experience to achieve the "universal truth" that is intended. Despite the accuracy of his observations, Rechy's political analysis of S&M, although it includes some good insights, is limited, moralistic, and tainted with psycho-analytical bias, and makes the leather scene into a place of warped madness and sickness. For some, this is the experience, but for many the experience of the leather bar is friendly, fulfilling and, I dare say, healthy.

Rechy plays into the assumptions of straight observers of the gay male scene by relentlessly probing the cause of men's enjoyment of these practices. We have stopped exploring the question "How did I become queer?" a while ago because it is rooted in the assumption that being gay is an error, someone's fault, something to be corrected in future people's upbringing. Likewise, it is time that men involved in the leather scene leave the guilt and sickness behind. Gay men need no more guilt-tripping and sickness-baiting based on what we do in consensual sexual activity. To continue the tradition of imposing shame upon men because of sexual needs which are expressed with others men who share complementary needs, is regressive and divisive. It contributes to the division of homosexuals into "good gays" and "bad gays." Rechy may understand the leather scene in terms of his own self-oppression, but to explain all S&M men as "internalized self-haters" is both to simplify the complex issues involved in what stimulates people sexually and to deny the varied motivations and fluidity of human sexuality.

This is not to say that there are *not* pressing issues which need to be explored by men who frequent leather bars. Men who engage in S&M practices have a responsibility to do so with a constant awareness and concern for the issues that they are confronting physically and sexually: issues of power and control, strength and weakness, humiliation, masculinity. Because of their acute awareness of the use of power and control, there is a tremendous untapped potential among leathermen to be in the vanguard of movements for sexual liberation and, indeed, many activists still live in the closet as far as their S&M practices go. The distinctions between S&M practices directed by men toward women and by men toward men need to be explored in view of the fact that the sexuality and societal position of men is different from the sexuality and position of women. Heterosexual S&M is not identical with gay male S&M, and lesbian S&M, the latest reactionary media rage, is an issue requiring unsensationalized analysis, not by men, but by knowledgeable feminist women.

What the gay male community needs now is an open forum on issues of S&M and leather bars. *Rushes* is a good beginning to this forum, but ultimately fails when the author pushes his point of view to the level of didacticism and his characters become caricatures. Rechy unfortunately serves as accomplice to William Friedkin, producer of "Cruising," by helping to create a new scapegoat in the gay community. To put the onus of woman-hating upon leathermen is to avoid the fact that misogyny is rampant in *all* sectors of the gay male community, as is self-oppression. Targeting one conspicuous subculture allows for a superficial and distorted treatment of issues that all gay men must face. Self-oppression is an unfortunate part of much of gay male culture and must be rooted out throughout. When self-hatred is expunged from our lives, S&M may very well still exist as a viable sexual practice.



# The Lesbian Adventure

## THE LESBIAN PATH

Edited by Margaret Cruikshank  
Angel Press  
c/o Carolyn House  
Box 161  
Thornwood, NY 10594

Reviewed by Maida Tilchen

The Lesbian Path should have been called "The Lesbian Adventure," for "path" is too tame a word for these true tales of women's journeys from city streets and farmyards, convents, marriages, and motherhood, to fully realized lives as lesbians. This anthology has 37 stories by 37 women, and every story is real, positive, individual, and inspiring. The stories aren't about sex, but about the roles in which lesbians find themselves in our heterosexist society, and how they triumph over these restrictions. The collection was edited by Margaret Cruikshank, who sees it as "a collective work — the autobiography not of one woman but of many. Remembering our isolation and believing that this book, if it had existed in the 1950s or 1960s, would have made our self-discoveries less painful, we are naturally eager to record something of our lives . . . we have an exhilarating sense of our power to say — sometimes tentatively — who we are . . . I wanted my [women's studies] students to have the book I never had: true stories of strong, woman-identified women."

I don't want to spend much of my valuable space here giving my opinions of the collection — suffice it to say, I loved it. It is an entertaining and uplifting read, and would be particularly enlightening for straight friends and relatives, especially if you suspect they are thinking of coming out. I would like to share with you some of the best passages in the collection. (Note: the quotations given have no page numbers because the advance review copy I had was not bound and numbered.)

Coming out publicly in a rural Indiana high school is described in a powerfully written piece by Mitzie Simmons titled "For You . . . For Us."

EDIRP YAG. I read the letters of my T-shirt backwards in the rearview mirror as I sit parked across the street from the high school. This is it, the first day of my senior year, my first experience with publicly coming out, and I'm scared. What the hell am I doing? Risking expulsion? Risking my future? No, I'm gaining it. Taking a deep breath, I leave the security of the car, walk briskly across the parking lot, and enter the jungle of students.

Half surprised at not being verbally attacked after walking through the door, I stop for a moment to reflect. I have no idea what to expect, from others or from myself, but I am no longer afraid. Currents of strength surge rhythmically through me; my heart swells with pride. I walk down the corridor, head up, shoulders back, reflecting my triumph in the light of my smile as I cast a forceful gaze into the eyes of each person I meet. Yes, I am gay; the rumors were right, and I'm proud of it! I feel the currents of wholeness, and I know that I will never let go of my self again.

Suddenly I stop, puzzled. Something is different in a way that I hadn't expected at all. Their eyes, once icy cold, now melt away from the fire in my own. Laughingly I wonder at how such situations can completely reverse themselves, shifting from one extreme to the opposite. Was it only yesterday that my eyes could not meet theirs?

