

The Lavender Salon Reader

The newsletter of the Lavender Reading Salon
A gay & lesbian reading club

Volume 1 Number 6

Michael L. Nitz, editor & publisher

November 1993

Meeting Highlights

October's Meeting Capsule

October's meeting had a great turnout with lots of new faces. We are glad to see the newcomers and hope you will come again!

For those who missed the meeting at Michael's, we watched and discussed the movie Sunday, Bloody Sunday. The film, directed by John Schlesinger in 1971, surprised us by how much the times had changed concerning what was acceptable. In one scene children were smoking pot in bed with Jackson & Head (who were babysitting for the weekend). Although Jackson was taken aback when she realized it was pot the children were smoking, it wasn't considered much of an issue.

There was also discussion of how the film was received in the Fox Valley when it was initially released. Many a loud gasp was heard when Peter Finch kisses Murray Head on the lips! Quite risqué back then.

November's Meeting Notice

The November meeting will be held at Marge's house on the 21st. Marge's address is 385 Willow Lane. We will discuss Joe Keenan's very funny comedy Blue Heaven. The meeting will begin at 6p.m. Again there is no special theme for the potluck. Hope to see you all there! [A map to Marge's house is on page 3.]

December's Meeting Preview

The book for December's discussion is Geoff Ryman's black comedy, *Was*.

Copies of the book are available for loan at the local public libraries, and for purchase through any bookstore.

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Critical Issues and Trends: Is homophobia hazardous to lesbian and gay health?

by Margaret L. Colucciello, PhD. RN

[Editor's note: I'm very pleased to present this thought-provoking article by our own member Marge Colucciello. This is the first in a series of three she has promised to publish here in *The Lavender Salon Reader*.]

This is one of a series of articles discussing homophobia prevalent in our Health Care Delivery System. The fifth edition (1993) of a very reputable and popular nursing text: R.B. Murray & J.P. Zentner's Nursing Assessment and Health Promotion published by Appleton and Lange of Norwalk, Ct. defines homosexuals as:

"people who are regularly aroused by and who engage in sexual activity with members of their own sex." (p. 435)

This compartmentalized definition written in this well-known text provides a weak interpretation and dimension within the context of sex leaving the reader with a distorted view of homosexuality. Identifying individuals solely through the choice of sexual partners ignores such diversity and demeans us by conveying the impression that persons with homosexual preferences are interested only in the sexual aspects of personal relationships. That is, when the term or label homosexual is applied, other aspects of an individual's personality and character are overlooked.

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Although health professionals have become increasingly sensitive to the unique needs of many minority groups, a review of the literature indicates that we have failed to adequately address lesbian and gay health issues. As a consequence of homophobia in the health care system, the health needs of lesbians and gay men are seldom recognized or met. Homophobia prohibits an accurate census of and access to unbiased information about homosexuality. Very few pages within medical and nursing texts, or articles for that matter, are devoted to lesbian and gay health education and issues.

Homophobia is a term used to identify the irrational fear of homosexuality pervasive in our society. This fear is sometimes exacerbated by the fear of homosexual urges within oneself. Many homosexuals are emotionally and physically assaulted by people who believe that homosexuals deserve mistreatment. Dimensions to this aversion include stereotyping attitudes and behaviors; feelings of threat and acts which restrict the civil liberties of homosexuals.

The role that homophobia fosters, I believe, includes a professional stigma placed on research on homosexuality health needs. An example of an homophobic reaction to conducting research on homosexual health is that there is no need to provide special services. In other words, the notion that lesbians and gay men are no different from other individuals prevails. This "denial of difference" attack fails to recognize the unique needs of the homosexual community and ignores the range and diversity of gay culture.

Homophobia in health education is a serious barrier to effective practice. Health educators have an important role in determining effective ways to foster positive attitudes toward lesbian and gay men. At the very least, sexuality education, health curricula and textbooks require vigilant monitoring for heterosexist bias. The prejudice against homosexuality that prevails within our health care delivery system is both covert and overt causing stress. This has further generated a hidden lesbian and gay culture that few straight health professionals know about. Because of the lack of thought on and knowledge about our culture, many health care professionals hesitate to assess our needs or even have the appropriate charts or forms to address our health care needs for proper documentation.

In my next article on lesbian and gay health issues, I will address specific areas of health needs commonly avoided and present case situations illustrating homophobic reactions related to our health care.

[For further information on homophobia in the health care system contact Dr. Colucciello at 414-729-9346]

1993 Lambda Winners!

Children's & Young Adult Books

📖 *When Heroes Die* by Penny Raife Durant*

Gay Men's Anthologies

📖 *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* by Randall Kenan*

Gay Men's Mystery

📖 *The Hidden Law* by Michael Nava*

Gay Men's Nonfiction

📖 *Becoming a Man* by Paul Monette*

Gay Men's Poetry

📖 *Counting Myself Lucky* by Edward Field Black Sparrow*

Gay Men's Science Fiction/Fantasy

📖 *China Mountain Zhang* by Maureen McHugh*

Gay & Lesbian Humor

📖 *Dykes to Watch Out For: the sequel* by Alison Bechdel

Lesbian Anthologies

📖 *The Persistent Desire* edited by Joan Nestle*

Lesbian Fiction

📖 *Running Fiercely Toward a High Thin Sound* by Judith Katz*

Lesbian Mystery (tie)

📖 *Crazy for Loving* by Jaye Maiman* and *Two-bit Tango* by Elizabeth Pincus*

Lesbian Nonfiction

📖 *Eleanor Roosevelt (volume 1)* by Blanche Weisen Cook*

Lesbian Poetry

📖 *Undersong* by Audre Lorde*

Lesbian Science Fiction/Fantasy

📖 *Ammonite* by Nicola Griffith*

Gay & Lesbian Small Press Book Award

📖 *Memories That Smell Like Gasoline* by David Wojnarowicz

* copies of these books are available at the Appleton Public Library.

