

PAST + PRESENT = FUTURE

SEPTEMBER SONG?

Yury Olshe, the well-known Soviet writer in his *Not a Day Without a Time* recalls walking down the street one day and turning around when someone calls out: *Boy!* He goes on to say he did not know to whom this was addressed but he turned around anyway. He wonders, however, whether he would turn around now if someone called out: *Old man!* Probably not. Why? Because he would not want to? No — simply because of his disbelief, his astonishment that it has come so soon. Has it really come?

Getting older is really a very dialectical process. From quantity to quality. Like water put over heat reaching its boiling point seemingly in one quick second and turning into steam. The years go by, truly seem to rush by — and there you are getting older, old. It is sad to realize that though your desire remains (and often very strong, very physical desire), your desirability has gone. But it is surely a lot sadder not to realize this. But of course all of us, men and women, homosexuals and heterosexuals, share the same common problems of "aging": Does anyone need you; have you reached a point of non-productivity, non-creativity; are you suddenly without emotional, physical, economic security; is time only a looking backward, not a looking forward anymore?

I am made most conscious of age when I go to places frequented by homosexual men of all ages — bars, dances, parties — all social centers of a kind. I look around and see so many men my age (or even younger, seldom too much older) trying so hard to look young, to act young — dressed in the latest hippy fashion, even sometimes too hippy. They look so doomed and gloomy — searching, searching, searching — alone, occasionally in twos or threes, but so alone, so lonely — hoping someone will want them, go home with them, but ending up alone or with a hustler. What about all the human reaching out, touching one another in ways other than physical?

I do know from my own experience that you cannot prepare for this aging — partly because you don't believe you will ever change. Maybe everyone around you — but not you. If your life has been full of interests, excitement, activity, outside your own very personal needs; if it has been full of meaningful, lasting relationships (not necessarily only physical ones); if love, for you means loving yourself, of course, but more, loving people, if the world and everything and everybody in it is important to you and you are concerned about it and involved in making it a better place for yourself and everybody else and are committed fully to a life of doing, and if you do all of this you are even earning your living in a way meaningful to you — then I think it is possible to continue living a full and meaningful life through all your years. You relate to other people because you are involved in a common cause for a common cause with them.

Memories are good and it is sad not to have good

memories but it is unhealthy, I think, to live in your memories of times gone by. It is better, to my mind, to just let your memories take their place in the warp and woof of your life, your being. You are who you are and what you are because of your experiences. But you can cross the bridge from generation to generation, I am convinced, only through working and doing.

1970 is a wonderful year, and that despite all of its many problems, for a homosexual man (I leave it to the older — and younger — homosexual women to speak for themselves) to be living in — and in the USA, and in N.Y. Though we are far from having reached a homosexual millennium, so many positive changes have come about in our personal and in our group living in these days. There is so much more to read, to see, to hear, to do in daily living, in personal entertainment — so much more, and so much better. And so many organizations, groupings have developed in these past very few years. No matter what your political convictions, your social attitudes, your organizational needs — there is a group for you to join and in which to work. For old time political rabala like me it is the GLF that is the center of activity. Here we find possible a unity of the struggle for homosexual liberation (in the context of the liberation of all oppressed groups) and the fight for the radical change in our social structure without which we understand that no deep, lasting change is possible. The gay liberation movement is made up of us, however, and can be no better than we, its constituent parts, make it through our work, our activity. Some of the things that have to be done are plain old Jimmy Higgins jobs: Cleaning up after a dance, walking in demonstrations and picketing, selling *Come Out*, passing out leaflets, attending meetings, propagandizing both gay and straight people so as to widen our dialogue. These are tasks that can and must be carried by men and women of all ages. And it is important, too, to keep in our consciousness that everyone of these tasks, even in and of themselves, represents a form of "coming out" in some small but not unimportant way.

Although my own personal memories are good, rich in loving and living and meaningful political activities, all my memories, going back as they do to the thirties (when I was already adult), rich as they are in a personal way and in a political way, are empty of one important element — a relationship between my being a proud, happy (always trying to be so, at least, not always succeeding) homosexual and my being engaged in a full, life-wide political life. This dichotomy, though not always a conscious one, did make it difficult to be a total human being under all and any conditions. Often now I feel I have to double, triple my activities to make up for these past divisions in my daily living. To do this, I have discovered that strangely I have to fight these two parts of my life — not with — me but outside of me. My older homosexual friends cannot see the reason or political involvement in the struggle for homosexual lib-

