EDITOR RESPONSES TO GAY MATERIALS

by Louie Crew

Are Gays justified in our often-heard claims that editorial pages keep out Gay writing, even in most small magazines? Is Gay really "bad" in the eyes of most editors? Just how objective can a Gay writer expect an editor to be with an explicitly Gay manuscript?

To seek some answers to these and related questions, I decided to confront the editors themselves. In December, 1974, I sent out a questionnaire to the 130 editors of "College, Literary, and Little Magazines" listed in the October 1974 issue of The Writer, one standard resource for writers sifting small magazines. At the same time I sent the same questionnaire to a control group of editors of the nineteen US and Canadian small magazines explicitly welcoming Gay materials, as evidenced by their own entries in International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses, 10th Edition, 1974-75. [See the accompanying "Pink List" which includes in addition to these 19, others abroad who also welcome Gay manuscripts.] It should be noted that while the control group had some "exclusively Gay" publications, several welcome Gay materials as but one of many interests; and several are edited by non-Gays. The "control" anticipated was to give a comparative measure of "liberality" with the Writer group, assuming that those regularly advertising or Gay materials would reflect attitudes more favorable towards Gay materials, and would thereby help to define favorable" and "liberal" in this context.

All respondents were invited to return the materials anonymously, but several editors elected to sign material to make their views publicly accessible.

Overall response was quite good, with replies from 31% of all who received the questionnaire (47% of the control group; 18% of the Writer group).

While Gays can find a few encouraging responses, such as the "Red List" of those who virtually dare Gays to send in good materials, the survey reveals that Gay writers have for their recurring paranoia a fairly strong basis in the facts.

What editors say vs. what editors do

One encouraging item is that 96% of the Writer group of editors say that they will consider materials from writers openly Gay in their writing. Nevertheless, several other responses of this same group reveal editorial practices which raise doubt about the validity, possibly even the sincerity, of their claim:

Item 1: Just over half (58%) have ever published materials by openly Gay writers in their writing.

Item 2: Half of them could not or would not name any of the openly Gay writers whom they claim to have published. Just how open are these writers?

Item 3: Only one-fourth of them could name over two openly Gay writers whom they have ever published.

Item 4: More than half (56%) have published material about IMPLICITLY Gay subjects, while less than half about EXPLICITLY Gay subjects. How much pressure is there for Gay writers to wear a mask?

Item 5: Sixty-nine per cent have no open Gays on their editorial boards.

Item 6: Only 24% of the editors admit to being Gay themselves. It is one thing to feel warm and liberal, generous and accepting, but quite another to give flesh to these attitudes.

How openly is "openly Gay"?

Undoubtedly the editors had problems with the wording "writers openly Gay in their writing." How openly is openly? Just when does a Gay writer become "flagrant"; just where is the fine line when one is said to be "flaunting" or "flaming"; just when does the intelligent homosexual become "the screaming sissy"?

To get at least a partial measure of these finer ways editors discriminate, I asked them, "granting that each subject was technially well presently", to rate each of several subjects "in terms of its likely appeal to the audience of your publication". Note that I purposely isolated subject matter from technique. Note too that I encouraged them to pass the buck, allowing them to project their own biases onto their readers, as many editors are wont to do. (Afterall, serious publications compete for a real audience, and serious thinkers can risk alienating that audience only so far...)

The editors rated the subjects on a scale: highly undesirable, undesirable, neutral, desirable, highly desirable. Editor responses inevitably yielded a profile of Gay tabu that can instruct Gay writers anxious to learn whether to go to the front door, the side, or the back. The control group which had previously advertised positive responses to Gay materials predictably maintained a higher tolerance of Gays in positive roles than did the Writer group, although there was much overlapping of attitudes.

All editors in the control group found the following neutral at worst, highly desirable at best:

Control Group "Yes" Writer Group "No"
Gays as hippies, yuppies, freaks, etc. 51% disapproved
Gays as witty intellectuals 38% disapproved
Lesbians as warmly supportive and strong 27% disapproved
Gays as successful politicians 27% disapproved
Gays as effective lawyers, doctors, professors, etc. 27% disapproved

We emphasize Gay writing and Canadian writing. Would like to do some Lesbian writing, and a Gay S&M anthology. Wish Gay outfits and small Gay presses could get together more on distribution, etc.

--Ian Young, Editor
Catalyst
315 Bantrey Avenue
Scarborough, Ontario
CANADA

---

PRIZE-WINNING REJECTION SLIP

We do not accept male homosexual themes. Sorry!"

