

The Gay Canadian Word

by Jim MacSwain

Gay literature in Canada offers a wide spectrum of various temperments, moods and personal opinions. The most "famous" of our gay writers is John Herbert whose *Fortune and Men's Eyes* has made the grand circuit from out-of town trial-run to international movie. Along with that other international hit, *The Boys In the Band*, it deals with the gay theme of coming out, only this time the theme is played against a background of prison brutality ending in rape. Like the *Boys In the Band*, however, even though the righteous anger directed against prison conditions is honest, it fails to lift its melodramatic pathos into tragedy, leaving the viewer, whether gay or straight knowing that his or her fear has been exploited. Rather than having that fear exorcised so that we are enlightened, the author tends to confirm the fear and induce a sense of impotence and frustration. Of course whoever said that an author must rejuvenate our lives with a vision of hope. However, if we turn to Michael Trembley, a more recent Canadian playwright, and especially to *Hosanna* his most avowed gay play, the theme of coming out is given a deeper metaphorical treatment, and in the end a more meaningful climax. *Hosanna*, a man, decides to dress as Cleopatra on Hallowe'en and go to the party given by his other drag queen friends at the club they frequent. The friends between themselves, because of jealous reasons, decide to all dress as Cleopatra in order to humiliate him. Even *Hosanna's* man, Raymond, is in the know. But the humiliation backfires; *Hosanna* realizes that the illusion his existence is built upon cannot achieve the love he needs to have.

"I'm a man, Raymond. If I ran out of there like that, tumbling down the stairs almost breaking my bloody neck, if I ran out, Raymond, it's because...I'm not a woman....And you're going to have to get used to that."

The revelation, although seemingly artificial, is real and *Hosanna* is reborn. The hope is refreshingly candid and the play stands as a positive reinforcement of coming out.

Turning from the here and now conflicts of the theatre we come to the more reflective and lyrical admissions of the poets. Our first poet, E.A. Lacey, has recently published a book of poems, *Path of Snow*, an anthology containing poems written from 1951 to 1973. Escaping the

bitter winters and equally frigid minds of his native Canada, he roams the hot countries of Central and South America in a delirium of sensuality. Against this background of wine and boys, the dominant theme is of the passing of time and the devastation of beauty ending in death.

"No, now I know it does not die, it will stay with me. I will die, a worn-out animal, who've had my pleasures --having, being had in many ways--most, holding close brown bodies, until night shall close."

Lacey's lyrical long lines, singing of the grotesqueness of life, are, at their best an invocation to the god of death so that death is made meaningful. At other times, the irony fails, leaving us with an aging faggot bewailing his fate; a melodramatic dirge that grates on the nerves.

A more accessible poet is Ian Young, who stayed at home in Toronto: has published several books of poetry, has initiated the establishment of an all gay publishing firm called *Catalyst* and is the editor of an excellent anthology of gay poetry intitled *The Male Muse*. His latest book of poems intitled *Common-or-Garden gods*, published 1976, contains his very personal gentle poems mainly dealing with autobiographical meetings and farewells with men of the past and of the present.

"Leaving you with friends that night at the farmhouse, kissing you good-bye and walking into stillness-

The poems are pervaded by a hush, a slowing down; images of rain, snow, the photograph, the womb of the bed, the stills of lovers lying in warm embrace and silent: these contribute to create a world of meditative acceptance based clearly on the Japanese haiku that Young must love.

"Your naked chest breathing....nipples....corks bobbing...on a hot sweet sea."

Young is one of the most positive of gay poets. Even though, like Lacey, he is aware of the passing of time, it is the moment of joyous innocence that guides him in the affirmation of his gayness. Perhaps because Lacey moves ever on to his next boy; Young, although probably not monogamist, seems to have formed a lasting relationship to a man named Richard, the man to whom these poems are dedicated. Although Lacey and Young differ in tone and content, they both continue the romantic tradition of

personal responsibility and personal freedom. On the one hand they have few direct political metaphors and on the other, they have not experimented with any concrete or sound or surreal poems. In some sense their poetry can almost be too sweet, too gentle to withstand the terrors of the twentieth century. This is only a criticism in passing, not to be taken too seriously. Both these men are honest poets; their art worthy of their time and place.

Other gay poets are usually published by the small presses: these include Talonbooks with David Watmough and Scott Wilson, New Star Books with Stan Persky, Coach House with David Dawson, Alice Press with Paul Maurice, Catalyst with Grahm Jackson, Oswell Blakeston, Gavin Dillard, Michael Higgins, Wayne McNeil and Tom Meyer. There is also an excellent gay novelist, Scott Symons, whose gay novels, *Place d'Armes* and *Civic Square*, are published by McClelland and Stewart.

Lastly, one of the best non-fiction books, written about what it means to be a gay writer in the past, a book by Jane Rule intitled *Lesbian Images*.

"This book is not intended to be a comprehensive literary or cultural history of Lesbians. It is, rather, a common reader-or not so uncommon reader - a statement of my own attitudes toward lesbian experience as measured against the images made by other woman writers in their work and /or lives."

The women discussed include Radclyffe Hall, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Vita Sackville-West, Collette, Margaret Anderson and others. The information is pertinent from both a sexual and artistic viewpoint by a woman who is herself a writer of excellent lesbian novels. These include the *Desert of the Heart, 1964, This Is Not For You, 1971*, and her recent *Against the Season*. Perhaps the best way to explain the feeling of the book is to recognize that Jane Rule's style is objective and fair-minded and intensely serious. Which perhaps sums up this short run-through of some of the best of Gay Canadian writing; the level of seriousness it obtains will be the test of its continuance and its endurance.

Avenge Oscar Wilde

Fear and anxiety handled in this external way, are at the centre of the prejudiced personality.

