

Christopher Marlowe

No doubt remains that Christopher Marlowe was, in the words of A.L. Rouse, a "convicted homosexual". Marlowe was apparently a pretty young man who lived fairly well with no obvious source of income, probably through his intimate relationship with Sir Francis Walsingham, the Secretary of State. Had Marlowe not been killed in a tavern fight at the age of only twenty-nine, it's likely he would have had to stand trial for heresy and sodomy, both being crimes punishable by death in Elizabethan England. Witnesses claimed he was in the habit of saying:

"That St. John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned alwaies in his bosome, that he used him as the sinners of Sodoma."

"That all they that loue not Tobacco and Boies were fooles."

The gayest works of Marlowe are *Edward II*, passages from *Queen Dido*, and *Hero and Leander*.

Edward II is consistently concerned with homosexual relationships, and is probably the finest homosexual play ever written. *Hero and Leander*, however, has more sensuously gay imagery, and the poem's gayness is apparent in spite of its ostensibly being a description of straight love.

I consider *Hero and Leander* the most beautiful long erotic poem in English. It has none of the stickiness of Shakespeare's comparable *Venus and Adonis*. The style is highly stylised and urbane; it is, in the sense used by Mr. Isherwood, "high camp".

The opening description of the girl, Hero, is done entirely in terms of her fairness and her clothing. Her fairness is described in such campy hyperbole as, "Since Heroes time, hath halfe the world beene blacke". A description of grotesque clothing accounts for more than half of the opening 46 lines about Hero, and she is covered so completely that only her white hands remain showing. In between are such covertly bitchy lines as:

*"Many would praise the sweet smell as she past,
When t'was the odour which her breath foorth cast,
And there for honie bees haue sought in vaine,
And beat from thence, haue lighted there againe."*

In drastic contrast, Leander is described quite naked, and with exquisite sensuality:

*"His bodie was as straight as Circes wand,
Loue might haue sipt out Nectar from his hand,
Euen as delicious meat is to the tast,
So was his necke in touching, and surpast
The white of Pelops shoulder. I could tell ye,
How smooth his brest was, & how white his bellie,
And whose immortal fingers did imprint
That heauenly path, with many a curious dint,
That runs along his back. . ."*

(The next lines seem to indicate self-censorship as well as a witty admission of Marlowe's true inclinations.)

*"...but my rude pen
Can hardly blazon foorth the loues of men,
Much lesse of powerfull gods: . . ."*

And Marlowe's lines become increasingly outrageous, though with such equivocal conceits and classical references, that he apparently felt safe in writing them.

*"...let it suffice
That my slacke muse sings of Leanders eies,
Those orient cheekes and lippes, exceeding his
That leapt into the water for a kis
Of his owne shadow, and despising many,
Died ere he could enioy the loue of any.
Had wilde Hippolitus Leander seene,
Enamoured of his beautie had he beene,
His presence made the rudest paisant melt,
That in the vast vplandish countrie dwelt,
The barbarous Thracian soldier moou'd with nought,
Was moou'd with him, and for his fauour sought.
Some swore he was a maid in mans attire,
For in his lookes were all that men desire,
A pleasant smiling cheeke, a speaking eye,
A brow for loue to banquet roiallye,
And such as knew he was a man would say,
Leander, thou art made for amorous play:
Why art thou not in loue, and lou'd of all?
Though thou be faire, yet be not thine owne thrall."*

Followed by this capsule description of a cross between Fire Island and Mardi Gras:

*"The men of wealthie Sestos, euerie yeare,
(For his sake whom their goddess held so deare,
Rose-ckeekt Adonis) kept a solemne feast.
Thither resorted many a wandring guest,
To meet their loues; such as had none at all,
Came louers home from this great festiuall.
For euerie street like to a Firmament
Glistered with breathing stars, who where they went,
Frighted the melancholie earth. . ."*

Overtly Gay action comes in a delightful episode where Leander swimming the Hellespont is accosted by Neptune. All parts of the poem are exciting, and no matter what the action seems to be, we know what Marlowe really had in mind.