The Queer Paradox

a review by Abba A. Solomon

The Culture of Desire: Paradox and Perversity in Gay Lives Today

by Frank Browning
1993, Crown
\$20.00, Hardcover

Books on gay American culture have the task of blind men describing an elephant. One author will feel men hung like elephants; another will discover elephantine communal memory, with identity passed down from David and Jonathan, Alexander the Great, Native American berdaches, and Karl Ulrichs.

Like Edmund White's 1980 *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America*, Browning's *The Culture of Desire* is a personal survey about gay men, not a survey approach with footnotes and index.

In the tradition of gay essay, Browning talks about what and who he knows, describing his respectable mainstream life as a National Public Radio journalist, a life which also included making it in parks and baths.

Do straight people read these books about gays, and what do they make of us, and our willingness to write about our sexual acts?

A major gender-role shifting is happening all over society. It's hard

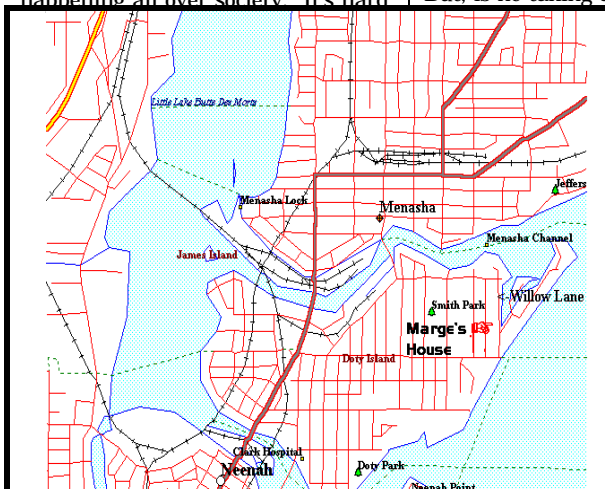
for us to be aware of how fluid things are when we're in the middle of it: homoeroticization of advertisements directed at men, fluidity of what it is to be a "man" or "gay" or "normal."

Browning engages in provocative discussions of the whiteness, blondness and urbanness of gay media ideals, and of inherent conflicts between the pursuit of community and the exploration of desire. Those gay men who pursue a radical, transgressive sexuality don't coexist easily with those who want to assimilate. A paradox when established in the same person.

Browning pursues the next generation, the queer successors of gay elders; rebel young men and women buying as thrift-store satire clothing from the golden days of the author; presenting extensive journal excerpts from a Queer Nationalist "boy"; building wild new worlds outside of traditional signs and ritual and wardrobe.

In a chapter on parties, pageants and parades, which Browning calls "Rituals of Deliverance," *Culture of Desire* seriously develops a theory about the "ritual" meaning of gay parties and pageants, and floats the idea that Halloween and Mardi Gras-type festivals, meldings of carnal and spiritual experience, have meaning that most of America, Wonderbreeding fast as it can, is missing.

But, is he taking an idea too far? To



Neenah
385 Willow Lane

quote Browning in another context, about taking clever ideas too far: "gay propaganda might easily claim that men who get fucked are the anointed liberators of a world in chains", a notion so far from sense or reality that it hardly deserves note.

After frankly describing and wondering about gay culture and

Member Listing

Barb
Dick
Gregory
Jeff
Jennifer
Len & Ken
Marge
Michael
Sandy & Debbie
Sheila
Tim & Pete
Tom & Andy
Tom & Fred

chosen- family- building, *Culture of Desire* gets theoretical to my taste but not to everyone's: Therein lies the essence of camp sensibility, of queer sensibility: intimate acknowledgement that there is no centered, secure self; that the modern self is a fluid fiction. To that end, Susan Sontag argued, camp spoke most directly to the universal human condition. Little wonder that homosexuals stood in relation to art as post-Holocaust Jews stood to the modern moral abyss.

As the post-modernists would have it, the contemporary construction of identity is totally fluid, Browning says. The courage to be queer is not just to be genuine and throw off masks, but to understand the mask is the queer genius, and to understand, "In the culture of desire there are no safe spaces." In that, pity the poor kid who comes out as gay with nothing inside of which he is sure. An ephemeral, mercurial identity is a pleasure for those with self-knowledge, but a snare for the earnest who don't understand that their role is subject to continuous re-writing.

Alluding to Foucault, Wilde and Sontag, he says that gays, "Employing wit and the critical parody of camp... unravel the hidden forgeries of their own inherited cultures and then self-consciously construct new cultural forgeries they know are destined to dissolve. That is

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the essence of desire in the queer paradox. To persevere is to disappear. The community of identity exists only in the state of transformation.”

Browning says, “The contemporary construction of identity is totally fluid. Despite years of Bible-thumping assault, divorcees have been resurrected from fallen Jezebels...

The ground of normalcy that had once so fixed their identification was no longer recognizable... the image of the black man is constructed of the relation between black and white people in America... so Queer as a disdained minority of forbidden desire exists only in its relation to the straight majority.”

Discussing aesthetic and provocative homoerotic images used in

marketing, Browning asks, how do straight men respond to the plainly homoerotic Calvin Klein underwear ads?... straight American men are responding to the ambiguity of desire. . . they know that the subject and object of desire are unclear, diffuse, disturbing... the ad writers for Calvin Klein, Johnny Walker, and Levi Strauss have shown that what it means to be straight is no longer clear. Maybe Browning believes, to