There is a fear of personal freedoms and an admiration of discipline, strong government, power and authority.

The prejudiced person doubts his own power over his destiny. He sees things as happening to him, not caused by him. He views his world as controlled by external agents and this often gives rise to the thought that others are out to get him. He does not see himself as a persecutor of others but the reverse. He has a general distrust of people, has a fear of being cheated or conned, and labels someone guilty until proven innocent.

I think you have the idea now. A prejudiced person has a lack of faith in himself since he probably felt rejected when he followed his instincts as a child. (and obviously there are types of families that are likely to produce prejudiced children). So not wanting to look to himself for security, he looks around him and demands the outside world give him the backup he needs. He projects his fears on others, since he's not looking introspectively, and makes them the blame for his problems and cause of his anxieties.

To turn from psychology to psychiatry, prejudices are found to wither of their own accord when a person gains a belief in his own worth and power. There are less demands on others and less scape-goating when an individual can look inside himself and find satisfaction.

identity groups within society is a reflection of the segmentation which alienates us all. The only way to prevent the formation of yet another alienation group is the realization that its concerns and yours are identical. I feel greater acceptance when other share themselves in my concern. And I am more willing to share in other people's concerns when they share in mine.

This is the only way.

Then I think true integration is a plausible goal.

Let's go beat up a bigot

by Bob Isnor

Minority groups have been hoping since time immemorial that they will get an open-armed welcome in to general society by explaining how they really aren't that different, or how the differences have a cute history, or some similar view. The effects have been less than encouraging to say the least. Members of the group wonder what went wrong: did they not explain enough? did they not reach enough people? They think that surely when confronted with facts, a rational person will give up his prejudice.

Too bad prejudiced people are not rational. Prejudice is usually part of the person's entire character structure, so firmly attached to other traits that it becomes a matter of redesigning that entire character.

Psychiatrists will scream at the generalizations I am going to make, but it's true that a bigot is very likely to also think and even vocalize statements like:

"Teachers should be more strict". There is only one right way to do anything", "There will always be war because it's a part of human nature," "Men are basically evil and dangerous," "Girls should learn things that are useful around the house," and especially, "Only people like me have a right to be happy."

Do you see a sketch begin to emerge? Underlying insecurity is the basis of a prejudiced personality. Very likely as a child, he the person was punished and made to feel guilty over his basic actions and emotions: genital handling, temper outbursts, striking a parent, toilet training violations. The child grew up with the fears of being unloved because of his desires and feelings. He learns not to trust himself. He gets upset when he sees anyone display any of the impulses that he was denied and now denies himself. He won't allow others to do what he can't permit in himself and he wants to see others punished for their impulses.

Prejudiced persons stand out for rigid moralistic views. They are inclined to harsh moral judgments of others, and insist on convention. They display a lot of sham propriety. For example, people who freely display their animosity towards Jews were also found to speak well of their own parents, while tests showed that they have bitterness and hostility towards the parents subconsciously. Meanwhile, tolerant people are inclined to have surface criticisms of their parents with underlying affection, not animosity. Repression like this is one of the main characteristics of prejudiced characters.

Our average bigot likes to break people up into the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. Women are virgins or whores. Affairs are black or white. Unable to handle questions of good and bad in themselves, bigots also impose strict labeling on all around them. There is a very low tolerance for ambiguity, things have to be categorized. This

even extends to perception. A prejudiced person likes to see patterns where a tolerant person will see the actual random design. A mildly irregular triangle becomes equilateral to a prejudiced mind while it's more likely to retain its actual shape for a tolerant one.

The bigot avoids saying "I don't know". He's likely to have an opinion on any current event and doesn't want questions left open or unanswered. There's a need for definiteness.

Order is valued highly by the prejudiced person, especially social order. Lodges, churches, political groups, fraternities and schools all can give security to a mind that looks for protection from around it, not from inside itself. Extreme bigots are extreme patriots. The worst example being Nazi Germany where patriotism was used as an excuse for violent persecution of anything non-Arian. The brochures and rally cries of groups like the K.K.K. always have an appeal to engage in someone's harassment /murder to "protect our American /Canadian /Russian way of life." This personality is not just a mess of negative attitudes. Rather he is trying to do something - find an island of institutional safety and security. The nation is that island. It's his positive anchorage, giving the definiteness he needs.

On Integration

by Dan

This article is addressed to the nongay community. The purpose is the examination of the relationship between gays and society on an individual level. An important determinant of my individual happiness is my ability to "accept myself". But, in the face of social disapproval, this is difficult to do. Approval and social acceptance are keys in the formation of my self-confidence. It has been a hard battle for me to respect myself, while the world around me has rejected vital elements of what I am.

Similar experiences have occurred for other individuals who have been discriminated against. Blacks, Jews, third world peoples and straight women, as well as gays, have had difficulties feeling that they are important as members of society. These ostracized individuals have organized to eliminate discrimination and reinforce pride. The successes of these groups have been many and varied.

Certainly equal rights is a prime concern I have for myself, as a gay person. But, I will not be satisfied with only legal acceptance, I need social acceptance. Even with the protection of the law, there will be great risks for the individual who "comes out". Passive attitudes by nongays will help only in the legal battle. Active participation is required for social integration.

Society's security and happiness is only as strong as that of the groups which compose it. The proliferation of

ANN LANDERS

Personality Disorder



Dear S.F.M.: Since you are a PhD, perhaps you can tell me the origin of one of my favorite quotes: "One person with courage constitutes a majority."

I agree with the American Psychological Association's statement that homosexuality, per se, implies no impairment in judgment, stability, social or vocational ability. I am well aware that a great many homosexuals function in their jobs and interact with others far more successfully than some heterosexuals. In fact, the only difference is their sexual preference.