--Linda Francischelli, Editor
Carlyle Communications, Inc.
150 E. 58th Street
NYC 10022
Gays as victims of oppression 23% disapproved
Gays as affectionate and fulfilled human beings 22% disapproved
Gay slang 22% disapproved
Gays as social reformers 18% disapproved
Settings in jails or mental hospitals 17% disapproved

Correspondingly, all editors in the control group found the following items highly undesirable or neutral at best:

**Control Group "No"**
Gays as child molesters and criminals 49% approve
Gays as neurotics and misfits 37% approve
Gay males as virile studs 17% approve

This study gives no way, of course, to account for why these biases exist, but one does not have a hard time seeing that what little magazine editors want to see is potentially threatening to the wholesomeness and integrity of Gay people. In a paper that I read to the 1975 national conference of College Composition and Communication, I demonstrated how stereotypes of Gays in past literature make that literature our enemy; clearly current editorial policies prescribe, to the extent that they are efficacious, more of the same oppression. It is not surprising that the Writer group found seven more categories to be objectionable than did the control group.

In addition, both the control group and the Writer group agreed uniformly and conclusively (88±%) either to censure or to consider neutral at best, four additional subjects, though the groups did not always agree for the same reasons: Gays as sado-masochists, male Gays as effete gossips, Lesbians as tough and insensitive, Gays as decadently rich.

Three subjects evoked wide disagreement within both groups (see Table). Even with such pervasive ambivalence, it is interesting to note that the control group of editors is significantly more accepting of these items than is the Writer group of editors.

The ideal vs. the real

No writer wants to write by a formula, and no artist ever is completely controlled by one, or so we would like to think. Daniel Curzon argues most cogently elsewhere in this issue about the need for Gay writers to explore whatever realities they choose, however disagreeable they may be to either editors or audiences, free from any prejudice, Gay or nonGay. In terms of the ratings required of the editors, Dan Curzon's ideal position could have been expressed simply by an editor's rating all subjects as "neutral"; but to do so, an editor would have had to assume an ideal audience, an assumption most of them did not make. However much we may want to hold out for the ideal, in practice it seems that editors and audiences are not so free as writers and reformers. Interestingly, many editors avoided the embarrassing attempt to get them to estimate their audiences' reaction. Twenty-two percent of those returning the questionnaire refused to complete the rating in terms of audience appeal. Their disclaimers are often sharp and instructive, as this sampling reveals:

**Can't answer. Don't know.**
This is stupid.
We try to publish good literature, so topics perse are irrelevant.
We try to stay away from functional literature, no matter what the cause. Because theme is not a significant factor for us, I couldn't answer these questions.
Gay people are human; I am human; there are good and bad humans, gay, nongay, and bis. I think you're buying yourselves off. We judge work as art—whether by gays, bisexuals, or whatever. I know as many rotten heteros as rotten gays (lesbians for me, as a feminist).—a bis-
We do not get enough letters from readers on any of our material to be able to answer any of the ratings. We could guess, but that would be all, and we might guess very wrong.
What audience? I don't know who they are.
Our audience is interested in Gays as writers!

Even those who completed the ratings often added similar disclaimers or explanations, such as:

**My audience is strongly midwest conservative.**

Though we have published material that may have Gay implications, we don't have a formulated policy on the issue, and it is very rare that we know anything personal about our contributors. I can't answer the questions above simply because they haven't come up yet.

**Political naivete?**

One wonders how willing most editors would be to accept the political consequences of editorial quietism. Invisibility has always been more than a metaphor in the Gay experience, and a Gay presence alone, with no more to it than a simple declaration "I am Gay" or "Meet my lover" is typically taken in this society as a political act, whether or not it is so intended. Predictably the control group seemed more in touch with the political facts of Gay life in literature. In response to the question "Is Gay material even when professionally nonadvocative inevitably considered political by the audience of your publication?", 33% of the control group said "yes", as compared with only 19% of the Writer group. This one question, in fact, produced the highest degree of nonresponse in the Writer group (35%), suggesting that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE: GENERAL AMBIVALENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>highly undesirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gays as queens, transvestites, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Gay genital sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settings in Gay bars, baths, teatrooms, and churches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it's important they identify themselves as lesbians, because that affects their art.

But I just asked . . . .

As is evident in many of the responses already recorded, many took offense merely being asked about Gay manuscripts and Gay people, and many assumed that the questionnaire itself supported a particular set of answers to the questions. Possibly some of this negative reaction was provoked by my using the symbol £ after my own name, a decision I made to minimize people making the usual and illogical assumption that all researchers are straight.

