DYKE DICTION
THE LANGUAGE OF LESBIANS

Leonard R. N. Ashley

She loved women and she loved men. The women was on the Q.T.,
of course; Jack wouldn't play that.
—Sherley Anne Williams
in Black Sisters: Poetry by Black American Women, 1746-1980

INTRODUCTION: TALKING DIRTY

Continuing my studies in British and American sexual slang for Maledicta,¹ here is an installment on lesbian lingo, one of the languages which comprise gay speak that some people hardly believe exist. In Susan Isaacs's novel Close Relations, the heroine (Marcia Green, age 35, a political speechwriter) believes, as many do, that nobody "talks dirty" any more: "In 1968, I found out, women were no longer wooed or seduced or flirted with or even whispered to suggestively. They were asked: You wanna?" Playboy advised its readers it was too early in the history of female masturbation for terminology to exist: "Give them time and they'll invent euphemisms."² A magazine of St. Louis (defined
therein as “the buckle of the Bible Belt”) admits “there are only two or three lesbian bars in the metro area compared to eight or nine men’s bars” (and mentions the firebombing of a dyke bar cutely called Mor or Les, on S. Grand Street) but in a long description of gay life there reveals no local language of sexual aberration, states there is “not much of a bar culture among lesbians…no lesbian cruising areas” or “baths for gay women,” and suggests lesbians in particular are “out of the limelight”; one local lesbian asserts:

“Women just aren’t that important. They pose no threat. It’s the men that supposedly do things.”

Dr. Barbara E. Sang, director of the Homosexual Counseling Center in New York, writes me that she agrees “on the role of language in social perception” (“having done my doctoral dissertation in the area of psycholinguistics”) and yet, “working mainly with lesbians,” she “can’t even think of a few words or any for that matter” of their vocabulary. She adds:

My clients tend to be “feminists.” Many slang words both gay & straight are often sexist.

Psychiatrist Nanette Gartrell (Beth Israel Hospital, Boston) and psychologist Diane Mosbacher (Baylor College of Medicine, Houston) discovered that women learn names for genitals later than boys do (after age 11) and “almost half the women [in their surveys of adults] said they had no name for their genitals until age 15,” and used many odd euphemisms (Christmas, bunny, and pocketbook for vagina, penic for penis, etc.), while two experts in “Speech Communication,” Janet Sanders (University of Missouri at St. Louis) and William Robinson (Purdue University at Calumet), determined that when it comes to sex slang “men and women are actually speaking two different languages.” In Playboy again, erotic writer Lynda Schor
“takes a long, hard look at one of the tools of her trade,”
and criticizes men who call their penis ‘him’ (“showing
undue regard for what is really still part of one’s body”—
the Chinese little brother or even blame-taking little boss
is better) and by nicknames such as John Thomas, John
Henry, Joseph, Rover, Oscar, Peter, Dick:

That is most embarrassing to me and I’ve often refused to call a
prick by name when it’s been introduced to me that way. But I know
many women love that, often make up their own name for their
lover’s penis and think of it as someone they can share, like a dog
or a baby.7

A dog as “someone”? Someone who is a dog is “sexually
unattractive”. . .

There is a lot of resistance to “dirty words,” ranging from
blushes from maiden aunts to complaints by Walter Kerr
in the theater section of my local newspaper that “dirty
words” have “become all-purpose substitutes, rushed in to
fill every hole left in a sentence by increasingly lazy
writers.”8 But we hear them everywhere: Patton in a film
promising that his troops are going to go through the enemy
“like crap through a goose,” a former president saying he’s
going to kick Ted Kennedy’s ass, television characters in
the Pennies from Heaven serial calling each other pimp and
whore (“Oh, Arthur, we’re having our first lover’s quarrel,”
the same programs including terms such as bugger and rot-
ten sod, pansy and jokes about Indian fuckers, i.e. fakirs),
George Carlin on WBAI in his recording of “Filthy Words”
(including shit, piss, fuck, cunt, cocksucker, motherfucker, tits,
fart, turd, and twat, though the Federal Communications
Commission later voted 5 to 4 that “the individual’s right
to be let alone” outweighed freedom of speech in the case
of this sort of thing on the radio),9 even though they do
get some people into trouble: Clearinghouse Review
(December 1978) reported Case #25,366 in which an 1897
Michigan law against “indecent, immoral, obscene, vulgar
or insulting language in the presence of women or children" got a man prosecuted for chewing out a policeman in the presence of his own wife.10

But everyone uses some of them, and so here, in the spirit of sober and scholarly inquiry, we are going to examine the language of dykes, hustlers, hookers, chicken queens, fags, drags, bags, hags, et al. We shall be using words which the feminist biweekly Majority Report won't even print (without an extra $2 per word) in their advertisements.11 (They object to White, Black, Slim, Tendencies, Handsome, Passive, Bisexual, Sincere, even Marriage, let alone Butch, French anything, Femme, Stud, Submissive, Dominant, Hermaphrodite, and Soixante-neuf—which is 69, in case you didn't know; 68 is "you suck me and I'll owe you one"). No extra charge.

When even the freshman composition texts are beginning to get rabidly political (Shirley Morahan, "convinced that writing is a meaningful process," of Northeast Missouri State University, has just published A Woman's Place: Rhetoric and Readings for Composing Yourself and Your Prose, containing bits such as Muriel R. Schulz's "The Semantic Derogation of Women"), and perhaps about time, too, we must look into the sex slang of the oppressed majority (women) and their more oppressed minority (lesbians) and other sexual minorities. In this "meaningful process" we shall learn a lot about language as "self-definition," "the relationship between gender and writing," and even (I trust) linguistic scholarship which is adventurous and, to use one more piece of Professor Morahan's prefabricated jargon, "performed with commitment."

We begin with dykes, and use the word as an increasing number of lesbian women are using it today, boldly, with the technique which I discussed as a sort of verbal karate (turning the strength of the opposer into your own weapon) in my earlier piece on faggots. Today the philanthropic North Star organization helps Dykes Opposed to
Nuclear Technology, lesbians with small children are banded together in Dykes and Tykes, a lesbian newspaper is Big Apple Dyke News. At Virginia Military Institute what West Point would call plebs are called dykes, but that's not the kind of dykes I mean: I mean a "female homosexual who plays the masculine rôle" (as a slang dictionary has it, ignoring the fact that the femmes are dykes too), a stinkfinger bulldiker.12 Read on.

LOOKING AT THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

"But Paula," Bill said, "how come all these — these —"
He fumbled for a more subtle word.
"Lesbians," Paula said.
— "Ann Aldrich," We, Too, Must Love (1958)

I do not wish to seem to violate The Motion Picture Code (1930) which demanded that "pictures shall not infer [imply!] that low forms of sex relations are the accepted or common thing," but it's only fair to tell you that there are millions of lesbians in America, "expressing divergence" (as Al Goldstein foolishly said of people who try to sell you dope in the street), some of them very quietly, some of them openly, like Florynce Kennedy (founder of The Feminist Party, coordinator of The Coalition Against Racism), who led a "Womanenergy" conference at Arizona State University in this song:

Nothin' could be sweeter
Than to find out that Anita
Is a les-bi-an.
Nothin' could be finah
Than sharing her vagina
With a wo-man....

Just when hard-pressed males are ready to turn to marriage again — even the late Governor Ella Grasso of Connecticut said: "I'm having trouble managing the [executive]
mansion. What I need is a wife”—a lot of wopersons are not at all interested. Well, maybe some will marry a gay as a beard (a male front), but most are liberated enough not to care what the prying neighbors think, though on television “Dear Abby” confessed to receiving this letter to her syndicated newspaper column:

Dear Abby: I have never seen a man go in or out of their apartment. Do you think they could be Lebanese?\(^\text{13}\)

The followers of the immortal Sappho (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople burned her books and labeled her gynaeon pornikon erotomanes, a “lewd nymphomaniac”) turn up in plays such as The Killing of Sister George (DEViate theme now box office said Variety in January 1969 and the subject has blossomed since), on the staid Mary Tyler Moore TV series (the “Girlfriends” episode was first vetted by homosexual pressure groups for political correctness), in novels (easily located in bibliographies of gay fiction, now extensive) and films (see Parker Tyler’s Screening the Sexes and more recent reports)\(^\text{14}\) and of course in studies of gay life in general (such as Edmund White’s States of Desire, “our gay de Tocqueville” says William Burroughs) and amor lesbicus in particular (soon to be joined by Lesbian Studies, edited by Margaret Cruikshank for Feminist Press, whose bibliography runs to 75 pages in typescript).