I walk into English class and sit down at a table at Annie's side. As the other students rise to move elsewhere, I chuckle softly to myself. My problem? No, theirs. Now I can laugh at experiences that once made me cry.

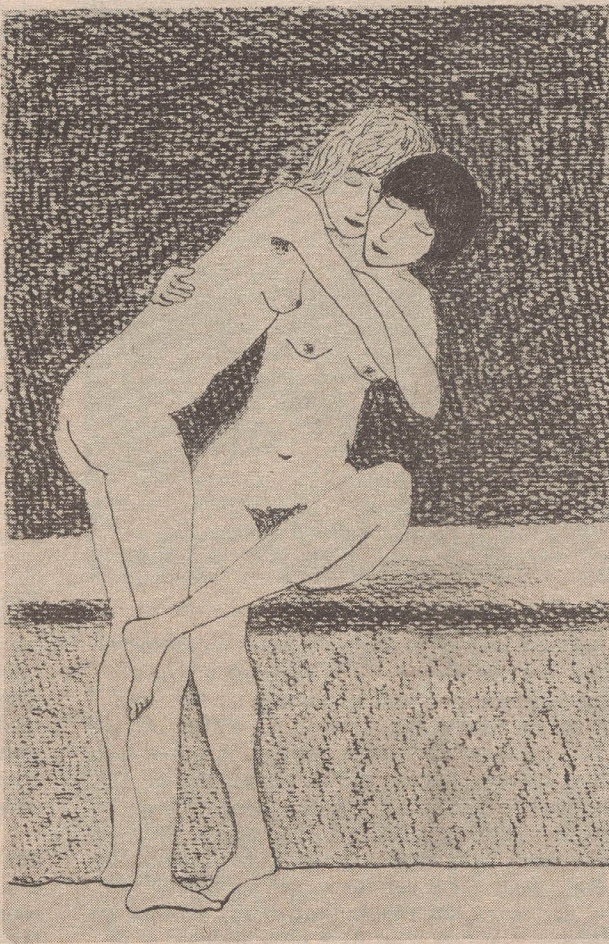
The book has several articles about lesbian Catholic girlhoods, including Jeanne Cordova's outrageous account of her sexual initiation when she was an 18 year old in a convent:

The phone rang one Sunday evening in Conventland. It was Mabel, a lay friend of Mother Superior. My fellow Sisters were in the dining room watching Peyton Place. After a lengthy discussion about nothing (later I was to learn this sort of conversation is called "flirting"), Mabel decided to come over and meet me. Mabel walked through the front door . . . I looked at her and she looked at me and we decided not to watch Peyton Place. The next thing I knew I was sitting on the couch in her apartment, she was handing me a Whiskey Sour and I was babbling out my life story with particular emphasis on the part about my gym teacher and camp counselor. . . .

I broke the vow of Obedience seven months before I was supposed to take it. I never understood what Chastity meant until the morning after. Poverty, however, I can still say seven years later, is my true calling. I can't say I really understood Mabel — she joined the convent the day I left it — I understood what we shared together.

Another section of the book includes several articles by lesbian mothers. Dpat Mattie describes how she felt when her teen-age son became a born-again Christian and refused to accept her lesbianism:

he finally says well maybe he'll come out to visit me at christmas. he does not acknowledge the other person in my life. this news if followed by more biblical quotes. he says goodbye. so do i. he has not called me mom or pat or dpat. he has without using the words been calling me sinner, queer, lost and damned. the next day i write a letter taking 5 pages to say "if you are coming to see me dpat mattie lesbian mother because you want to see me please come quickly and stay as long as you like. if on the other hand you are coming with thoughts of attempted conversions stay where you are. i have witnessed personally and through other people's experiences the pain and destruction of life and hope that



has resulted from pious bible thumping bigots. i fight that behavior every way i can." there has been no reply.

it is the price i chose to pay for me, my sanity and my freedom. he does not understand and my words make little difference. i have his pictures arranged before me on this sunday afternoon. a chubby laughing baby, a 3 year old's thrilled christmas morning, a 5 year old's hot day at the beach, an awkward gangly cracked voiced teenager, a young man i hardly recognize in the graduation gown. he is beautiful. he is probably in church. maybe praying for his sinful mother who has no name he can say.

In a piece that captures the spirit of the sixties, Jane Gurko tells of "Coming Out in Berkeley, 1967." A "hip" straight couple, Hass and Sharon, have invited her to join them in bed:

"Well," [Hass] replied eagerly, "you know how I feel about monogamy. It's too limited, it just doesn't feel right to me. Sharon knows that I have a primary commitment to her, and that isn't affected by my sleeping with other women. I'm really attracted to you, Jane, making love to you

seems right to me. If I can't have that freedom, I can't have marriage at all."

My stomach suddenly knotted, and I felt closed in. But Hass was right, wasn't he? Freedom was good. People shouldn't try to own each other. Families should be open and sharing. Everybody in Berkeley in 1967 knew that. Why did I feel a weight on me? I couldn't respond to Hass, and looked toward Sharon for help.

"Sharon?" I asked. She was stiff, but she looked up at me with dark, imploring eyes. . . .

On an impulse I reached out my foot and gently prodded her on the behind. Sharon relaxed and accepted my touch. We both forgot for the moment about Hastings and his freedom.