Of course a few did indicate that they were pleased to see this kind of study being done. Gene Damon, editor of the revived *Ladder* (Box 5025, Washington Sta., Reno, NV 89503) wrote: "I will admit I always dreamed someone would send me a questionnaire like this someday. You've made this a happy Christmas for me."

More typical was the response that arrived two months after all others were in: "Since we have never received any Gay materials, I can't complete this rating. Two of my best friends are gay and get along better than any other couple I know, so I'm not being prejudiced in saying this is the dumbest survey I've ever filled out!"

The usual way of attacking the questionnaire was to assume positions that were not a part of the questionnaire: "Our standards for manuscripts remain the same no matter what the material. We do not inquire into our writers' life styles, nor are we interested in formula material." Of course this editor misses the question that really pervades the questionnaire: viz., are writers who are Gay free to indicate their lifestyles by writing about them openly and honestly without following prescribed formulas? Is it interesting how often editors immediately assume that Gay writing would automatically be formula writing, while they do not make the same assumption for nonGay writing.

*Formula* like movement becomes a label by which editors conveniently ignore the substance of Gay writers, and possibly the labels even control what the editor sees.

**THE LAVENDER LIST**

The following writers were named on the questionnaires as "some of the openly Gay writers whom you have published."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>William Barber</th>
<th>Ellen Marie Bissert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Boxer</td>
<td>Rita Mae Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Burroughs</td>
<td>Louie Crew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilton David (artist)</td>
<td>R. Daniel Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen Ginsterg</td>
<td>Judy Grahn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Green</td>
<td>Susan Griffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat Hardman</td>
<td>Herbert Huncke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Isherwood</td>
<td>Graham Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Kuda</td>
<td>Z. Kurlowks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.A. Lacey</td>
<td>Michael Lally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Laurence</td>
<td>Laurie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd S.J. Lawson</td>
<td>L. Leard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audre Lourde</td>
<td>Paul Mariah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David McReynolds</td>
<td>Isabel Miller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerard Melanga</td>
<td>Harold Norse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plufane Norman</td>
<td>Pat Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula Novatane</td>
<td>Efren Ramirez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Phelan</td>
<td>Ron Schreiber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Rule</td>
<td>Carl Solomon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia Scott</td>
<td>Fran Winant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep and eat my cake

The best response showing an editor trying to feel good about one's editorial liberality while maintaining simultaneously some very censorious attitudes is the following example of mortally and editorially muddled prose:

"My magazine deals with ideas designed to influence the lives of college young people. A writer's personal sexual preferences have little to do with those ideas. In that sense, I am open to gay writers. I would rather not know whether they are gay, I cannot and will not deal with the politics of the gay movement. The sponsoring agency for my magazine will not tolerate it becoming a forum for radical politics or controversial social movements unless the issue is clearly a matter of justice and human rights and free from moral ambiguities. I try to treat writers and their content in an individual basis, judging on quality of writing and appropriateness of topic. It is unlikely that my reading public would welcome any focus on Gay people or situations just because they are Gay. Neither is it likely that I would use the magazine as a forum for that issue. I have other priorities.

Apparently a "writer's personal sexual preferences" have
much more to do with this editor's responses to a writer's "ideas" than this editor is prepared to admit. Is it any wonder that so many Gay writers prefer to take their manuscripts to Gay publications rather than wait for such persons to sort out their real priorities? Face-to-face with Gay people and Gay writers, the small press of this country seems hardly more open than the big publishing houses. It seems that moral courage is possible for most people only when all sponsor-

ing agencies have led the way. Meanwhile, even small magazine editors would prefer that we continue to "regularize" all the pronouns in the Romeo and Julietts which we continue to write. Small wonder that even in 1975 W.H. Auden can be praised even in the Gay press for not denying that he had written the conspicuously Gay "A Day for a Lay", a poem which first appeared in an underground newspaper without his prior knowledge or approval.

THE RED LIST

While the questionnaire reported in "Editor Responses to Gay Materials" was anonymous, several editors elected to state their names and to invite Gay materials. In some cases the wording of these invitations seems rather like a dare to Gay writers to hit them with their best work; in some cases the confrontation may resemble a bull ring. Proceed with caution.

***

We are open to good writing from anybody and on any subject. — The Iowa Review, EPB 453, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52240.

The personality of our authors does not figure in our editorial decisions. We are open to any subject matter and base decision solely on the author's handling of his chosen subject. — California Quarterly, 100 Sproul Hall, Univ. of CA, Davis, CA 95616.

Art takes precedence over ideology here; so much depends on how well it's done. Obviously it's less likely, though, that we'd wish to reiterate a stereotyped attitude. — Harry Smith, The Smith, 5 Beekman Street, NYC 10038.