eration (a struggle they, on the whole, do acknowledge, but only insofar as it affects their lives as homosexuals). My older political heterosexual friends cannot understand why it should be hard for me to be just me, Bernie, inside the left of which I have always been a conscious part. Always — that is from the age of five when I was first involved in political action. Even though that left persists in its reactionary attitude towards homosexuals? It is only my continued involvement in GLF that convinces them of the importance I give to this unity of thinking and doing. Then because their love for me brings such acceptance, they are inevitably, though grudgingly, brought closer to an understanding of its wider necessity for people like me. In a way I have been preparing all my life for today, the day of the reality of a Gay Liberation Front. Just as I have to struggle for personal integration as a homosexual with my friends on the left, just so do we all have to fight together for total group integration in the movement for revolutionary change on all age levels, bridging the generations through this common work.

I am profoundly aware, of course, that reactions, needs, vary greatly. To get back into the personal picture and speak about me in the particular rather than in the abstract — I need emotional, intellectual, physical (sexual) unity. I have had three great loves in my life and I find I still relate to other men on all these levels. Maybe such mutual relationships are more difficult as you get older. I'm not even sure I want to stop to think about that, and dwell on the "problem." Life for me is too full, too busy. My old loves all ended for objective reasons. I find I can still fall very much in love — but love is a two way street. When does one give up the hope of making fulfilling, complete relationships in one's life? It is always important what you feel inside — this gives an outer glow to you. Even an older man or woman can give off a glow of beauty and appeal. It is important to accept yourself first as you are — for others ever to accept you. I find it is still good to know I can respond fully — physically, emotionally to a beautiful man and enjoy just still being able to respond. If you fill your life with work activity, friendship — not as a substitute for or substitution of the need for a profound relationship of love — but because life is made up of many things and through the physical, the sexual is a most important element — a relation between people, homosexual or heterosexual, it is not the only element. Friendship is important too and the act of friendship continues through life. Friendships continue. I love people — men and women. I find joy and fulfillment always in my friendships, as well as in my love, in living and working with people.

It has been hard to find time to think this all out in any sequence, let alone write it down. Who has time? Maybe when I get real old, like say, 190, there will be time for retrospection. Maybe. **BERNARD LEWIS**

tea & sympathy revisited

It was one of those nights suitable and too rainy to go out for the Times, when you wish that you had a box — only to watch the late show and when you're too tired to go out and too bored to go to sleep. I reached into my paperback book shelf which is composed of things I've found in used book shops or endless swapshops and borrowings from friends and found a book of Best Plays from the 1950's. One of the plays in it was *Tea and Sympathy* by Robert Anderson. I started reading it again and it was like looking at the face of an old friend whom I hadn't seen in years. It was almost exciting rediscovering it at first, remembering the characters as they came back into place. Then I started to remember how I had come to read it in the first place and when I realized how extremely ugly the play seemed to me; not that the play was an ugly play, it was a beautiful piece of theatre for the time it was written (1953), but that I had changed and not this old friend.

When I was fourteen, in my first year of high school, a very sensitive English teacher of mine recommended that I read the play and write a book report on it. We were reading plays at that time in her class and even though this was the sort of play that could have got her fired in Savannah, Georgia at the beginning of the sixties, she thought that I should read it. She made me promise though not to show this copy of the play, which was hers, around the school. I did read it and the effect it had on me was so strong that I did a report on Auntie Mame instead because it was easier to talk about Mame Dennis than Tom Lee, the main character of *Tea and Sympathy* who is accused of a homosexual liaison with a teacher at a New England boarding school. He redeems

himself in the last act by going to bed with the compassionate wife of one of the housemasters. The play was easily one of the most shocking plays of the early fifties, first because the housemaster's wife accuses her All-American husband of having more than academic interest in the boys he spends every weekend with climbing mountains, and, second, because it revealed that genuinely heterosexual mates in America could also be sensitive and tender, as the boy Tom Lee is. The whole play absolutely reeking with a kind of liberal compassion that telegraphs every punch and shows just how far we have come since *Tea* was written — all the "straight" men are overbearingly straight, Tom is sixteen, innocent for a boy of eighteen, the housemaster's wife seems like one of those Hemingwayesque nurses who give themselves to dying men in hospitals. It is this type of dreary compassion — knowing that the right is going to come out alright, that there will be no homosexual "offenses" committed by the good people, that the bad people are really just dirty old All-American latents and will their just rewards in the end (!) that infuriates me at this time. And yet I know that all of us at one time or another had to go through the ordeal of "proving" his or her "normality", his conformity, his straightness to a world that is really very willing to accept it. Because the world wants to believe that deep down inside you are just like everybody else, that is, you are a good boy and a "regular" fellow. Tom's father only wishes that his son were not such an intellectual, such a creative person (the even plays' teens like a fox instead of like a bear) and were more of a "regular guy". And in the

end of the play, Tom does prove that deep down inside he really is a regular fellow, a regular heterosexual, even though he does act like a "fairy", that is, he likes classic music, plays the guitar, and refuses to wear a crew cut. In the fifties this last non-conformity alone could make you a classic neurotic.