The Lesbian Community (to use the title of Deborah Wolf’s book from University of California Press) gets in the press struggling to hold onto its children or to adopt children (New Jersey’s Department of Human Services, for one allows this) or to get its members elected to public office (Elaine Noble to the Massachusetts legislature in 1974, for example) or to protect them against politicians, with scandals old and new (Eleanor Roosevelt, Billie Jean King)\(^\text{15}\) and organizations for social change (The Sisters of Sap-
pho in Arcata County, California—"not a baseball team," comments the San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, 15 August 1976) and unconventional actions and even conventions (the first statewide lesbian convention in Colorado was 28-30 September 1979, for instance). "Every year more and more Yale men aren't men," trumpets the advertisement in Working Woman; and every year more and more "Yalies," and graduates of all sorts of other schools, in business and the professions, are lesbians. Jean Chalon in his gushing biography of Natalie Barney (died at 95 in 1972, subject of a Portrait of a Seducress) records she "suffered a thousand deaths for not being like the others," but today lesbians, though still under fire, suffer less, and surface less flamboyantly. Some are bold to proclaim they are dykes and lay it out before us the way "Judy Chicago" sets a dinner table with plates depicting what the press calls in horror "women's labia." The Lesbian Tide (the title of Jeanne Cordova's important periodical) is at the full. In Britain there are Scottish Lesbian Feminists and gaysoc's of various sorts for women, there are Lesbians in Belfast and a Sappho group in County Derry, Liberation for Irish Lesbians and other groups in Dublin, and in England groups such as National Organization of Lesbians, a Lesbian Line in London (similar to Gay Switchboards in New York, London, etc.), even Gemma (for disabled lesbians), a Catholic Lesbian Sisterhood, a disco in Oxford used to be called (perhaps still is) No Man's Land.... In short, lesbians are organizing, as are their male counterparts in NGTF, CHE, GAU, and so on, and even getting some help from heterosexuals—a far cry from the days when the pioneering Daughters of Bilitis made a few sympathetic men honorary SOB's (Sons of Bilitis) in recognition of a little attention. At The Modern Language Association gay caucuses and sections seem epidemic and panels attract authors such as June Arnold (co-founder of Daughters, Inc.)
press), Sandy Boucher (*Amazon Quarterly, Lesbians Speak Out, Lesbian Reader*) and Susan Griffin (*Dear Sky, The Sink*), to name a few seen in San Francisco in 1975 when MLA was still a trifle uneasy about it; by 1979, when the MLA met once again in San Francisco, the local press was still commenting on such presentations as discomforting but MLA was no longer embarrassed. There is even a Herstory Archives (one of the many lesbian sources of information I was able to crack).

The eponymous hero of Barry Hannah's novel *Ray* tells his friend's wife, who consults him about her lesbian tendencies, he will sleep with her to cure her. Frankly, most American males (and many females) believe that no woman would be a lesbian if she had an opportunity to be anything else, that lesbianism is a disease that can be cured with one injection. This is not the case, and slowly everyone is having forced on them the fact that lesbians are a whole subculture with their own lives and their own ways. Here, we are interested in the language. Others are beginning to share that interest. Witness:

*New York City News*, a gay paper in the Big Apple [New York], is compiling info on whether or not Lesbian slang exists. Other questions are: do lesbians have a distinct language? does it come from different cultures? is it more that a few words? Input is requested from lesbians of all cultures and can be sent to New York City News, Box 2171, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10163.

Well, I saw that in *Mom... Guess What!* in October 1981 and wrote to them. No reply. Perhaps this article will help to answer some of these questions and prove that times have changed since a Miss Kahn (author of a book on sexual fantasies, interviewed on Bill Boggs's "Midday Live in New York") recalls as one when women "didn't have dirty jokes; we didn't have raunchy magazines; we didn't talk to each other." Now they have *Playgirl* (though the *gays* seem to like it more) and raunchy clubs (and lesbian *S&M*) and a language, too.¹⁹
LESBIAN LANGUAGE: WHAT IS
THIS THING CALLED, LOVE?

The lexicographers of homosexuality, from G. Legman and
"Donald Webster Cory" to James W. Chesboro and Bruce
Rodgers, even the writers on lesbianism (such as Julia
Penelope Stanley) and on specialist topics such as black
slang (where things get all confused: butch = “female
homosexual” and cock = “a black girl’s sexuality or organ,”
fruiting = promiscuity), have been scoffing fishheads and
scrambling for the gills (having a hard time).

Check their completeness against this list if you will:
amy-john (active lesbian, much rarer than dyke in general
use), beard (pubes, also chuff, Fort Bushy, fur, garden,
grass, lawn, mowed lawn if shaved, moustache, rug,
short and curlies and short hairs, velvet, wig, wool, but
generally snatch or pussy, occasionally fuzz, whence the
joke of picked up by the fuzz [police] and the reply “Oooo,
that must be painful!”). Bushy Park (obviously U.K. but
appearing in the U.S. Dictionary of Adult Sex Words and Phrases
by Dale Gordon, 1967, where adult, like mature has the
odd U.S. meaning of “obscene” or “vulgar”), belly whop
(Venus observa femina as reticent medical terminology has it),
big brown eyes or big brownies (boobs, breasts, from
the aureoles, tit tips), box (vagina, as in hetero slang, but
more often in the sense of U.S. gay term basket, U.K.
packet), boy in the boat (clitoris, button, dot, joy buzzer,
cockpit), bread (vagina, little used term now because of
the hippies establishing that bread = “money,” also cab-
bage, cake, canoe, cock, poontang from putain, crack,
cunt, crush, quiff, quim, organ, lollipop, Dead End
Street, twat, yoni, and fuckhole, futy, gash, gig,
groceries and many other terms connotating “edible,”
growl, hairpie, hatchi, hidden treasure, hot box, jam-
pot, jaxy, jelly roll [so that’s what “Jelly Roll” Morton was
all about!], jing-jang, joxy, little sister or little pal, slash,
slit, slot, meat, old thing, passion pit [though this usually means a cinema for necking, U.K. snogging], muff [as in muff-diver], toolbox, piece of ass or tail or similar, or it or she), bull or bull bitch or bull dyke (also bulldagger and variations), bumper (active tribade), cherry (hymen, also cherry-picker for one out for virgins), chichi (breasts, boobies, grapefruits, headlights, lungs, mammary glands, Manchesters from “Manchester City” = titty as with U.K. bristols, maracas, melons, upper deck, and so on), closet dyke (as with closet case and closet queen, shy or furtive), curse (menstruation, which in French slang is equated with the arrival of les anglais in their military red coats), dandysette (according to Gordon, which none of my informants has ever heard or read), dripping for it (sexually eager), fluff (though Martin Sherman’s recent play Bent makes a big point of using this term to describe male homosexuals in a manner less derogatory than queer), flat fuck (Venus observa femina, jokingly called “a navel engagement without loss of semen”), Hottentot apron (elongation of labia majora, curtains), ki-ki (lesbian who goes either way), king (old term for diesel dyke, like tom), lady love, les and les girls and lezzie and Liz and Lesbo and Leslie and so on, pinky (femme or passive lesbian), pussy queer or queen, rin-o-tam (balls for female masturbation), Saphist, scarf (Gordon uses this for cunnilinguis but he presumably means the U.K. scoff = “eat”), strawberries (nipples), twilight girls (I have never found this but twilight men was common in the days of lavender lads and pansies, from which some words such as wildeman are lost and some such as fairy still survive), van dyke (“lesbian with a moustache” says one so-called authority, trying hard to be cute), and of course girl lover and woman lover. Many lesbians deny they use many of these terms and insist that they must belong (with on the rag = menstruating, etc.) to the lexicon of heters.
For what they quaintly call the "monosyllable" (cunt), John S. Farmer and W.E. Henley in Slang and Its Analogues (1896, IV:336-345; reprinted in one volume by Arno Press, 1970) have an extensive list of synonyms drawn from literature, such as: aphrodisical tennis court (Sir Thomas Urquhart), bookbinder's wife (G.A. Stevens, "manufacturing in sheets"), commodity (Shakespeare), customhouse goods (Capt. Grose for a harlot's cunt "because fairly entered"), Et-cetera (Earl of Rochester and John Clelland, though the most effective use of this is surely in a poem by e. e. cummings), India (John Donne, because southern and hot, one hopes not unexplored), parts of shame (Alexander Pope), and so on down the alphabet; but these are euphemisms and jokes, not really slang, and not in general use. Still, Farmer & Henley do lead us to the origins or early use of words such as gig[sg] and trace to the etymology of some English slang for cunt in French, German (Schwesterlein = "little sister"), Spanish (which has material of interest to onomasticians in Cuba, Doña Fulana de Tal, Juana la loca, Madre Soledad, etc.), Portuguese, even Dutch (kut) and Walloon (gatte).23 Lesbians use far fewer of these nicknames for cunt than men do though, to be tough, some of the dykier ones may use a slang term. Those who hit the sheets (are passive) are more reserved in their speech, it is said.