I don't give a damn about gay or nongay—I just want it well-written! — Leland Sapiro, Riverside Quarterly, Box 14451, Univ. Sta., Gainesville, FL 32604.

As editor of Beyond Baroque for six years, we've seen (and published) almost no good writing on "gay" themes and can only conclude that writers simply were afraid to send it out—sad indictment of the editor-end of the literary maze. —George Brury Smith, BB, 1639 West Washington Blvd., Venice, CA 90291.

We are not likely to accept so much material that we should seem to be advocating gayness, but we are interested. We want good work, whatever the sexual orientation of the con-

THE PINK LIST

The following small magazines and little presses are listed as specifically welcoming Gay materials in the International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses, 10th Edition, 1974-75, $4.95, PO Box 1056, Paradise, CA 95969.

Many are not exclusively Gay. This list is abstracted from the complete directory for the convenience of Gay writers and others who are interested. Writers are urged to read the Directory for more details and to read the magazines themselves before submitting materials. Nineteen of the US Publications in this list were the Control Group of respondents in the study "Editor Responses to Gay Materials".

***

The Advocate, 2121 S. El Camino Real, Suite 302, San Mateo, CA 94403.
Amazon Quarterly, 554 Valle Vista, Oakland, CA 94610.
Bastard Angel, PO Box 3449, SF, CA 94119.
Beau Geste Press, Jose de Teresa 52, Mexico 20 D.F.
Bitman, c/o 146 Great Western Road, London W11, UK.
Catalyst Publications, 315 Blantyre Ave., Scarborough, Ont.
CANADA MIN 256
Carovnsville Roadrunner, 28 Brunettes Road, Chorlton, Manchester 21, UK.
Come Together, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1, UK.
Cymbeline, 15 East Hill, Colchester, Essex, UK.
The Dial-A-Poem Poets LP, 222 Bowery, NYC 10012.
Fits Printing and Publishing Collective, 2680 21st Street, SF, CA 94110.
Friends of Malatesta, Inc., Box 72, Bidwell Sta., Buffalo, NY 14222.
Bay Book News, Catalyst, 315 Blantyre Ave., Scarborough, Ont. CANADA MIN 256.
Gay News, 62a Chiswick High Road, London W4 1SY, UK.

Gay Sunshine, Box 40397, SF, CA 94140.
Gay World, 118 Windham Road, Bournemouth, Hants, UK.
GPU News, PO Box 90530, Milwaukee, WI 53202.
Inside Out Magazine, 49 Meadowside, Dundee, Scotland, UK.
The Ladder, PO Box 5025, Washington Sta., Reno, NV 89503.
Lavender Press, PO Box 60206, 1723 W. Devon, Chicago, IL 60660.
Lavender Woman, PO Box 60206, 1723 W. Devon, Chicago, IL 60660.
Light: A Poetry Review, Box 1105 Stuyvesant Sta., NYC 10009.
Lunch, 59 Bridge Lane, London NW1, UK.
Mouth of the Dragon: Poetry of Male Love, Box 107, Cooper Station, NYC 10003.
The Open Cell, Box 52, Berkeley, CA 94701.
Peace & Pieces Review, Box 99394, SF, CA 94109.
Peace News, 5 Caledonian Road, London, N1 9DX, UK.
People's Bookseller Newsletter, PO Box 2436, Tallahassee, FL 32304.
Pilot Press Books, PO Box 2662, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.
The Point, PO Box 1001, El Cerrito, CA 94530.
Sappho, BCM/Petri, London WC1V 6XX, UK.
Shameless Hussy Review, Box 424, San Lorenzo, CA 94580.
Sisters, 1005 Market St., No. 402, SF, CA 94103.
Sol, 6 Kings Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, SS0 8BH, UK.
Street Cries, Box 210, Room C-009, Old Westbury, NY 11568.
13th Moon, 30 Seaman Ave., NYC 10034.
Unicorn Bookshop, Nantgwilw, Llanfynydd, Carmathen-
shire, Wales, UK.
Women's Press Collective, 5251 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94618.
None of these negative reactions will be news to most Gay writers, who can give fairly explicit estimates of the numbers of rejections they have received because some editor knew, or just suspected, not to mention the rejections they have exerted themselves by writing from their own taboos. Those of us who dare to write Gay write to keep handy some different, "unrevealing" vitals for the items that we want to slip into un-

content or the author. —Kansas Quarterly, Denison Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506.

Tell everybody to send their manuscripts to us. —Fiction, Inc., English Dept., City College, 138 St. Convent Av., NYC 10031.