"I'm glad you tried that, honey," he broke in. "It takes courage to overcome these old inhibitions. I had to struggle with jealousy myself."

I felt Sharon begin to go tight again. . . . With a pang I felt this body asking a question, as the eyes had asked even from the first moment; and I realized I had answered even then. I turned back to Hastings with fresh interest.

"Of course I've been attracted to you from the start, Hass. But I like Sharon, too. I want the freedom to be warm to her, like now; in fact, I think your wife actually turns me on."

Hass beamed. "I think that's terrific. Women should be able to express themselves physically with each other." He added, "whatever you do is fine, as long as you don't exclude me."

Sharon gave me an odd smile, her eyes alight. She turned to Hass and said, "How could we promise that? We've never been there, we don't know what it feels like."

"There," he replied, "that's what I mean. If you're going to go into a big romantic fantasy, forget it. They're exclusive by definition. But physical affection, that's different."

Several of the stories recount lesbian herstory, such as Alix Dobkin's tale of how the first lesbian-produced record, "Lavender Jane Loves Women" was financed:

Kay [Gardner] and I were constantly asked, "When are you going to make a record?" One night in September 1973 during a cruise on the Hudson River for five hundred lesbians we were approached by a dozen of them who offered us enough money to make a lesbian record. It was a good place for Lavender Jane to be launched — a boatload of dancing and partying dykes listening to live music from the New Haven Women's Liberation Rock Band.

Rosemary Curb provides the most current lesbian events by describing perfectly the shock thousands of women have felt returning to the "real" world after voyaging to that lesbian wonderland at Hesperia, Michigan, the Michigan Women's Music Festival:

This morning I sat at the opening faculty meeting of the southern state college where I teach English, crossing

continued on the next page

## Warm Heart

### COLD HANDS

By Joseph Pintauro  
Simon and Schuster, New York  
344 pp., \$10.95

Reviewed by Roger Frye

Joseph Pintauro has written a first novel which displays his skills as a poet and playwright. However, he has not completely adapted these skills to the new form. The poet is a master of symbolism and imagery, and symbols serve Pintauro well in *Cold Hands*. In a season of crisis for Cello, the central figure and narrator, Pintauro writes, "Indian summer may not have tricked the oaks, but it befuddled the roses." Here Cello is a rose; at other times he is a fish; he is always befuddled. When snow falls on the roses, when a mako is beheaded, when the weaks and blues swim south, they all reflect Cello and his befuddlement.

The imagery in *Cold Hands* is sharp and entertaining, but sometimes it interrupts the narrative flow. Pintauro, the poet, creates a kaleidoscope of images which flash and disappear. He touches all of our senses with his words, but the feelings come and go: the pain of physical injury, which he brings to life as blood and shredded skin, does not linger to ache and heal.

Pintauro, the playwright as novelist, manages his props and his characters as though they were on stage. He is ever careful to keep the car running when we return to it and to litter the stoop with glass after a window is broken. He ages his characters between scenes and presents them to us newly costumed for entrance. We see Cello and his relatives in finely boxed frames. The effect is dramatic, and the technique allows the author to cover three decades of Cello's life, but it leaves the reader looking for causes that remain hidden. It leaves the reader, as well as the characters, befuddled.

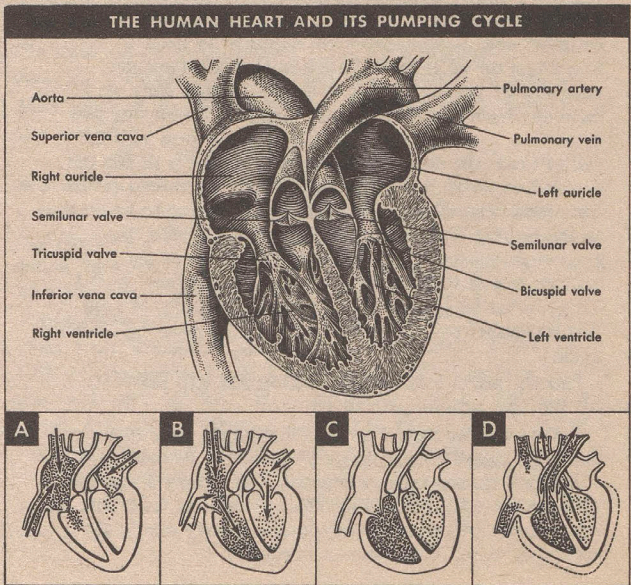
This theme of befuddlement is also enhanced by an excess of coincidence. Coincidence has been used on stage since the Greeks. However, there, it is startling; in this novel it is disenchanting. Too many times one person turns out to be another. Too many times Cello gets hit on the head. We expect a family of characters, no matter how fantastic, to interact by choice. Instead, they are assaulted by fate. If that is the purpose of the book, to

show that we are not in control of our destiny, it must be done through characters who have goals. Cello has no goals to reach; he is merely sent from one place to another.

What Cello lacks in purpose, he lacks all the more as a sexual being. He is a gangbanger, masturbator, adulterer, voyeur and father. Watch him be molested, raped and entrapped. But it is a perfunctory performance. He is led. He is trying to please. He just wants a friend. The man is unexcited and unexciting.