Here are some obsolete or nearly obsolete terms which careless lexicographers continue to list as current (as in The Queens' Vernacular): from the Twenties: goudou and gougnotte from French, pantalonuda (Spanish tomboy), Leslie Anne and Thespian and Marge; from the Thirties: Apache, dagger, fairy lady, marinacho (Spanish tomboy again), wear boxer shorts ("to take the active role..."); from the Forties: brother girl ("Jap.fr Eng"), cat, collar and tie, dandysette, fellow, mantee, mason ("because she lays bricks = homely gals"), shim (she + him), vegetable (not a fruit),
vot ("Calif women's prison sl. fr -vert in pervert"), wolf ("= vot," but probably just in the usual prison sense of "predator"), mantee voice (deep bass) and mantee walk (swagger), battle cruiser, to be frank ("the aggressive partner in a lesbian encounter: "Honey, I want to be frank with you tonight..." "No, no, I'm Frank tonight, you were Frank last night," one with the gay joke on "Let's be Frank and Earnest..."); molly dike (which Rodgers traces to U.K. "molly = bosom, woman, effeminate" but the point is in the connection between molly and women's clothes, as with the disguised Molly Maguires), go south (modern go down), sneeze in the cabbage (modern give head as a lawnmower or bumper sticker, etc.). Paul Muniment in Henry James's The Princess Cassamassima said, "One must be deep to penetrate," and if we are going to straighten out homosexual (and other) slang we have to pay attention to dates of origin and use and indicate who said or says what and when, not simply throw together all the terms we can find.

SEPARATIST POLITICS
AND POLITICOLINGUISTICS

Charles Merrill Smith in Instant Status, or How to Become a Pillar of the Upper Middle Class (1972) wrote that "when God created two sexes, He may have been overdoing it." Now we have more than two sexes and some feminists who see little reason for the heterosexual males. Trying to investigate lesbian lingo, I have encountered some politically-motivated hostility; even my female helpers if detected as not sympática have been cold-cunted and brushed off. A critic in The Nation complained that with some modern writers (such as E.L. Doctorow, Robert Coover, Joseph Heller) it requires "complete concordance with their politics to read them at all." With many lesbians, we found, one has to be sympathetic and politically correct to get any
information out of them—and they would clearly prefer that if the language of lesbians is to be revealed to the general public at all it be revealed by lesbians themselves.

But they do not seem to be getting the finger out (U.K. slang for galvanizing into action) and examining the lesbian language, so I am daring their wrath here, and if it moves them to more extensive and more accurate studies, this effort will not have been wasted. At least in addressing this aspect of the slanguage of sexual minorities, as opposed to the language of male homosexuals and camp (already reported on in this journal), swingers (which used to mean “bisexuals” and now translates “promiscuous persons of all sexes”), boy-lovers, TVs and TSs, necrophiliacs (whose few specialized terms I found unprintable) or onanists (whose activities have already been taken in hand in Maledicta to some extent), and so on, I shall not be accused of being one of them.24

I might add that, in contradistinction to my collaborating “native speakers” of gay language (who were very forthcoming, if not all out), my lesbian informants often underlined for me the fact that gay women are far less promiscuous and in the life than gay men, that their relationships tend to be far more sentimental and less physical (and longer lasting and more nearly monogamous) than those of gay men, and that many of them do not know much of “the language.” “Angela and I have been together for years,” one typical respondent testified, “and we seldom or never go to bars. We really don’t have any lesbian slang unless you think huggle [a combination of hug and snuggle in the style of Lewis Carroll’s portmanteau words] is lesbian.”

The Sapphists (to use a dated term still heard in some U.K. circles but pretty well dead in the U.S.) have more slang slung at them than they use. Dyke was originally an insult, created by some straight who forgot it was a Dutch boy, not a girl, who put his finger in. Jokes about thes-
pians and tomboys and tit-kings were heterosexual, as butch and femme were gay, first. In time lesbians made jokes on themselves: when gay boys on Fire Island gave their summer shack names such as The White Swallow, the dykes responded with names such as Lickety Split. In time lesbians talking (having an affair in stir) picked up and to some small extent contributed to jail slang, Army slang, and other departments of informal English and American. But one can read much in lesbian novels from The Well of Loneliness on and pick up little of the private vocabulary one can collect from similar works (discussed in my “Kinks and Queens” in Maledicta). The women (girls is not p.c. [politically correct] and lesbians seem more exercised about such things than gays) are more likely to salt their speech with the terms of the Lib movement than the lesbian subdivision of it and insofar as the Movement has estranged lesbians from their gay brothers it has reduced the gay component in women's slang. A crude term such as clithopper will not be found in a novel such as Maureen Duffy's The Microcosm (1966) or in more outspoken, more recent fiction, and even the toughest dyke, though she may swear like a trooper, can be heard to use gentle, old-fashioned terms such as my affair. (A male homosexual may be having an affair but only in the U.K. is he likely to call his boyfriend his affair; in the U.S. “my lover” or even “my friend” is preferred, for affair here carries connotations of impermanence, of trick.)

LESTER LINGO IN USE

Masculine lesbians occasionally use male names and some adopt sexually-ambiguous monikers (Robin and Lee would do for lesbian, gay, or transsexual—though two transsexuals whose names I can reveal, since they got involved with the courts in California and Pennsylvania and thus entered the public record, are Selena Jagger [formerly Richard Cooper]
and Leslie Phillips [formerly Ralph Plotkin] while more famous sex-changes took names such as Christine, Gaby, Jan, April, Cochinelle, etc.). Lesbians make little of camp names, unlike some faggots or queens. It would be difficult or impossible to dish or chew out an offensive lesbian with a string of special names such as I discussed in my article on camp, for camp is neither virile nor ladylike, and les girls wish to be one or the other, not screaming, and (this may cause me more trouble than anything else I have said about lesbians) as a group lesbians tend to be peculiarly humorless and lacking in wit, or the will to use it. There are a very few standup lesbian comedians (though the joke is that “women find it difficult to make a living standing up”) but they are nowhere near as amusing or as clever as the gay ones, even the drag queens and imitators of gays (these are mostly in the U.K. and include Benny Hill, Frankie Howerd, Stanley Baxter, Larry Grayson; the U.S. tradition used to include “Uncle Miltie” Berle in drag and others but is now perhaps too touchy). Lesbians—big generality coming!—tend to be shrinking librarians or shrieking liberationists and, when not simply trying to stay inconspicuous (to avoid trouble of The Children's Hour sort), serious to the point of grimness; neither the dullness nor the decibels contribute much lightness, much wit, much fun.