After eight more years of living behind the velvet mask that homosexuals have to wear most of their lives — no matter how liberated I might think I am, eight more years of America's holy enlightened liberalism which says that now it's alright for homosexuals to be creative (that's why we're here for) and now even homosexuals can stop acting like John Wayne just so long as they know that deep down inside they're all men (and don't you forget it), I have very little sympathy with *Tea and Sympathy*. In its own way it is the forerunner of *The Boys in the Band* because the good people always win out and the bad people always lose out and everybody knows that's the way life is. If *Tea and Sympathy* shows that a creative young man "accused" of homosexuality can prove his "ineffectuality" by taking the housemaster's wife to bed and if *The Boys* shows that gay life is a dreary Freudian shit pile as opposed to heterosexual life which is stable and honorable, then the mask is right back there where it's always been. It is the velvet mask. It feels very good to the touch. It is just what the bourgeois want to see — that although you might be an artist and a creative, sensitive person, you might have long hair and play the guitar, at least deep down inside you're a regular guy, just like they are.



EAT your HEART out - rita mae brown



Bread lines were strung out through the country. The famished stood in chaotic lines of hunger. Starvation comes three dimensional, a visual spectacle not unlike Busby Berkeley's choreography, at least in form. People are dust and it drips up their dreams. Out of this Great Depression came the celluloid dream, the musical extravaganza, the fantasy of a generation. The movies were a phantom land where the screen could say, "Eat your heart out," and America did just that. The women were too, too glamorous. There were unending lines, circles, geometric festivals of beautiful (by the standards) women. Add to the bulchrous pyramids of pulsating flesh the convention of Dick Powell, plus a highly contrived plot, and you have a '30's musical.

Gold Diggers of 1935 and *Footlight Parade* are two of the finest examples of this type of film. *Gold Diggers of 1935* is a good Women's Liberation movie. The central theme of all the *Gold Diggers* series was that a woman must go through a man to get ahead. Either you could take him for his money (remember this was the depression) and gain power, hence the theme of gold diggers, or you could fall in love with a nice boy, always Dick Powell, and find happiness and fulfillment in a superior adored role. *Gold Diggers of 1935* is especially interesting from this viewpoint. We find ourselves at the Westworth Hotel, an exclusive resort for rich white folks where lots of whistling black folks polish brass signs and sweep the sidewalks. Into this "desirable" atmosphere comes Mrs. Prentiss, worth millions — her husband was the "Flypaper King" — raise you wonder where the green went. Daddy has dumped out of the nuclear family and there remains his dignified widow, her twenty daughter, Gloria Stuart, and her demoted heterosexual son, Humboldt, who'd screw a female dog if it shook its ass right. It all gets pretty complicated what with Gloria Stuart engaged to the Sultan of Snuffboxes, a blithering idiot, and Dick Powell hired (believe it or not) as a slick secretary not for gold, and Adolphe Menjou as a con man etc. etc. as enjoyment. All of the women in the movie are in one way or another exchanging one form of slave status for another. The assumption is, of course, that none of them have any identity without a man.

Hong on through all this for the third reel which contains the big numbers. The first blow out is a pianist's nightmare. There are hundreds of pianos — I know it sounds unreal but see it — sliding all over the screen. The uses of motion are startling and wildly inventive. The section with the pianos sliding and undulating are beautifully executed and actually beautiful, save for the intrusion of three two-toned gags whose costumes suggest severe qualification of the show theme. Aside from the three heavies there is a wonderful feeling of lightness and gracefulness.