Barely sexual, is he even homosexual? In this book homosexuality means fear. In fear of it wives fly to England or take the children to Pennsylvania. A store owner hides under the counter. In fear of being detected a young man flees through the woods. In Gestapo-like fear the once cocky cop hunts his own kind. And of course Cello, in fear of his own sexuality, but also in fear of incest and force, rejects his identity, his love, and his closest friend.

I was frustrated by this book. I found some art in it, but I could not identify with the heroes or the theme. Some of the characters and scenes were disappointingly unbelievable. Nevertheless, the book holds promise in the way it fails, and I look forward to reading other work by Joseph Pintauro.







## Orientalism

LANDSCAPE WITH TRAVELER:  
THE PILLOW BOOK OF  
FRANCIS REEVES

By Barry Gifford  
E.P. Dutton, New York  
142 pp., \$10.95

Reviewed by Roger Frye

A perfect, little book. Read it. Pass it around. Give copies to friends. But beware! Beware of the lie (the denial of caring) in this journal from an ideal life. Don't miss the irony when it says:

Most of what goes on in the world is of little interest to me and I am most certainly of very little interest to anybody but myself, and even then I hardly matter. Which, the way I see it, is as it should be.

There are several levels to the irony depending on who you think is writing. Ostensibly the author is Francis Reeves, a forty-eight year old, gay man, making an entry in his "Pillow Book." Actually the author is Barry Gifford, a thirty-three year old, heterosexual novelist, giving us a certain perspective on life's landscape through a character he has created. On another level, you may

believe with me that the character is based on Gifford's perception of a real person who is affecting a pose of oriental detachment at a solitary point in his life. And you may see the relationship between the author and this person who captured his interest mirrored in a friendship in the book between Francis and his correspondent, Jim.

This book is fascinating. I want to recount some of the episodes — Francis' discovery of foreskins, the smell of Youskevitch's balls, the last watch at boot camp, the bus to Fire Island. Although the stories are told as true events — and many ring true in their details — some are so improbable that they must have been invented or at least appropriated from gay lore. (How many of us have really had sex in a Piper Cub?) The problem is to recognize that Francis Reeves and his author are entertaining us. Read the stories in this context.

I recommend this book, yet I denounce the denial of caring in it. Francis leaves his lover to avoid feeling jealousy. He sends his wife away when she becomes depressed. He turns inside to find a simple happiness in solitude. He rejects brotherhood for books and plum wine and music. He composes lists for a perfect life, for life on a desert island. Damn it, Francis, you dead man! Wake up! Give a suck! Why are you so serene? Is this the male menopause? Did Ilya hurt you that bad? Are you secretly dying of cancer? Stop lying!

Barry Gifford depicts a sublime sensibility, a character you may admire or want to gose. Perhaps the best praise is that Francis Reeves seems real.

## Dinner Party

Continued from Page 3

reproductions seems to be distorted. Chicago is an artist whose ability to manipulate color and texture has been demonstrated in works like the "Great Ladies" series. These talents are indeed expressed in "The Dinner Party", but they cannot be appreciated from reproductions.

Readers of Chicago's earlier book, *Through the Flower* (1975), know her to be both a dedicated artist and a feminist. She was instrumental in developing the first women's art program and was a co-founder of the Women's Building in Los Angeles. Chicago has done a great deal to establish a reputation for women's art, and "The Dinner Party" clearly demonstrates her commitment to the rediscovery of women's history. But above all she is an artist — and her art must be experienced directly. The book tells us a great deal, but it cannot substitute for the work of art itself.

"The Dinner Party" has encountered numerous difficulties in the year since its completion. Cancellations of scheduled exhibition dates by museums, high storage costs and the dangers of transporting the fragile plates have plagued Chicago and the Through the Flower Corporation. The costs for installing and exhibiting the piece, which include the necessary security, are extremely high. Nevertheless, a group has formed to try to raise the money to bring "The Dinner Party" to the Boston Center for the Arts. People interested in working on this project in any capacity should call the Center or write them at 539 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02116. The work of this committee and others like it is obviously crucial if people are to see "The Dinner Party" as it was meant to be seen.

This work is important for a number of reasons. First, it is beautiful and filled with meaning. Many works of art fit either one or the other of these categories, but rarely both. Second, it is a brave attempt to express the experience of women in a large-scale and — ideally — highly visible project. Chicago has developed a language of art and a personal style over the last twenty years, and she uses her skills here to comment on the oppression of women and their contribution to history. The piece is intended for a wide audience, and Chicago has clearly struggled to make her art accessible. This is an admirable undertaking, and she has been largely successful.

"The Dinner Party" is a unique work of art, conceived by one woman and executed by many people. It breaks new ground for art and for women's history. I would encourage readers who have not already done so to read the book, and those who have leafed through once or twice should go back and read other parts (no one could read it from cover to cover). But beware — the story is exciting, the biographies of women are fascinating, and the plates are interesting, but the piece should be seen first hand. We must all support the efforts of the Committee to Bring "The Dinner Party" to Boston, and encourage the work of women artists who, like Chicago, struggle to express their feminism and their experience as women through various media.

## Path

continued from preceding page

and uncrossing my panti-hosed legs and folding and unfolding my arms over the large pewter labyris dangling down the center of the same prim white T-shirt in which I stormed the capitol for equal rights a month and a half ago. This morning a Chamber of Commerce representative assured the rows of polished bald heads that the business community is concerned not only about business expansion but about preserving our American way of life, Christian morality and the family. Knowing the hatred and bigotry behind such glittering exhibitions of patriotism, I shudder.