Nor do lesbians as a group know much of their own history. Ask a gay about the etymology of a gay word and he will probably at least hazard a guess. Try asking a lesbian whether childie was in U.K. use as a term before the play and film of Sister George (in which Childie, by the way, is a dependent woman in her thirties, no spring chicken). After French films such as Les Prisonnières, Olivia, The Girl with the Golden Eyes, La Religieuse, etc., English-language films were somewhat more outspoken about lesbianism (though the first version of The Children's Hour in
1936 was so evasive as to be quite confusing) but in the last 20 years (after A Walk on the Wild Side, say, released in the year of the second crack at The Children's Hour, 1962) it cannot be said that the language of lesbianism has reached the general filmgoing public. British films (such as The Smashing Bird I Used to Know, where smashing = fan-tabulous and bird = young girl, as in the comedy The Secretary Bird) reveal nothing new about lesbian slang.

**LESBIAN SLANGUAGE**

**IN THE LITERATURE**

Lesbianism gets little useful notice in the “Lexicon of Homosexual Slang” appended to The Homosexual and His Society (1963) where dike [sic] appears with terms which serve both male and female homosexuals (butch it up = “to make an effort or a pretence to be[ing] butch”), hand job (“manual sexual stimulation”), hickey, husband, jam (U.S. West Coast then for straight), one-night stand, score (“to find a paying customer,” but actually equivalent to make out, with no money necessarily involved), etc. There “Donald Webster Cory” and John P. LeRoy misspell nelly as nilly and vice versa (“mutual cunnilingus”) is about the extent of their knowledge of lezzy (which they call rare) terminology.

More informative are pioneers Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in Lesbian Women (1972, which raises the question: “Are there lesbian men?”). They note marriage (long-term affair) and DOB (Daughters of Bilitis). The Ladder and other publications, now defunct, added more. Richard Hauser, asked in 1958 to prepare a survey of homosexuality for the British Home Office (the results are in The Homosexual Society, 1962) ignored lesbianism, as did U.K. law (allegedly because government officials did not dare to present such information to Queen Victoria), though it ranges over these male categories: bisexual, married, self-isolated homosex-
ual, fully sublimated homosexual, gay prostitute (young volunteer, call-boy, cottage or tea-room cruiser or troller, club and pub pro, roller or decoy for thieves), sugar daddy, homosexual marriages and affairs, the club type, the pub frequenter, the homosexual friend, the prison queer and ship's queer, the gay alcoholic, the religious gay, the pedophile, the psychopath, the masturbator, the voyeur, the sadomasochist, the "abnormal" or kinky homosexual, the toucher, the promiscuous gay, the rebel, the woman-hater, the virgin-chaser, the body-builder, the transvestist [sic] both "true" and "false," the mentally-ill homosexual, and those who stress age in active or passive rôles. This extensive though hardly well-organized list does not mention female homosexuals and the one-page Appendix 3 ("The Private Language of a Minority") is ludicrously inadequate. The Homosexual Society has some egregious errors: verda should be varda (Parlyaree for "see" or "observe"), though Partridge gets it wrong, too (vardo), adding that "low Cockneys" pronounce it "vardy," which is not so. (It is from Romany varter = watch but camp gys use it in expressions such as "How jolly to varda your eek," eek, being really backslang ecafe = face).

With the caveat that Hauser can't spell, we can notice these lesbian terms: mute (vagina), jubes (breasts), polone-homi (actually omi-palome) for "Lesbians", les-be-friends = "an affair between two women." Parlyaree in homosexual use (along with backslang riah = hair, which Hauser gets as "riha") gives us nanti (no), bona[r] (good), [h]omi[e] (man), and polone (woman) and other mangled foreign words (cartso = penis, from Italian cazzo, etc.). Hauser hits upon some words later found in The Queens' Vernacular such as cod (vile), chicken ("young bitch" in Hauser's definition), and some strange entries such as dally ("sweet, kind"—probably confused with dolly = "pretty"), regal ("dignified," clearly related to queen), gutless ("a lot," but U.S. would take this
to mean "lacking courage"), reef and grope (feel up), bod (body), park (give) and Dill Doll ("artificial phallus"), not quite close enough to dildo. He doesn't know just for cods (just for fun). One suspects some spiky (bitchy) "bitches," as he calls them, were taking the piss out of him (U.S. fooling him). He thinks minnie is equivalent to mince (walk effeminately). One smells something fishy in his work; one snarfs a send-up.

THE LESBIAN LEXICON
AND LITERATURE

R. E. L. Masters in The Homosexual Revolution has a chapter on DOB's The Ladder but gives us no new vocabulary. This 1964 book recommends the writings of "Ann Aldrich" (who also wrote as "Vin Parker") as "probably the best popular works ever written about lesbians in the United States."

So I excavated We, Too, Must Love and We Walk Alone, both very rare now. We Walk Alone was groundbreaking and We, Too, Must Love (1958) even has fan letters at the end, but its early promise of the "vocabulary of the lesbian" is not fulfilled. It gives hands around or Paul Jones (from the dances, for switching partners) and twilight world (lesbian life), and puts gay in quotation marks as unfamiliar: "the 'gay' girl." It says:

"Cruising" is a word more indigenous to the world of male homosexuality than to the Lesbian world, but cruising does exist in the Lesbian's world.

You bet your bra it does, and so does passing as a man, though "Ann Aldrich" knows nothing of that. This author is still able to call the hard glance or lingering come-on look the long drink. "She" writes dike and promises that in later chapters: "We will see what it is that attracts the female to the Well of Loneliness...." It is surprising to realize that
all this was written during the lifetime of many of today's militant lesbians.

I cannot determine the date of the earliest U.K. lesbian periodical but for the U.S. I think we need not go farther back than the late 1947: *Vice Versa*—moderns would balk at any pun in *vice*—was published in Los Angeles from late 1947 two months into 1948. Did *vice versa* for “female homosexuality” predate or follow this? If it set the phrase, it is difficult to see how so ephemeral a U.S. publication could have had such an effect upon U.K. slang. Probably the slang term came first, as with *One Magazine*, the gay pioneering periodical, clearly related to the old joke about soldiers numbering off:

Sergeant: “Are you one?”
Private: “Yeth, are you one, too?”

The lisp dates the joke as well. By 1969, City College CUNY chartered a group called Homosexuals Intransigent (publishing *Homosexual Renaissance*), proof of the new radical consciousness. (The initials also mocked the drawled *Hi!,* then considered the standard homosexual conversational gambit.) The earliest activists liked the word *homophile*, now as outmoded as *urning*, and in time were created such monstrosities as *radicalesbian*, *youngman* (popularized by John Rechy's *City of Night*), and other short-lived combinations.

For years lesbianism hardly received any official notice, though the U.S. Civil Service Commission stated that “for many years...criminal, infamous, dishonest, immoral or notoriously disgraceful conduct, which includes homosexuality or other types of sexual perversion, are sufficient grounds for denying appointment to a Government position or for the removal of a person from the Federal service,” and it was male homosexuals who were denied admission to the U.S. as “sexual psychotics” and persecuted
or prosecuted when discovered. As part of female oppression, the male Establishment refused to believe or perhaps to care about any hanky-panky between females. What could they do?