This is followed by the incomparable "Lullaby of Broadway." This piece — the height of Berkeley's genius — sexist through and out, is lyrical, perfectly paced, concise and with smooth transitions. It has a definite beginning, middle and end. A love scene to Manhattan and a moral treatment of women, it is both chauvinistic and one of film's most exciting and overwhelming achievements. The sexism involves the punishment delivered to a "free" woman, Wini Shaw (later the famous Lady in

Red). In the sequence she is a woman of what was termed "loused" morals. She is taken to ritzy parties and lives a life of pleasure although she sleeps the day away in a modest one room flat. The fantasy of those beggled depression women was being acted out by Wini Shaw. When she sat up on that high block in the night club with hundreds of singers and dancers begging her to "Come on and dance" — those women must have ached, lusted, longed to be Wini in her lina clothes with all of Manhattan at her feet. And how does the sequence end — with the fantasy smashed from a high building — Wini has to die for her life of pleasure. Why isn't the rich man who takes her to these places killed? He's the real pig. Why does the woman pay for sexuality, for beauty, even in this case, for freedom as capitalist envision it? "Lullaby of Broadway" is a powerful piece of film for anyone who loves the medium — for a woman with a Women's Liberation consciousness it is a real dow — our mothers fall off that skyscraper with Wini and we're left to pick up the pieces.

At a total film, *Footlight Parade*, is a better movie. The plot is more together, the characters are more interesting, the dialogue finer and is very funny, and Joan Blondell gets great lines. The whole movie builds to a hilarious finale in which the chorus girls are bused to three different theaters to work their show. The first number is *Honeymoon Blues*. Picture a platoon of prostitutes in Jersey City singing in the halls of Healey's Hotel — Great Gaudy Aighty. There is also a funny short piece early in the movie with two of the men singing a love song to each other, a sly swipe at male homosexuality but not nearly as offensive as what goes down today. The second big number is a water wonderland with Ruby Keeler as cheer nymph. The aquatic acrobatics prepare you for stars of semi nude female bodies (making money off our meat again) that turn into incredible kaleidoscopes of flesh, it'll blow your mind. The final number is a loving tribute to U.S. imperialism and it's called Shanghai L.P. This is absolute must for the John Birch Society.

After forty years, we see only the head and camp aspects of these movies. The bread lines for most of us were a threat our parents hurled at us so we would cease our plates out of gastronomic guilt. We look at these musicals and explode with laughter. Our parents, especially those of us who came up poor, looked at these movies and drooled. Not only did they want to escape from the hunger into a singing land of silver, go on one white, they wanted to believe it was real. It is the desperate fantasy of that generation that provides us with our superior, mocking attitude of camp.

Camp is part of the protective coloration for the homosexual belief. It has by now been varnished and passed into the heterosexual "beautiful" culture but I'd like to concentrate on its center, to homosexuality. Most homosexuals live in a world of stylized, normal communication. We officially posture our way through alien territory. We are pseudo-heterosexuals, if we don't work the show there would be a renaissance of bread lines because most of us would get fired. The effort to present yourself normally to your oppressor is rewarded by rejection. Within this rigidity we have become

masters at picking up the undercurrent, the vibration of realness underneath the facade. The survival of oppressed peoples is dependent upon being able to pick up these undercurrents. We can seize the counter content that lurks behind the stereotypical form. Camp is part of that process for the homosexual. It is our unique fantasy, our fleet amid the heterosexual famine. And we too, want it to be real.

Go to those two movies and really watch them. The body conventions are planned, the relationships are highly stylized, the acting is stagey, the makeup is brightful, the clothing has nothing to do with the human body and there are orgies of reducing human beings to opulent designs. Well, we live in something very similar to those Busby Berkeley musicals. Our lives are highly stylized. We perform all the meaningless (to us) conventions of sacrosanct heterosexuality and we know the dreary dialogue by heart. Why not groove on those movies where no one really relates to anyone else, where we all know the ending before it begins and where we can laugh at the logically transparent dreams of our parents — we all had straight parents, dig? Aside from that those movies are beautiful tributes to the area of this fucked up culture that the straights have left to homosexuals — dancing, theater, fashion — in short, the arts, major and minor. We, our homosexual "parents" of the 1930's took what your parents disavowed and made it into a celluloid dream for America to choke on. They caught the undercurrent. They crystallized the real sickness and the real needs of the time and made the musicals. They forced the eye to mock itself. Behind the glitter of *Gold Diggers* is the dust bowl, the bread lines, the threat of fascism. The facade is funny precisely because it is so unreal.