Less than a week ago I was glowing with vitality at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. To cross the miles and centuries from that woody womanspace, with beautiful Amazons leaping naked through the trees and dancing barefoot in the grass, to this bastion of male power paralyzes my womansoul. This morning I wore a long billowy India print skirt with intricate designs in lavender, mustard, indigo and ivory. Perhaps I should have encased my womansoftness in an exoskeleton of armor. I feel in my own flesh the loss of the ancient matriarchy. My labyris, with "Remember the Future" etched on its back, consoles me here in patriarchal exile. I know in my nerves and tendons that I am not part of this oppressive system even though I endure imprisonment here.

The anthology concludes with a most unusual piece, "Hudson Bay Journal" by Judith Niemi, a diary of a canoe trip from Minneapolis to the Arctic wilderness of Canada taken by six lesbians:

DAY 24 FOX RIVER. HOME FREE. One last day of rapids, and Kristin and I wanted a chance to paddle together. (Moon had warned us we could escalate excitement, egg each other on.) We are all being very cautious now — Kris, subdued, warns us to keep lifejackets on while eating lunch in sight of the water. And still we get our chance at a rapids bigger than we'd have any right to choose to run. Scouting ahead, the two of us find ourselves in a place where, unless we wait for fall to lower the water level, our only choice is to run the rapids that we've just yelled to everyone else is out of the question. We wait for a potential rescue canoe to be lined to the bottom and then push off, and I'm afraid, but even more excited and pleased. Washing out at the bottom in a canoe half full of water I'm intensely joyful. This is what being alive and a dyke is all about. If I can just remember this moment clearly, I may never be afraid again.

Judith Niemi's reflections after her trip seem to speak for this whole anthology:

One way we were that month only got clear to me later. We didn't decide things by majority, of course, and often we didn't even use consensus. We simply knew who to listen to. And if the usual voice of caution, or caring, or whatever we needed wasn't heard, I knew one of the rest of us would say what was needed.

## Lost in Space

THE NEW GULLIVER

by Esme Dodderidge  
Taplir Publishing Company  
247 pp., \$9.95

Reviewed by Pat M. Kuras

English writer, Esme Dodderidge's first novel, *The New Gulliver*, teems with an irony that quickly becomes tedious. Her novel concerns a male member of an "experimental kind of airship," who somehow finds himself a second-class citizen in an unpleasant matriarchal world. Says the unfortunate airman, "I am resolved to set down as true an account as is possible of life in this strange land, where circumstance has placed me. Of the manner of my arrival here, I shall say little." So be it. What he does tell us, is that he has lost consciousness in his airship, only to awaken safely tucked into a bed of a household in Capovola. Even his host(esses) relay no information as to how they found him or how he became a member of their household. This gaping hole in the narrative is enough to make science fiction buffs, as well as other readers, angry and frustrated. But author Dodderidge, speaking through the guise of the airman, expects us to overlook this early, major flaw, and happily proceed with her fable. A tall order, indeed. If she had even given the airman a few sparse sentences groping for theories on his predicament — time warps, black holes, magnetic fields — I could excuse her novel's feeble opening. As it stands, the novelist is unduly trying my patience.

The second major problem, also noticeable in the book's opening pages, is simply the style in which the airman's "manuscript" is written. The airman speaks not as a space age scientist, but more like a Victorian age explorer, such as a Jules Verne character or even Swift's original Gulliver.

The book's story line concerns this new Gulliver's attempts to live in this strange world. In Capovola, men are sex objects, inferior to women, etc. (Imagine every obstacle and prejudice that is thrown on women and reverse the situation so that men are the victims. That is the gist of *The New Gulliver*.) I have often heard that the English have what is called a "dry sense of humor." After reading a book such as this one, I am inclined to believe that that dry sense of humor has actually evaporated. I do not find the



plight of real-life, everyday women very comical, so Dodderidge's attempt to make this seem humorous is aggravating. Her protagonist, Klemo, the lost airman, is a condescending twit who, despite his usurped male supremacy, maintains his racist and sexist ideologies. Thus, it is impossible to sympathize with his "ordeal."

What Dodderidge attempts to do in her novel has already been accomplished with far more grace and wit in Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*. Russ vividly paints the fallacies of male-female co-existence/struggles in our modern (circa 1969) world; the episodes involving Janet Evason, the ignorant, arrogant visitor from Whileaway, are far greater in satiric achievement than the plodding banalities of *The New Gulliver*, which fails as both entertainment and satire.



## Barrie

Continued from Page 1

Nico (the youngest of the five brothers) the last word: "Of all the men I have ever known, Barrie was the wit-tiest, and the best company. He was also the least interested in sex. He was a darling man. He was an innocent; which is why he could write *Peter Pan*." (The review of the book in the *New York Times* complained that Freud had ruined the concept of platonic love and that *all* relationships were now (incorrectly) being regarded as sexual. This love, which the reviewer calls "innocent, asexual, natural, and dignified," is what occurred between Barrie and his boys, Housman and his "lad," and Tennyson and Arthur Hallam. This is an odd notion and relegates sexuality back to its position as a "basal emotion," undignified, and nothing akin to love — which in turn, has nothing to do with people of one's own sex, or underaged children.)