The answer to that was available in a long literature of lesbianism, older than the gays in Marlowe and Shakespeare, than Sir John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* and Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random*, in modern times featuring the works of “Radclyffe Hall,” Djuana Barnes, Elizabeth Bowen, Gertrude Stein, Naomi Royd-Smith, Shirley Jackson's *Hangsaman*, Diana Fredericks' autobiography (1939), Rosamund Lehmann, Mary Renault, Ronald Firbank of *Inclinations*, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, “Clemence Dane” of *Regiment of Women* as early as 1917, not to mention many anonymous writers and others more famous as lesbians than as writers. Dorothy Baker's *Trio*, D.B. Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God*, and Sir Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women* were early reactions against twentieth-century lesbianism. Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* gave “Radclyffe Hall” her pen name, I believe, and the whole history of the Victorian novel is yet to reveal in full extensive lesbian overtones, more carefully hidden than the subject in Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Lamartine, Pierre Louÿs, Maurice Maindron's *Deux Amies*, Charles-Étienne's *Notre Dame de Lesbos*, Feydeau's *La Comtesse de Chalis*, etc., to list a handful of French works of note. Maupassant's *La Femme de Paul* and plays such as Mourey's one-actor *Laun-Tennis* of 1891 show the extent of the lesbian tinge. Frederick Hawkins has surveyed the eighteenth-century French drama (1888) and Brander Matthews the nineteenth-century drama (1905) but the lesbian aspect was in their time not mentionable and so neglected. The place to look is in fiction; say, Victor Marguerite's *La Garçonne* (1922), Suzanne Roland-Manuel's *La Trille de Diable* (1946), Catulle Mendès's *Méphistophela* (1890), Henri de Regnier's
La Pécheresse (1920) and other detritus of the Symbolistes, Édouart Bourget’s The Captive (English translation 1926, very influential), 29 Jacques de Lacratelle’s Marie Bonifas (1927), and the extremely outspoken modern novels, lightyears beyond the evasiveness of La Belle Époque and “Josephine Peladan” (the man who wrote Le Vice suprême, L’Andragyne, etc.) and such. In none of these will one find the pungent argot of Genet and Céline, but I mention some French titles not only because they are less well-known to English scholars but because, especially if one adds the pornographic trash which proliferated in the period, the language is more revealing and more colorful than that of English writers. The fact is that before Americans began to tackle the subject with some regularity in the Twenties, before André Tellier’s Twilight Men (1931) in English, lesbians had been extensively if sometimes obliquely recorded in French popular literature. The gay woman never appealed as much as the “fallen woman,” but our ancestors found frissons in both. Today there is a whole, extensive lesbian literature, lesbian authors, lesbian presses, a lesbian reading public, and some slight interest in “properly handled” lesbian references in the media.

IGNORING THE MONSTROUS REGIMENT
OF WOMEN AS A SEXIST APPROACH

Wilde, however, was wrong. It is not male homosexuality that is “the love that dare not speak its name.” Today it seems sometimes as if it is the love that will not shut up. It is lesbianism that is neglected, ignored, as it has been from Havelock Ellis’s The Psychology of Sex until pretty recent times. Allen Edwardes and R.E.L. Masters (The Cradle of Erotica) distinguished nicely between sapphism and tribadism but really regarded lesbianism as resulting from “the immoderate use of aphrodisiacs” and were more interested in informing us that Muslims admire a shaved
pudenda (which they nickname "hairless peach," the way we used to have "split apricot") and that the Kabuli like a ghulāmiyeh ("she-boy," a girl trained for anal intercourse and dressed as a boy) who is able to entertain two males, front and rear, at once. They add:

The term "she-man" ("she-boy" very rarely) is sometimes used in the United States to refer to the effeminate or "swish" type of homosexual male.

Actually, Wentworth & Flexner give "shemale n. A female, esp. a disliked, distrusted woman; a bitch" and gays use shemale for faggot. But to return to women:

In U.S. Women's prisons, the same term is used to designate a lesbian, usually of the masculine or "butch" type, who takes the male role in homosexual intercourse.

Permit me to sidestep the question of whether there can be "a male rôle" in lesbian "intercourse," while stating that straights sincerely believe that hetero rôle-playing exists at least potentially in all sex. What we should have preferred Edwards & Masters to have explained is exactly why there is "the taste for lesbian practices...widespread throughout Arabia" (page 305); are Arabs lousy lovers or do they instill in their women a taste for what the Indians so picturesquely call padmakompalachati ("licking the lotus stamen") and vambhagabhachusi ("sucking the bamboo sprout"), clitoral stimulation orally?

We English-speakers need not grapple with such mouth-filling terms. We can politely say lesbian, less politely dyke, and old terms such as "aberrant women" or even "sex variant women" (as Jeannette Foster's book of 1956 called them) are out, not used as insults even by cunt-lapping, muff-diving men.

Don Teal (The Gay Militants, 1971) says that after The Stonewall [Bar] Riots (1969) radical gays objected to Lucien Turscott in the Village Voice calling them "faggots," and to-
day the *Voice* (which once refused to print the word *gay* as "obscene...equatable with 'fuck' and other four-letter words") runs much *gay* and *dyke* news, advertises homosexual and other porno films, and in its "Personals" columns includes many invitations from GWMs (*gay* white males) and GWFs (*gay* white females) to unnatural acts forbidden under the laws of The State of New York, By the Grace of God Free and Independent. In specialist lesbian publications the advertisements are even more frank.

"Donald Webster Cory" in his *The Homosexual in America* survey 32 years ago (1951) thought *gays* outnumbered lesbians in the U.S. 10 to 1. Now we know there are even *gay* seagulls (thanks to the Hunts of The University of California, Irvine, and other researchers) and more queer ducks of all kinds than was previously suspected. Gene Damon and Lee Stuart's *The Lesbian in Literature* (1967) and subsequent studies make it possible for us to see the lesbian impact and their language, though lesbians do not get their share of attention in books such as Roger Austen's *The Homosexual Novel in America* (1977) or Brian Reade's study of late nineteenth-century Britain, *Sexual Heretics* (1970). One hopes that with the great expansion of the *Annotated Bibliography of Homosexuality* (Vern Bullough *et al.*, eds., 2 vols. 1976) forthcoming from Garland Publishers under the editorship of Wayne Dynes and others, the subject classification and index of the 22,000 items in 4 volumes will show how much has been printed on lesbianism and how much still needs to be done, especially on the language. Dynes's *Gay Books Bulletin* is also running installments, edited by my colleague Edward C. Paolella, detailing mentions of *gay* and lesbian topics in the *straight* periodical press, which once again demonstrate that lesbians (and particularly lesbian language) are too much ignored. Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* points the way to more linguistic analysis, while
Lillian Faderman of California in *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) writes the history of lesbianism from the Renaissance to the present but still does not delve deeply into the way that the special language of lesbians reflects their unique experience and unusual outlook on the world.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Having waded through seas of lesbian literature and pornography (with much less reward in new vocabulary than I should ever have suspected), I suppose I am entitled to make at least one or two generalizations about the language therein. Though "Pisanus Fraxi," as Bruendorff and Henningsen sum it up, "has drawn attention to the pitiful literary standard of Victorian pornography," I believe lesbians are portrayed (or hinted at) there in more realistic language than male homosexuals or other perverts (as those who practice what today is fashionably called an alternative lifestyle were then called), and in more modern works I find descriptions and dialogue more creditable in lesbian than in gay, fladge, or other such works. One can more readily believe that lesbians do really use the words contained in their fiction than that gays speak the overheated sentences ("I plunged my throbbing rod into his quivering pit of passion") of the cheap pornography denigrated as fag hots. Lesbian writing may often be sticky with sentiment but not with semen, of course, or inelegant "elegant variation," seldom or never as overwrought as (say) *Teleny*; or, *The Reverse of the Medal*, the authorship of which, attributed to Oscar Wilde, may well have been the most monstrous canard ever perpetrated against him. The typewritten trash of the tawdriest gay writers has little or no parallel for women, and violence plays only a very small part in lesbian fiction, where kisses and hand-holding are the rule, not trash and fist-fucking. What H.L. Mencken said
of nuns in cloisters, that they “have developed their own slang (amusing, but of course genteel),” can, on the whole, be said of lesbians, and Stuart Berg Flexner’s prefatory comment on Wentworth & Flexner’s Dictionary of American Slang that slang is generally in America “created and used by males” is about as true as can be expected of a broad generalization in the field of linguistics. If and when a lesbian or a lesbian character in fiction uses violent or very vulgar slang, it most often indicates that she is aping some macho model, or echoing the slang of gays, prostitutes, jailbirds, etc. From them she might pick up and more to startle than identify with her sisters use words and expressions such as peddle your ass, have a bit of ring (pedicate), bring out, play chopsticks (mutual masturbation, from the crossing of hands when playing Chopsticks on the piano), coal burner (a white who has relations with a dinge, or black), crack (vulva), daddy (butch or diesel dyke), daisy-chain (defined by Legman as “a spintry”), double-gaited (bi or AC/DC), fluff (femme), gash-eater, go down on (fellate or be a high diver or muff-diver), horsewoman (he-she or butch bitch), kid-simple (obsessed with the very young), kicky (exciting) and kinky ( perverse), mama (old-fashioned term for daddy), mark or mug (a john), malfior (Pachuco term for lesbian), old lady (lover), proposition (make a pass at someone you have eyes for), quickie (brief encounter), rim (anilingue), rubyfruit (female genitals), sil (a woman silly about another, having a crush on her), tongue (as a verb), tourist (not in the life but down there on a visit, etc.), go [way down] South [in Dixie] (oragenitalism, says Legman, referring us to Cary’s Slang of Venery and Its Analogues, 1916), your mother (the self, as in “Your mother needs a drink,” picked up from camp conversation).