MAIL

Come Out of Your Closet Before It's Nailed Shut

Allright, get this straight once and for all, so we can dispel all these ridiculous portrayals of homosexual life. There are no makes on every corner, there are no \$200 sugar daddies for most of us. The vast majority of homosexuals in this country live perfectly normal lives, look perfectly average, never lead the glamorous escapades set forth in this tripe type of picture. They do not go bouncing from crotch to crotch. But you never hear of them — you never even notice them. But we are here — probably 50% of the male population, and every one of us scared shitful of ever admitting it. Afraid to get caught, afraid to be disgraced, afraid to jeopardize our reputations — and even if we weren't worried about all that, we're afraid to confront each other for fear of rejection! The key word to homosexuality is not sexuality — it's fear!

I went to a movie and a guy sat down next to me, with billions of empty seats around, smacked his leg against mine and waited. Both my testicles were in my throat. I froze like solid ice. I awkwardly moved my leg and he left. I was afraid of what might happen (too proper to simply accept this as sign language — and I was cruel to that poor guy whose face I never even dared to turn to see. (My apologies, buddy, but you came on awfully fast.) But why did I do that — why did I turn from that glorious chance to meet someone? Hung up on stupid proprieties, that's why. I'm so blasted proper, so damn shy — so damn stupid!

Most of us want to meet with more subtlety anyway. A glance, an idle comment, strike up a conversation slowly — get to know each other as people, not just bodies. We just can't take a flying leap into bed — we're looking for more than that. Yes, we're hung up on things like emotion, love, a lasting and meaningful relationship — why not call it marriage? So is it a crime to be sincere? Look, I can masturbate all by myself. I don't need anyone to help with that. But I can't love all by myself, and that's the thing I'm really after (and so are most people, despite the sexual pleasures without it).

We're not promiscuous as a rule — only the ones you happen to notice are that way, and that's the reason you notice them. Most of us you never even see. (Hello, all you proper queers — keep looking. I'll find one of you yet!) But it ain't easy — not by a long shot. Cruising is tasteless, bumpsie-kneezies is too. No, it has to be subtle because nobody we want to be hooked up to should be that promiscuous. We can't advertise either — nobody proper would do that, and nobody proper would answer it, either! So what the hell are we supposed to do? Become "spinstuds"?

Well, that's what becomes of most of us, I suppose. Unless we marry some broad because we can't get what we really want. Yes, queers marry all the time. All of my propositions have come from married men! Figure that out. And I turned them all away, and for the same proper reasons which you'll hate. Why should I be the "other man" that might possibly screw up a marriage? I don't think there's anything morally wrong with homosexuality — it hurts no one. It does not harm whatever. It only satisfies the love desire of two people, the same way heterosexuality may. But if you screw up a marriage in the process, then you are doing something wrong. So I won't.

So here I am — a nice, responsible, clean-cut, not so bad-looking guy, with lots of things just ready to explode. So much to give somebody I might love — and nobody's there. I'm not being egotistical, but damn it, I would make a good catch because I'd really appreciate what a magnificent thing it is to have another man to love me in return. I'm not even gay — you could introduce me to your most suspicious relatives and they'd never suspect a thing. So what good is it all? Anyone like me is hiding under the rocks the same way I am. If they'd just leave us the hell alone, and get their damn legal noses out of our bedrooms and mind their own business. What the hell does anyone else care what we do in our bedrooms anyway? It's a pretty dull story in mine besides — still a virgin! Would you believe? I'm more "respectable" than anyone I know, yet I'm the one with all the guilt hangups! Now that's how it really is, so print that and let the truth be known.

Sorry I can't sign this, but I have to be careful. I'm always careful. I'll probably be the first one they catch. Isn't that always the way?

Wish me luck. . . I need it!
—A Proper Stranger—

Dear COME OUT,

I am writing this letter for two reasons. The first is Pride in myself for what I have done to change my life. The second is hope that some of the many "Closet Gays" that will possibly see this letter might take a fresh look at themselves and at their life styles.

I am a young man of Twenty-Three years, gay, and fairly intelligent, I like to believe. Not so long ago, I was a perfect example of the Closet Homosexual. I hid behind the facade of a Heterosexual, playing at girl chasing, declaiming effeminate acquaintances as "Queers" and considering Marriage to the point of Engagement — all in an attempt to hide the truth about myself — from myself.