The question of James Barrie's sexuality has been much discussed. He was not a tall man (and bemoaned the fact that his height prevented him from becoming a favorite with women) and stood just over five feet. Alison Lurie, in a *New York Review of Books* piece on Barrie (Feb. 8, 1975) has suggested that he may have had a glandular disorder and never got completely through to the other side of puberty. Whatever the case, his notebook entries show a certain mistrust of women and marriage: "—Greatest horror — dream I am married — wake up screaming;" "—He never has contact with a woman — If he had this might have made his exalt less in making women love him;" "—Perhaps the curse of his life that he never had a woman;" "—Morning after engagement, a startling thing to waken up & remember you're tied for life." In his notebook, during his honeymoon, he jotted down: "—Our love has brought me nothing but misery. —Boy all nerves. 'You are very ignorant'. —How? Must we instruct you in the mysteries of love-making?"

In contrast to these there are the letters to the boys and his writings about them. When George was away fighting, Barrie had written: "Of course I don't need this to bring home the danger you are always in more or less, but I do seem to be sadder today than ever, and more and more wishing you were a girl of 21 instead of a boy, so I could say the things to you that are always in my heart. For four years I have been waiting for you to become 21 & a little more, so we could get closer and closer to each other, without any words needed." After Michael's death he wrote to the boy's tutor at Oxford: "It may seem strange to you that I did not write to you long ago, but what happened was in a way an end of me, and practically anything may be forgiven me now. He had been the one great thing in my life for many years, and though there are many things to do, they are very trivial."

There can be little doubt that James Barrie was a boy lover. The question of his acting out physically these feelings is besides the point and does not negate or detract from the emotion.

Barrie also took many photos of the boys — quite a few of them nude — and these are reproduced plentifully in the book. They have a charm that is rarely seen in children's photos. You can sense a relationship between the boys and the photographer, a love, trust and openness that is missing from most family pictures. If he were living in Boston today, he could be sent to jail for as long as twenty years for them (Victorian sensibility explains only so much in our society).

There is also good reason to believe that several of the boys had homosexual affairs — especially Michael, who drowned with a boy friend described as his constant companion, and whose best friend, Roger Senhouse (the first translator of Colette) later became involved with Lytton Strachey. *J.M. Barrie & The Lost Boys* is best when it describes the relationship and intimacy that existed between the brothers and their guardian. Although it skirts the discussion of sexuality that would have made it a more interesting book, it rarely tries to moralize or deny. Despite the *New York Times*, it is impossible to separate sex from friendship and love (although it is possible to repress it, which is an altogether different matter) and love is what existed between James Barrie and the boys.

Perhaps the most interesting question that the book raises is how the five Llewelyn-Davies boys were an inspiration to Barrie in the writing of *Peter Pan*. How he borrowed from them is clear, not only ideas and dialogue, but also sheer energy to continue. However, the question of what that meant to him, as a writer and a person, is left unexplored.

Barrie was one of the most respected writers of his day. He is thought of today mainly as a children's writer (a rather patronizing term) and known more for the Broadway musical and Disney adaptation of *Peter Pan* than the original play itself. Readers between the wars were rejecting what they saw as old fashioned in favor of the hard edged cynicism of Evelyn Waugh and the very modern psychological complexities of Virginia Woolf. Barrie was thrown out as sentimental, Victorian, and dated, when in actuality his work is made of much stronger, tougher and harsher than people imagined. (It also did not help that he was extravagantly praised in his heyday and this caused something of a backlash.) With more of a perspective, I think that Barrie's complexities and attitudes may seem more modern today than 20 years ago.

Critic Leslie Fiedler has pointed out that adults have often relegated works of literature that they are uncomfortable with to the children's shelf in an attempt to somehow defuse them. He cites *Huckleberry Finn*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Moby Dick*, saying that many adults

have the notion that they are "children's books" and have little idea of what is in them. The idea that children's literature should be light, carefree, and idyllically emptyheaded is a fairly recent one, a response to the early instructional primers, and Goodie-Two Shoes moralizing of the late Victorians. James Barrie wrote very little for children — of his 15 novels and 20 plays, only the *Peter Pan* play and two novels about Peter were really written for children — and these are quite remarkable especially considering their time.

Generally thought to be a simple play about the joys of childhood, *Peter Pan* is actually a complexly constructed meditation on the problems and realities of growing up and not growing up. Unlike the pixie-like Mary Martin, Barrie's Peter Pan is a selfish, somewhat cruel boy/imp, closer to his amoral, mischievous Greek name bearer than the fragile fairies of the Victorian imagination. Barrie refers to Peter several times in the stage directions as "heartless," and he is quick to make demands for himself without thought for other people. But he is also lonely and afraid of others; Wendy goes to hug him in the first act and he recoils saying "No one must ever touch me." Barrie adds, in a stage direction, that [for the rest of the play] no one ever does. At the play's end Wendy comes again to Never Land for spring cleaning and Peter has forgotten all their adventures, the lost boys, and even Tinkerbell; Peter's eternal youth is only for himself. Act Three ends with Peter, in a tight situation, stoically saying, "To die must be an awfully big adventure." As Wendy leaves Never Land for the last time at the play's end she tries to hug Peter again, then withdraws. Barrie adds in a stage direction, "It has something to do with the riddle of his being. If he could get the hand of things his cry might be 'To live would be an awfully big adventure!'," but he can never quite get the hang of it, and so no one is as gay as he." The bliss of childhood is inextricably mixed with a desire for death.