It is sexist to describe lesbians as “soul-mouthing harri-dans” (see John Barth’s The Sot-Weed Factor) and lesbians,
being more politically-minded than most people, may agree with novelist Jane Rule's comment:

...I once tried to deal with a lesbian group—that wasn't a group, you know, just a bunch of [fellow] lesbians—I have never been in such a nightmare circumstance in my life. Every one of them invalidated every other one. By the time they got through—there were about 50 of us—there wasn't a true lesbian in the room. Because if you ever spoke to a man you weren't a true lesbian; if you ever had children you weren't a true lesbian; if you were just talking about being political, that wasn't being a true lesbian. There was nobody left. I said, "Apparently, a lot of people have hang-ups about being called 'lesbian,' and none of us need to after this. We just wiped it out as a category."31

The discussions of lesbian language get more involved with the p.c. (politically correct) than those of any other sexual minority, but the fact remains that there are millions of lesbians, of all stripes, and they have to some extent their own identity and a special way of looking at the world that is both the product of and the reaction to their larger societal context. You can read more about it in BAD [Big Apple Dyke] News and many other militant lesbian publications today. I hope that this comparatively brief analysis of some lesbian slang will help in deciphering the occasionally strange words one encounters there and in other lesbian writings.

COMING IN OUR NEXT
(AND FINAL) INSTALLMENT

In the final installment of this series on the sexual "fringe" vocabulary, I consider the more or less private language of other sexual minorities: Prostitutes (male and female); child molesters and man/boy lovers; water sports enthusiasts; sado-masochists and dabblers in discipline, bondage, flagellation, etc.; transvestites and transsexuals.32 Hedda Hoppers may say, "I want to know why you are always plunging into sewers!"33 I answer: This research is
linguistically and culturally significant, *humani nil a me alienum puto*, though I hope you will not misinterpret the first part of that sentence of Terence's (*Homo sum*), and, after all, it's a dirty job (if you like) but somebody has to do it.

I hope each and every section of this study will prove of interest to the reader of *Maledicta* and indeed stimulate further efforts, in amplification and (if necessary) correction, on the part of specialists too long silent on these subjects. And lexicographers, whose work in this corner of the vineyard has been woefully inadequate, now have in print the citations which should add considerably to the length and completeness of future lexicons; they can no longer argue that they never heard of these vehemently vulgar and sometimes outrageously obscene words.

I do not agree with the Rev. William Sloane Coffin that "just as 'the Black problem' turned out to be a problem of white racism, just as 'the woman problem' turned out to be a problem of male sexism, so 'the homosexual problem' is really the homophobia of many of us heterosexuals." That may do for the pulpit but the world outside Riverside Church is more complex; the truth, however, is that the "problems" of all the sexual minorities discussed in this article (and of the creators of words such as *homophobia*, discussed in an earlier article in this series of mine) are much bound up in and reflected in the language of society and its various subcultures, and that in so apparently trivial a matter as a capital *B* for *Black* and a small *w* for *white* in that sermon, let alone the oppressions and expressions of the sexual outsiders, there are ample proofs that (as "George Orwell" argued) thought not only corrupts language but "language can also corrupt thought."

As asked what the first thing he would do were he given the governance of the state, Confucius replied that he would "reform the language." I have been given no such oppor-
tunity or charge, but I do think it helpful to describe the language, for in it are clues to the way we all think, majority and minority—and perhaps how we can think better of some things. In my view, this is no prostitution of scholarship.

**FOOTNOTES**


2. J.W. of Amherst (Mass.) asked: "What about female masturbation? Is there a slang phrase in common currency? Is the absence of such a phrase a sign of the sexual repression of women by the larger society?" *Playboy's Advisor* replied: "We conducted an informal poll of the ladies in our life and couldn't come up with an accepted slang term for female masturbation. Some nice tries—diddling, the old five-finger discount, getting off—were obviously borrowed from the masculine. What are you going to do—sue them for copyright infringement? Women only recently discovered masturbation. Some of them even go to seminars to learn the basics (clear evidence of a difference in intel-
ligence between the sexes). If they talk about it at all, they tend to use the simple term: masturbation. Give them time and they'll invent euphemisms. Then again, as masturbation becomes acceptable (and guilt-free), it won't be necessary to use slang." Playboy clearly does not have its finger on matters female; there's the rub.


6. Sanders and Robinson's study first appeared in the Journal of Communication, 29:2, and was summarized in the Psychology Today "Newsline" article, above.


9. "Maybe words really are as dangerous as stick and stones," editorialized Rolling Stone (7 September 1978, 17), "more dangerous than ideas, in fact, because the Supreme Court will fight like a motherfucker to protect our ideas; they just want to ban some of the ideas our words are made of." The Nine Old Men quoted Murphy of freedom of utterance versus "social interest in order and morality." RS offered $5000 "for the first piece of valid, documented proof that any of the ten 'filthy words'...in and of themselves, have caused demonstrable physical, mental or spiritual damage...in this country in the last five years and must be a result of the word itself, not an indignant reaction to an insult (such as someone taking out your face because you called them a twat)." No takers.

10. Prosecution affidavit deposeth: "That he [the pro-
secutor] verily believes that testimony from prosecution witnesses at trial will show that the defendant uttered the following words toward the police as the basis for his arrest under M.S.A. $28.569, MCLA 750.337: A. Fuck or fucker. B. Bitch. C. Assholes. Further affiant saith not.” Case dismissed; William T. Street (Saginaw, Michigan) for the defendant.

11. The Village Voice interviewed Majority Report publisher Nancy Borman: “Yup, that’s right. And we’ve just added ‘pussy-eater,’ too. Our reasoning is simple. All these words indicate false advertising or offensive attitudes that we can do without.” Moreover, she admitted, the paper ($7.50 a year) could use the extra money, though it was then on a CETA grant and owed subscribers copies.

12. Peter Tamony (to whom I am indebted for bringing a lot of rare and useful information to my attention in my slang studies) as No. 31 in his series on Americanisms: Content & Continuum (May 1972) provided 15 pages on “Dike: A Lesbian.” Military use of dyke = fag (in the U.K. sense) dates to the 1940s: it appears in that sense in Time in 1950. As lesbian slang spread (if dyke is lesbian slang rather than hetero slang for “lesbian”), it faded. Now, Esquire reports, VMI uses dyke “with a nervous twitter whenever outsiders are present, since it does have other connotations and you wouldn’t want to get the wrong idea.”

13. “Abigail Van Buren” later repeated the punchline on a Johnny Carson “Tonight” television show with a different letter (including stereotypes “a gym teacher” and “a middle-aged social worker” supposedly living together), along with some very old jokes (from her new book) which make it obvious she is making up these letters she considered “not fit to print” in her columns. Or maybe her public is putting her on and she herself is too naive. Anti-fag and anti-dyke jokes also deserve study for what they reveal about heterosex hates, fears, prejudices, values.