I was successful in avoiding this knowledge totally until I was nineteen. At that time I realized that I could not achieve Sexual or Emotional satisfaction with a Woman. I reasoned that I was undersexed, due to a strict religious training and decided that my only alternative was to be a Celibate. I ignored the fact that I liked to watch Men, considering it a basic appreciation of beauty.

After reaching my conclusions about my sexual life, my attitude towards Homosexuals changed and I became a "Straight, Sympathetic Liberal". Ironically, I began surrounding myself with Gay Friends and developed a great appreciation for cruising — "for kicks" — or so I thought.

When I was Twenty-One, I finally realized that I was Gay. I was stunned and ashamed, and very much frightened that someone else might find out and expose me. I couldn't accept the fact. The trouble was that I believed what I had heard about Homosexuals, not what I, as one, felt.

I became morose. I resigned myself to a life of loneliness and became very embittered with life. It didn't take me long to start hating myself and become destructive to all around me.

When I was Twenty-Two, I went to work for a Gay Friend's Lover. We struck up a great friendship right away. I could see at the time that we had a great deal in common. This individual was also closeted and had basically the same fears of exposure as I. He, however, was much older and fairly set in his life style.

We developed the habit of playing judge and jury over all around us. It was enjoyable at the time. Then, at a Dinner Party given by my Gay Friend, I was fortunate to see what a bitter, Self-Destructive Man his lover was. It was a lot like looking into a mirror. I felt as if I were seeing the Me of the future. I didn't like what I saw. The prospects of a creative life without changing myself were nil, so I decided it was time to reevaluate myself.

Since then, I have stopped caring what Society thinks of Gay people. I am much happier now that I am in the open about it. People must now accept me for what I am, which has little to do with my choice of bed-mates. I am not interested in friendships with people who let this be a determining factor in who they associate with. Society's image of what a Man and Woman should be is totally ruinous for all, gay or straight, male or female. As for me, since I have torn down my closet, I feel I am once again a Creative Being, and am most anxious to help all "Closet Cases" dismantle their Closets.

Michael F. Boyle

Dear friends,

I read about your organization and activities in the current *Advocate*. Bravo! We need a more aggressive approach in the nonviolent revolution to achieve homosexual rights.

Enclosed is my check for \$10 for which please put me on your mailing list for all literature, including your forthcoming newspaper COME OUT.

I have been active in the homophile civil rights movement since 1953; was for three years national Director of Education for the Mattachine Society, and edited the organization's Education Handbook under my former penname Carl B. Harding. Because I will never again be in sensitive employment, my penname now belongs to the past and I write and work under my real name in our cause.

With every good wish for success in your new imperative adventure.

Sincerely,
Elver A. Barker, Member
Mattachine Society of N.Y.

Can Gay people live among straight friends and relatives without feeling alienated?

Thus far I have been able to function comfortably amidst roommates, friends and relatives. While at school I just told my roommates that I was going out and that was a satisfactory explanation for my conduct for the evening.

Now that my living situation has changed, will my parents now wonder about me — I wonder?

Would it be best for those in this situation or ones similar to this to be honest when faced with direct "are you or ain't you" questions? I don't know.

Scott
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Scott,

Your question is universal to all Gay people but the answers you arrive at have to be tailored to your own particular needs. There is no question that you will feel more whole and happier when you can be who you are all of the time. This is no easy thing, I know. It took me until age 32 to finally give in to myself and though it felt at the time that I was losing everything (the good opinion and sanction of this society from my family right on up to any career dreams I have had) I have in truth gained the whole world. I feel at a loss to convey to you right now what that means. I can just say that I have never felt better in my life. I know now in retrospect that I only began to be really alive when I was able to take that step.

When dealing with friends in a dishonest way you instill in yourself guilt feelings which should not be there. You mention "friends" but it is hard to have real meaningful relationships with people who do not know this part of your life. You do not mention your age or if it is necessary for you to live with your parents at this time. You must think practically — but at the same time you should be getting yourself in a position where you will be able to hold your head up and say who you are, just for your own self respect. Why don't you come and see us GLFers. We've all been through it and getting to know us might be a good and groovy experience.

Love and strength,
Lois and Bob

"COME OUT," PHOTOGRAPHERS, ARTISTS, WRITERS, all of you talented members of the Gay Community. Contribute to your paper to make it the best this country has ever known. Don't just sit there rattling your chains. COME OUT, c/o Bob Fontanella
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