Camp is our fantasy today because it allows us to be superior. It's one thing to look at an unreal movie, feel superior, in control and tough — it's another to look at your own life and laugh. That's where camp can be a double edged blade. You can cut yourself while you cut the culture that has forced you into this unreal situation. We mock ourselves. We don't take ourselves seriously. We attempt to transcend our superiority rather than confront it. We call each other "Superdyks" or "Fairie Queen" instead of facing the heterosexual and calling out loud and clear, "Oppressor!" We have internalized the straight culture's values and act them out in elaborate rituals of self mutilation. We glide past each other in frozen postures just like those man pushed women in Berkeley's movies. And in the passing we make fun of each other and ourselves as we make fun of the whole insane society. If we keep accepting heterosexual definitions of homosexuality we are killing ourselves. Eat your heart out. With camp we can keep the unreal values of this world at arm's length and assure into the more stylized unreality of *The Pines*. But behind the glitter and our summer costumes lies the hunger in Appalachee, the anti lesbian backlash in Women's Liberation and the creeping fascism that masquerades as patriotism.

Footlight Parade is pure camp and so are the grade zick tricks called *The Great Society*, *Law and Order*, *The American Way*, *The Nuclear Family*, *The Well Adjusted Woman*, and *The Damned* subtitled *Watch the Devils Dance*. It's time that we turn the lights on and eat their hearts out.

The Boys in the Band - one more time...

David G. Messie

I can't get over the abundance of guilt and anxiety expressed in *The Boys in the Band*. It's terribly depressing. But I'm part of the oppressed minority it ridicules and the story is not meant for my enjoyment anyway. It's the warbling for mid America, for the Upper East Side Swingers. I can picture them at the One-Millibon-Extra-Emphasized Theatre on Third Avenue and 58th Street, having all their conceptions of gay life confirmed. They suck up all that limp-wristed, swishy, Heidecker-Interior Decorator bullshit as gospel and get their kicks as well.

Crowley presents homosexuals as security-minded people with a sort of neurosis of their own way of life. Revolution and homosexual joy. It takes shape in Michael in the form of the kids. Many homosexuals suffer from incapacitating feelings of shame, guilt, bitterness and self-hatred. Some are unconsciously driven to destroy themselves. That's some, certainly nothing of any appreciable size. Crowley paints a disgraceful picture. Every one of the characters is somehow out somehow. If it's not a drink, it's pills or liquor, or some such catch. They're portrayed as emotional cripples. Tragically so?

Homosexuals have been lied to them. They're sick. Evil, immoral, sinful, blind. There's a good one. You're better off years old and you've just gone down on a friend. As you walk home alone through dank, dismal

back streets, you turn things over in your mind. You remember what Father O'Hoolahan said last Sunday, and especially what your old lady's been drumming into your head since she got one. All that fire and brimstone shit. You can visualize thunder and lightning and the Virgin Mary descending from heaven in a flaming chariot. It's pretty gruesome. How can you adjust to your homosexuality with such oppressive attitudes all around you, and how, after this play miniforce?

The really sad aspect of the whole situation is how the mass media have reacted to *The Boys in the Band*. Of the stage version, the *Times* said, "... uncommon promising in its honesty..." How can this view be honest? What of the vast majority of homosexuals who can't see themselves so viciously in the play? We're portrayed as stereotyped mingling swishes and the *Times* feels it's honest. I wonder if Rex Reed feels so.

The Voice of Male Chauvinism said *The Boys in the Band* is honest, with "... no obscenity to the expectations of the heterosexual world." Are they serious? The image of the homosexual in the play is just what Helms and his gang of Eudemoeks have been helping to perpetuate for years. They're among the worst offenders.

Some of the comments are truly stomach turners. From the *National Observer*: "The dank and sordid homosexual play ever put on the stage..." Said the *Publishers Weekly*: "It's a rip-off and hilarity." And

from *Life Magazine* (known for its profusely regarding homosexuals): "... you don't have to be a homosexual to enjoy it..." That one has to take the cake.

The reviews of the film version are a little more depressing. In the *Times* this is so, probably because of its truthfulness: "There is something basically unpleasant, however, about a play that seems to have been created in an inspiration of low hate and that finally does nothing more than exploit its (I assume) sincerely conceived stereotypes."

The *Daily News*' review, keeping with true New York tradition, was very moral about it and objected, first off, to the "soot..." also, repellent language."

"The most pathetic of them all is the host, who is still fighting his homosexuality, as if he hoped that it was a nightmare that would someday go away." The paper is last referring to the exhibit the Crowley's did up for them. The *News* goes on: "There is much truth and compassion in this film..." They really eat that shit up. It's everything they've ever wanted to believe about us. The next quote from the *News* is the same kind of the unending ignorance of straight society: "Crowley's writing tells it, I believe, like it must be for the homo sexue." Crowley should be saint.