14. Tyler asserts that “Homeroses of sapphic gender”—
the book is better written than this suggests—"are comparatively few on the screen" but actually he has plenty of what he calls special friendships, vex-sex, naughty Momism, etc.

15. Herb Caen's San Francisco Chronicle column often makes anti-gay jokes—my favorite was 18 February 1980 when he reported a rise in S&M in S.F. elevators: "Juan-Miguel Olexy was riding in a crowded one in the Russ Bldg. and said to a friend, in the course of describing a bad scene in his office, 'I'm so sore I feel like beating the hell out of someone.' At which a few voice piped up from the rear: 'This is NO place for romance, dearie!'" and on that date he also remarked: "Pretty young women go backstage [at the Avon Tennis Tournament] at their own risk after one of those 'ladies' pro tennis tournaments. At least three of the 'lady' stars come on pretty strong, cha-cha-cha."

Many male tennis stars have been very gay indeed, but I always thought the epitome of the butch dyke in sports was a once-famous lady golfer nicknamed "Babe." The sport with the most gays in it is probably a male one, pro football, as Dave Kopay and others attest, though there seems to be no word for a homosexual "tight end" or queer quarterback.


17. National Gay Task Force, Committee for Homosexual Equality (U.K.), Gay Academic Union, GAA (Gay Activists Alliance) could have been GAY (Gay Activist Youth) but gay organizations do not tend toward pronounceable acronyms like NOW (National Organization of Women), though some are known by names such as Dignity, Integrity, etc.

18. Pierre Louÿs's Songs of Bilitis gave DOB its name in the days when gays gave their groups allusive names such as Mattachine and Dorian League.

19. The language has attracted notice in many quarters.
Pop linguist William Safire ("Geezer Power," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 September 1981, 11-12) is partly right (as usual): "Without communication disorder or speech disfluency, I resist the word *gay* just because homosexual-rights groups insist upon it; I don’t say *queer*, because that is a slur, but *homosexual* is neutral and accurate. If lesbians argue that 'homosexual' should be limited to men, I would put up a feeble fight—arguing that the *homo* is the same as the 'man' in 'mankind' [it isn't; it's the same as the *homo* in *homogenized*, being the Greek for 'same,' not the Latin for 'man,' as even Safire should know] and covers women, too—but I'd cave in; if many people used the separate terms, that differentiation would be in the direction of precision." To aim Safire in such a direction, I recommend John Balzar, "California Seeking an Enforcer of Gay Rights," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 March 1981, 4: "According to the glossary [prepared by The Sexual Orientation Project, Sacramento], 'gay' is actually an older term than 'homosexual,' and can be used to refer to both men and women. But the glossary notes that some women strongly prefer the word lesbian. For this reason, state workers are advised to use the phrase 'lesbians and *gay* men' when referring to homosexuals of both sexes." It is also noted that a 1979 executive order in California makes it unlawful to discriminate against homosexuals (lesbians and *gays*) in the civil service and *dyke*, *fag*, *queer* are "cruel, derogatory and offensive, and should not be used." But over the last decade these words have become at once more common and less insulting. In *Panic in Needle Park*, for instance, a detective warns a girl threatened with city jail: "It's like a zoo.... Those diesels don't fool around." In *Sauce for the Goose*, a Peter De Vries novel satirizing feminism 10 years later, the editor of a feminist paper is named Bobby Diesel. Now everyone is supposed to know not only what a *dyke* is but that a *diesel dyke* (the reference is to a big truck, of course)
is a large, aggressive one, and De Vries can get a laugh with “a malaprop black cleaning lady who describes a woman dressed in mannish tweeds as ‘one dem ‘lezibethianz,” though Peter Andrews in a New York Times book review (20 September 1981, 14) says this is “really the sort of comic characterization that should be stored away wherever it is they keep old ‘Amos ‘n’ Andy’ scripts.” (Note he objects to the attack on the coon char, not the “mannish” female.)

20. Amy-john (presumably from Amazon) is obviously a straight insult.

21. An old song had “Push My Button and Ring My Bell” and there is a lot of sex slang in pop songs, often unsuspected by the proles, civilians, etc.

22. An early U.S. gay porn “classic” was The Scarlet Pansy; its language looks more quaint than queer today. Nobody says “that way” today or “so.” To trace fads in lesbian literary lingo, start with Linda McDonnell’s bibliography of twentieth-century U.S. lesbian novels in So’s Your Old Lady: A Lesbian Feminist Journal 21 (16 October 1978) out of Minneapolis. Joseph L. Hayes had a select bibliography of the language and language behavior of gays in the Journal of Homosexuality 4:2 (Winter 1978), 201-212, while other relevant information on the fads in homosexual speech is found in gay journals (such as Gay Insurgent) and other publications (such as Stephen Murray’s article on “The Art of Gay Insulting” in Anthropological Linguistics 21 (1979), 211-223). The linguistic aspects of lesbian separatism are well covered in Julia Penelope Stanley and Louis Crew’s Lesbian Separatism (1978) and numerous later studies by other hands.

23. We do not have space or need here to go into foreign homosexual slang, etc., but some of it has been reported on in Maledicta before. I recommend more investigation.

24. Necrophiliacs were, amazingly, more cooperative
about their language than lesbians were, but they operate almost exclusively alone and have only a few in-group words and expressions, using chiefly hetero and gay slang when they use slang at all. Because of society's horror at their activities, there is little public record of their ghoulish life, even when we know of their proclivities (as with the inventor of the detective story, Wilkie Collins, whose idea of a hot time in Paris was a visit to the morgue). One necrophiliac (who may only have been a necrophiliast, fascinated with death and its accoutrements, even with executions, but not perhaps going so far as connections with corpses) who is entertaining is George Selwyn (1719-1791), rusticated from Oxford for celebrating Holy Communion "pretending to be Jesus Christ" (1745) and thereupon launched on a witty London life. Though Lord Holland said Selwyn was a eunuch, he was very interested in several small girls (one of whom may have been an illegitimate daughter) but his real passion was the dead (he told his friend Storer he had had sex 7 times in his life, the last time at age 29 and his attachment to the Duke of Queensberry was only "sentimental sodomy," Glenbervie guessed). Cf. T.H. White's amusing chapter on Selwyn in The Age of Scandal (1950). Holland on his deathbed said of Selwyn: "If I am alive, I shall be glad to see him; if I am dead, he'll be glad to see me."

25. Dorothy S. Painter and Leonard C. Hawes presented a paper on lesbian "joking talk" at the Speech Communications Association convention in San Francisco in 1972 and Prof. Painter (Ohio State) has a paper on "Lesbian Humor as a Normalization Device" in the proceedings of the First Annual Conference on Communication, Language, and Sex (Bowling Green State University, 1978), edited by Cynthia L. Berryman and Virginia A. Eman as Communication, Language & Sex (1980), in which she claims that lesbian humor is "the most discernible factor when separating
the speech acts of lesbians and other women in the larger culture." I suggest the Scottish verdict: not proven. If there are any lesbians today capable of the humor fathered on deep-voiced Tallulah Bankhead—He: "With your voice, has anyone ever taken you for a man?" Tallulah: "No, dahling. Has anyone made the mistake with you?" or "Here's the key to my apartment; if I'm not there in half an hour, start without me" or (to Norman Mailer), at a party for the author of The Naked and the Dead in which fug often appears, "So you're the boy who can't spell f*ck!" and so on—they seem to be living in retirement as deep as that famous lesbian pair of the Eighteenth Century, the Ladies of Llangollen. Where's the lesbian Quentin Crisp, or any modern equivalent of Gertrude Stein's description of her native Oakland, Cal. ("There's no there there")? Certainly the lesbian writers on lesbian humor are unrelievedly humorless. If Dale Spender of the University of London Institute of Education is right that women are oppressed in a world consisting of The Namers and The Named, we may say the lesbians are the joked about, not the joke-makers. For an argument about why little is funny in a world structured by chauvinist pigs, try Cheris Kramarae's Women and Men Speaking (1981).