Peter Pan is ripe for all sorts of Freudian analysis. Both Peter and Hook's band of pirates want Wendy to be their mother. Peter must kill Hook (actually the crocodile gets to eat him — very castration-anxiety), the father, in order to have Wendy. The boy fairies are mauve, the girls white, and some colors don't know what sex they are; and of course, there is the transvestism of a woman playing the part of Peter himself. Brigid Brophy has wittily dissected the play in her *Fifty Works of English Literature We Could Do Without*, and sees it as the literary equivalent to Freud's scheme in the *Interpretation of Dreams*. Her major complaint is that Barrie interrupts the suspension of disbelief and makes the audience morally responsible for Tinkerbell's life by having them applaud if they believe in fairies. All these suggestions aside, *Peter Pan* is revealing about how Barrie viewed childhood, and children. The boy who would not grow up (some London papers during the divorce referred to him, snidely, as "the boy who couldn't go up") and refused to be a man was banished to a life of loneliness. Unfortunately Barrie wasn't as heartless as Peter Pan and needed, and lost, the boys whom he loved.

In 1920 Barrie's last successful play was produced in London. *Mary Rose* is a variation on the Peter Pan theme with an ageless mother replacing the ageless boy. If *Peter Pan* has solemn streaks, *Mary Rose* is its underside; it is eternal youth soured, the Never Land becomes a hell. One of Barrie's best works, it remains unknown to most readers, despite a recent London stage production and a frequently voiced desire by Alfred Hitchcock to film it. Told in a complex series of flashbacks, the play tells the story of Mary Rose, who as a young girl, was "lost" for several days on a remote Scottish island. She remembered nothing of her experience and seemed perfectly normal, though somewhat childish when found. She returns to the island years later with her husband and is "lost" again, only to return 25 years later, the same age. Her infant son has now grown and left home, her husband is an old man, and she is faced with an empty life. The final scene is a confrontation between the ghost of Mary Rose, doomed to roam the house, and her now grown son, whom she can barely remember and cannot forgive for having left.

The themes of *Peter Pan* are more cleverly drawn here; childhood is a state of awful innocence, death lurks behind all growth, and nothing can be avoided. Both *Peter Pan* and *Mary Rose* are plays filled with the sadness of the inevitable. *Mary Rose* may be Barrie's most mature work; in it, he is consciously able to draw upon what seems to be unconscious or subliminal in his other plays and novels. The playfulness of the earlier work is missing, just as the youth of the Llewelyn-Davies boys gradually was replaced by death and adulthood; if Barrie could not remain a child himself, he could remain one with them. Andrew Birkin's book is a good record of his attempts and struggles with this evitability.

But beneath all this sadness is still a defiant call: "I won't grow up" says Peter Pan, and with some reason. Peter does not want to grow up — which means to go to school, to get a job, to go to war, get married, have children — in short, to be a man. His revolt is, in part, against the institutionalized heterosexuality and regimentation of the world. Psychiatrists have been telling gay people for years that their sexuality is caused by a refusal to "grow up" and become adult, to achieve a "mature" sexuality (i.e. reproduce). I suspect that, on some level, this was also Barrie's "problem": he did not like the world he saw and did not want to "grow up". Perhaps, like many, many homosexuals, he was able to create his own world in his writing, in his ability to fantasize. His easy ability to be with children and his natural com-

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munication with them came from his ability to let them be children and not demand that they grow up, or place expectations upon them. Unfortunately, he tried to live vicariously through them and negate his own self and feelings.

Both *Peter Pan* and *Mary Rose* are records of this inner life — the joy and the pain. When Mary Rose drifts into the inner world of the island she hears incredibly sweet, beautiful music. Barrie had heard music, but knew, at that stage in his life, that there was pain connected with it also. Part of the problem was that he could not imagine an alternative to the world of childhood and the given adult world. He had to make a choice, and by choosing childhood he also chose its mother fixations, oedipal conflicts, and childish self concern.

Gay people have the opportunity to create their own lives; to avoid the pressures of enforced heterosexuality, to strive for something better. We must find ways to grow, without "growing up," to mature, and not become "adults." James Barrie's problem was that he was caught between two worlds and could not see a third. His love of the boys was deep and sincere, but it could not rescue him from his situation. *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* is a love story with a sad ending. Sad, because Barrie could hear the sweet music, but could not find out where it was coming from. By creating our own lives, we know the music is us.