Our editorial policy is determined by our dedication to bring to our readers the best available work in poetry, reviews, graphics, photography, essays, the novel, the short story, and drama. —R.W. Lowe, Event, PO Box 2503, New Westminster, BC, CANADA.

We are willing to publish Gay materials that present Gay subjects not likely to appeal to our audience. —Frances M. Rippy, Ball State University Forum, Muncie, IN 47306.

My editorial policy is to publish the best work by women, whoever it's by, whatever it's about. As a lesbian, I tend to like reading work by other lesbian writers on lesbian topics. I think this is only natural. I am also very glad you're doing this study in Margins, which I feel is a very anti-woman, anti-homosexual, anti-feminist magazine. I hope you tell them that. —Ellen Marie Bissert, 15th Moon, 30 Seaman Ave., NYC 10034.

We are willing to publish Gay materials that present Gay subjects not likely to appeal to our audience. —One, PO Box 1347, New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

We have never bothered to ascertain whether our contributors had any particular sex orientation, what beliefs and color they were, or (in the case of initials) whether they were male or female. Frankly, it doesn't interest us. We're not concerned with movements. Only work that we think is worth publishing. Sorry if this screws up your survey. —Ottoné Riccio, Pyramid, 39 Elliot St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Perhaps I'm hopelessly old-fashioned, but I don't see how "gayness" is an issue. A m. is either publishable or not publishable. I can conceive of "confessional," "I'm telling it like it is" material being impossible for me to publish by virtue of the university on whom I rely for part-support. But the quality of the man—never touched on here—is crucial. —R.H. Costa, Quartet, 1119 Neal Pickett Drive, College Station, TX 77840.

We have printed homosexuals, lesbians, prisoners, academics, street people, and quite possibly more diverse schools of poetry than any other literary magazine on the scene today. . . . The only criteria is the excellence of the work itself. Anything done in good taste. What I mean by that is that sexual poems in and of themselves tend to bore me. . . . I do not censor poems for my audience. . . . A graphic sexual poem will be printed if it is unusual and different enough to warrant it. . . . Anyone can fuck—he it a man or a woman—it is the experience that makes me decide whether it will interest the reader or not. —Al Wimans, Second Coming, PO Box 31246, San Francisco, CA 94131.
suspecting publications.

The Gay writer's dilemma

Many Gay writers are caught in the cultural dilemma of wanting to be true to our own Gay experience, but also wanting to be listened to as universal. When "Gay writer" exists as a label that clearly in the minds of many editors (though certainly not in fact) limits universality, it is small wonder that many Gay writers will go to great lengths to be labelled simply "a writer" instead of a "Gay writer." It is no accident that the 1975 edition of A Directory of American Poets in its "index of poets with special backgrounds" includes Black writers, Spanish-speaking writers, Chicano writers, Native American writers, and Asian American writers, but no Gay writers. We are in the book, of course, in all the major and minor divisions, but many of us would consider it professional suicide to indicate our "special background," even in the thousands of cases where our Gaiyness has been a major force in our creative process.

Several accomplished Gay writers, some who have even occasionally written for explicitly Gay publications, have asked not to be reviewed in this special issue precisely because they want to avoid the discriminatory label in other quarters; and oppression being what it is, we have elected to honor these requests. We suspect that increasing numbers of these will want to welcome the opportunity to affirm their part in the Gay community in the future, but for now there really is a back of the bus, and some of our finest and most sensitive Gay writers for reasons good as well as bad find their sensibilities flourishing there. When textbook reform allows the truth to be told about Gay writers in the past, when laws, medical diagnosis, and popular opinion become more enlightened and less repressive, when more and more people start integrating their craft with their lifestyle, when non-Gays discover how tired they have made their world by narrowing their personal options quite arbitrarily, we will not be in the millenium exactly, but it will be a Gay day indeed. +++++

THE PROBLEMS OF WRITING GAY LITERATURE
by Daniel Curzon

People who teach literature—and I'm one of them— seldom give any thought to where literature comes from or through whose hands it moves before it gets to those supposedly love it most, and who pass on the tradition—teachers. They stand around waiting for literature to drop out of the sky. Critics, whose very existence depends on the literature available to be analyzed, likewise stand around waiting for literature to come to them, god knows how. If any literature at all exists in our time, it's by chance. If any gay literature exists (or is going to exist in the future), it is despite the following real-life people, the "problems" of writing gay literature.

The first "problem" is named Harvey Harden. Harvey is a publisher of a major book company—on Madison Avenue, New York City. Where else? Harvey prides himself on being tough—and successful. Why, he's had more best sellers in