26. U.K. (and U.S. on PBS) audiences of TV's Morecambe and Wise are expected to get all the gay innuendoes signaled by slang: Wise says he is sitting down gingerly and you must know Cockney rhyming slang (ginger beer = queer); he says he has been well endowed and you must know this means "heavily equipped sexually" (also hung in U.S., though what is meant is hung heavy). Some of this surely registers no more with U.S. listeners than, say, Parma violets (once telegraphing "Lesbian") do. Those who "don't know the language" must be wondering what all the laughing is about, and perhaps they laugh along with it out of fear of betraying ignorance by questioning.
27. I am omitting masturbators from my gallery of sexual minorities here, for I believe those who turn to what one physician has called "the thinking-man’s television" are not in the minority, whether male or female, straight or gay. Nonetheless, solitary vice has given us many examples of folk poetry (beat your meat, tickle your pickle, etc.) and folklore (it leads to hair on your palms, or it makes you go blind—when the U.K. catch phrase I don’t want to be a sergeant pilot anyway and the U.S. joke I’m only going to do it until I have to wear glasses) and a scholarly casebook (Manfred F. De Martino’s Human Autoerotic Practices, 1979) and Fred Ebb’s version of a Cole Porter song: “You’re the purple heat of a bridal suite in use / You’re the bust of Venus / You’re King Kong’s penis / You’re self abuse.” It drew crowds to Michel Foucault’s lecture at New York University on “Sexuality and Solitude” (which turned out, disappointingly, to be about medieval monks). It haunted Somerset Maugham: his rough boyfriend Gerald Haxton once asked him, when he came down late to a splendid dinner to explain to a dazzling assemblage of guests at his villa that he had lingered in his bath, “And did you masturbate?” It lurks in old music hall songs, such as that on Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the great engineer: “It’s a big top hat if you want to get ahead / He always has it off when he’s lying in his bed.” Has it off, jerks (or jacks) it off, takes it off (or down), fingers it, mars it, lays it, whanks it, pulls it, and so on and on. There are old words (such as brandle, in Teleny) you never heard and others you may have heard today. Nijinsky, we are informed, was lithe enough for auto-fellatio; others must be more traditional. Lesbians jill off (not jack off), tickle the clitty and indulge in rubbin’ nubbin (according to Ronni Rittenhouse of Northern Panhandle Mental Health Center of New Martinsville, West Virginia, whose favorite expression is for the “joys of a vibrator”: catching a buzz). Pope Paul VI came out
against solitaria voluptas in 1976, but he's dead now, and
(as some think) so full of shit his eyes were brown (an old Cana-
dian expression I recall from a misspent youth). Mastur-
bation has figured grandly in low literature and in high
camp parody. A bit of fun before I get back on track. A
song:

Last night I pulled me pud.
It did me good.
I knew it would.
Sling it, fling it,
Throw it on the floor.
Bash it, smash it,
Catch it in the door.
Some people say that fucking's fucking good,
But for personal enjoyment, I'd rather pull me pud.

(The pud is the male organ; sometimes pudding, as in the
Cockney admonition to a woman who may be
menstruating: “Don't put jam on me pudding, Mary Anne.”
The definitions as “pudding,” etc., in Partridge and Went-
worth & Flexner leave much to be desired. Now you know.)
And:

Little boy sits on the lavat'ry pan,
Gently caressing his little old man.
Flip, flop, into the tank,
Christopher Robin is having a whank.

Sandra Cole (University of Michigan) says that psychiatry
has established that a “dirty” vocabulary is an “essential sur-
vival skill” for a child and that you can’t protect him from
such words “unless you wrap him in cotton and lock him
in his room.” Make a list of the words you know describ-
ing what he might do there. I must get back to sexual
minorities, not be a jerk-off.

28. Diana has this passage (p. 143):
“Do you mind telling me,” she said, “if you are one of us or a spook?”

I was embarrassed to be ignorant of lesbian jargon. Elizabeth had to explain what she meant by “spook”:

“A woman who for some reason or other strays into lesbianism as second best. And stays because she likes it better.”

One might have suspected that spook would indicate a hostile spy, but Ms. Fredericks in her “Strange Autobiography” strangely makes it mean someone who finds lesbianism attractive:

“Once a woman is a spook she almost never prefers a man again,”

she went on like a teacher. “She may marry if she wants a home and children, but chances are she has a lesbian lover.”

Then the surprising opinion I have heard many times [presumably only from lesbians] since: “Women make better lovers.”

Ms. Fredericks, if I may “go on like a teacher,” ought to have known (or been told in her time) that then spook in U.S. slang meant some kind of outsider (a white to the blacks, or vice versa), a creep or ugly girl or the wallflower type (which is what it meant when I was at Princeton in the Fifties and probably meant a generation earlier in Ms. Fredericks’ time) or (here are Wentworth & Flexner): “A girl, esp. an ugly or shy girl.... One who, though boring and shy, tries to gain entry into a group or social set by currying favor with its members. Some student use.”

29. Peter Tamony, “Keeks, Kikes, Kooks and Courèges,” Maledicta 1, p. 279: “The first acceptance of homosexuality (Lesbian) on the American scene was on the stage. Édouard Bourdet’s La Prisonnière (The Captive), 1926, presented homosexual love with sympathy and penetration [no pun intended], was restrained and not offensive. Produced in New York in 1927, after 160 performances it was ruled off Broadway by Mayor James J. Walker, instituting an era of censorship”—so presumably it was offensive to some. Édouard Bourdet (1887-1945) became director of the
Comédie Française about a decade later (for a second time the much more talented Jacques Copeau was passed over for the job). His play is not to be confused with La Prisonnière in Proust’s 16-volume series À la Recherche du temps perdu—where the French for “lost” is also the French slang for gay, by the way—and here is the summary of Bourdet’s plot (from Bernard Sobel’s Theatre Handbook and Digest of Plays (1950), since few if any people today, even lesbians, have ever seen or read it: “Seeks to exploit disharmonies due to homosexual love. Represents the heroine struggling against a force too strong for her. She has conceived for another woman a passion which renders her indifferent to the advances of a male lover. Yet she would keep this lover as a screen to hide her real reason for remaining in Paris against the wishes of her father, a diplomat desirous of taking her to Rome. At first, Jacques accepts her suggestion that he merely pose as her fiancé. Then, in the hope of driving out a morbid passion by one perfectly natural, he marries her. But, although the pair spend a year in travel, Irene returns as mad over her friend as ever, and Jacques is forced to recognize the wisdom of the warning given him earlier by a friend who had suffered with a wife similarly infatuated.” Note that Jacques is unlike the narrator of Proust who (in the previous volume, Sodom et Gomorrhe) not only sees that the outrageous Baron de Charlus is gay but that Albertine is a lesbian, and that revives his love and explains why he is with her in Paris in La Prisonnière. (Of course Albertine is not really a lesbian but a boy the novelist has disguised as a girl, but that’s another story.) We must conclude on The Captive that it can hardly be called a pro-dyke production, though its tragic heroine was more attractive than the druggie dyke in Chelsea Girls and many others, later lesbians on stage and screen.

Elsa Gress, Copenhagen: Thaning & Appel, 1961), vol. 3, p. 110. These volumes also survey the lesbian in art.


32. Rubber fetishists have very few exclusive expressions: where gays use French (oral sex) and Greek (anal sex), however, they occasionally use Swedish (referring to the sweating in saunas—rubber sex is wet).

33. “Tennessee Williams Presents his POV [Point of View].” New York Times Magazine, 12 June 1960, reprinted in Where I Live: Selected Essays (edited by Christine R. Day and Bob Woods), 1978. See p. 114 of Where I Live. Hopper was a talentless and relentless Hollywood gossip and publicity blackmailer whose columns, if anyone wishes to bother, record the gossip (also found in Kenneth Anger’s Hollywood Babylon and elsewhere) about film folk, emphasizing and even distorting their sex lives. She uses some old slang but did not invent words (only facts) as Walter Winchell did. Study her values?

34. Riverside Church (New York), Sermons, 12 July 1981.