## American Poetry

Continued from Page 3

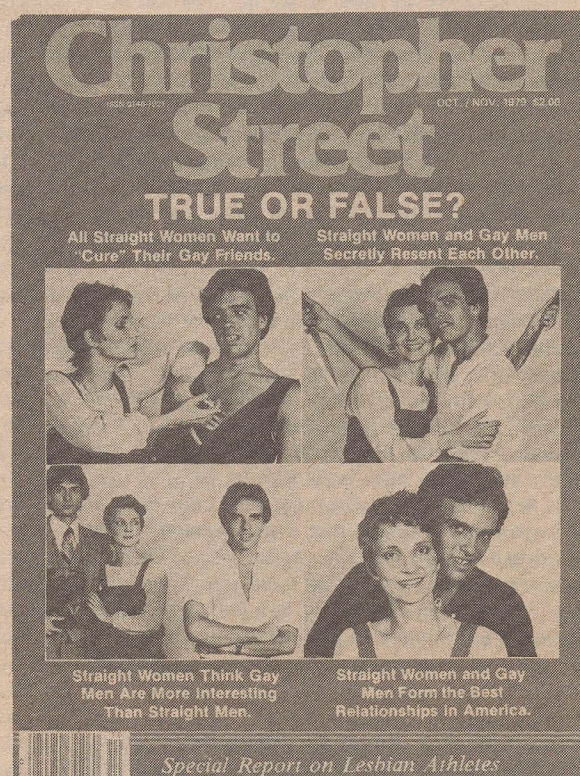
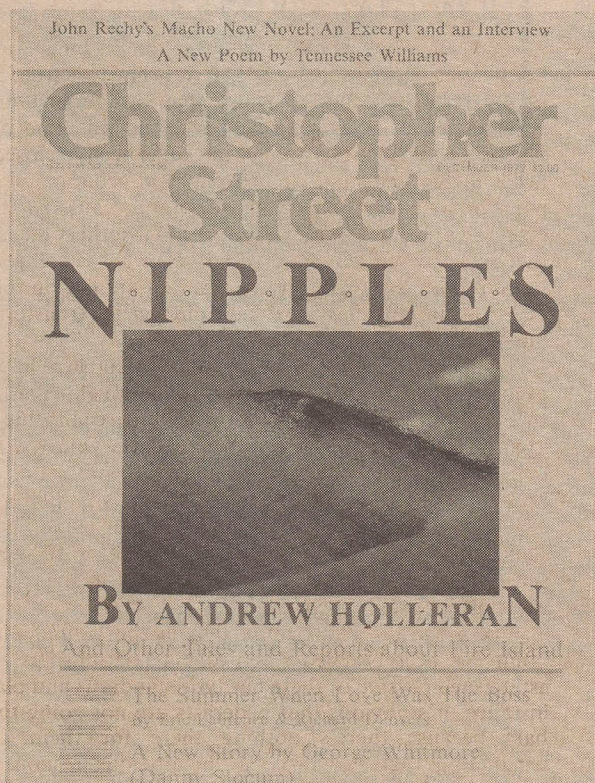
uneven" and "not always highly discriminating"), because surely, along with the political fervor Martin might have found within such publications, he should also have discovered the "overstatement and vulgarity" that he has found in Whitman. Would he allow that these are now, too, as he admits they were for Whitman, "probably necessary and even salutary"? Because of the exclusivity and respectability of his subject choices in the final section of this book, Martin may have to take responsibility not only for sounding the depths of a literary stream, but for having had a hand in directing its flow.

Jonathan Katz, in the introduction to his monumental *Gay American History* states: "This book is significantly not a product of academia; it does not play it safe; it is rough at the edges, radical at heart." For good or ill, that is not a comment one can imagine Martin making about his *Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*. Certainly it is a book the literary establishment will have to take seriously. Thanks to Martin, for whom it must have taken considerable courage to write this book, the *real* Whitman is within it, bearing his witness into the hearts and minds of teacher and student alike that the only alternative to making heterosexual war — in the opinion of indisputably America's greatest poet — is making homosexual love. That is as radical an accomplishment as we have a right to expect from a member of the academy!

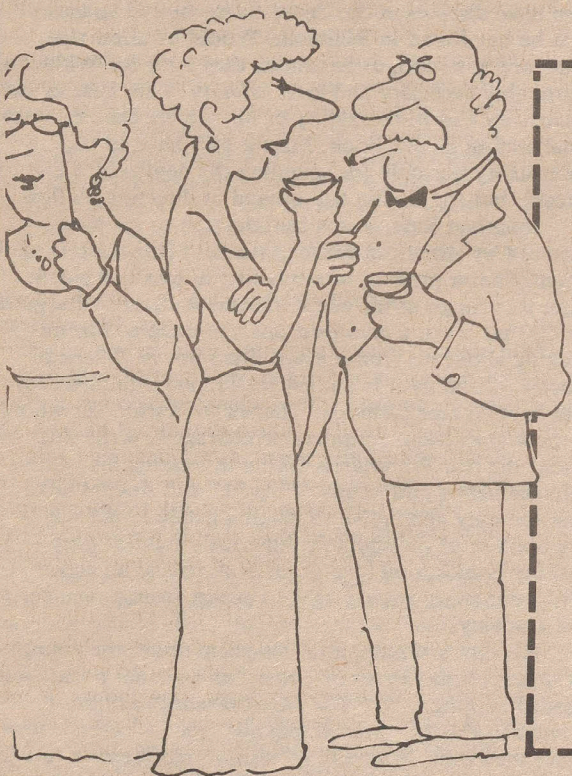
Howard's Whitman, in his poem about the young Whitman, calls *Leaves of Grass* "an essential poem — it needed making. . . ." *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* "needed making" too — perhaps now more than ever. Whitman's "vision" represents a revival of alternatives at a time when war-mongering heterosexual men are "trying to out-macho each other," as even *Time* magazine claims. Crane's interest in artistic "form" is appealing at a time when "style queens" think they are making their lives "aesthetic" by adorning themselves with the appropriate designer scarf! This is a book everyone can profit from. But beyond that, of course, it is a book "essential" to the history of "gay liberation," and it is "essential" too to the history of American Literature, which *everyone* will now finally be able to read.



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