



FAGGOT

This contemptuous slang term for male homosexual carries overtones of effeminacy and cowardice. Inasmuch as its use is widespread and its origins usually misunderstood, it deserves careful consideration.

One of the most persistent myths that have gained a foothold in the gay movement is the belief that "faggot" derives from the basic meaning of "bundle of sticks used to light a fire," with the historical commentary that when witches were burned at the stake, "only presumed male homosexuals were considered low enough to help kindle the fires."

The English word has in fact three forms: *faggot*, attested by the Oxford English Dictionary from circa 1300; *fadge*, attested from 1588; and *faggald*, which the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* first records from 1375. The first and second forms have the additional meaning "fat, slovenly woman" which according to the *English Dialect Dictionary* survived into the nineteenth century in the folk speech of England.

The homosexual sense of the term, unknown in England itself, appears for the first time in America in a vocabulary of criminal slang printed in Portland, Oregon in 1914, with the example "All the fagots (sissies) will be dressed in drag at the ball tonight." The apocopated (clipped) form *fag* then arose by virtue of the tendency of American colloquial speech to create words of one syllable; the first quotation is from the book by Nels Anderson, *The Hobo* (1923): "Fairies or Fags are men or boys who exploit sex for profit." The short form thus also has no connection with British *fag* as attested

from the nineteenth century (for example, in the novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*) in the sense of "public school boy who performs menial tasks for an upperclassman."

In American slang *faggot/fag* usurped the semantic role of *bugger* in British usage, with its connotations of extreme hostility and contempt bordering on death wishes. In more recent decades it has become the term of abuse par excellence in the mouths of heterosexuals, often just as an insult aimed at another male's alleged want of masculinity or courage, rather than implying a sexual role or orientation.

The ultimate origin of the word is a Germanic term represented by the Norwegian dialect words *fagg*, "bundle, heap," alongside *bagge*, "obese, clumsy creature" (chiefly of animals). From the latter are derived such Romance words as French *bagasse* and Italian *bagascia*, "prostitute," whence the parallel derivative *bagascione* whose meaning matches that of American English *faggot/fag*, while Catalan *bagassejar* signifies to *faggot*, "to frequent the company of loose women."

The final proof that *faggot* cannot have originated in the burning of witches at the stake is that in English law both *witchcraft* and *buggery* were punishable by hanging, and that in the reign of the homosexual monarch James I the execution of heretics came to an end, so that by the time American English gave the word its new meaning there cannot have been in the popular mind even the faintest remnant of the complex of ideas credited to the term in the contemporary myth. It is purely and simply an Americanism of the twentieth century.

Given the fact that the term faggot cannot refer to burning at the stake, why does the myth continue to enjoy popularity in the gay movement? On the conscious level it serves as a device with which to attack the medieval church, by extension Christianity in toto, and finally all authority. On another level, it may linger as a "myth of origins," a kind of collective masochistic ritual that willingly identifies the homosexual as victim. It should be evident that the word faggot and the ideas that have been mistakenly associated with it serve no useful function; the sooner both are abandoned, the better.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Warren Johansson, "The Etymology of the Word Faggot," *Gay Books Bulletin*, 6 (1981), 16-18, 33.
Warren Johansson

FAIRY

The word *fairy*, derived from the French *féerie*, the name of the mythical realm of these supernatural beings, was one of the commonest terms for the male homosexual in America in the 1925-1960 period. In an article published in *American Journal of Psychology* in 1896, "The Fairies" of New York are mentioned as a secret organization whose members attended coffee-klatches; dressed in aprons and knitted, gossiped and crocheted; and held balls in which men adopted ladies' evening dress. The spellings *faery* and *fary* also appear in the literature. The word designated the more stereotypical or "obvious" sort of street homosexual, with the semantic link supplied by the notion of the delicate and fastidious that had attached itself to the expression, so that it was transferred effortlessly to a dainty and effeminate type of male. The image of the "fairy" in book illustration as a winged creature flitting about the landscape probably contributed to the further evolution of *flit* as a slang term for homosexual. The semantic development of *fairy* in this sense began on the east coast and spread to the

rest of the country, but not to other English-speaking areas of the world. In the 1960s the word yielded to *gay* as a positive term preferred by the movement, and to *faggot* or *fag* as the vulgar term of abuse.

In the late 1970s a quasi-religious movement began on the west coast of the United States under the rubric of fairy spirituality. Inspired by the ideas of gay pioneer Harry Hay, this trend emphasized the concept that male homosexuals who will acknowledge their difference ("fairies" or "faeries") have special insights and gifts for interpersonal relations. It looked to the supposed homoerotic element in shamanism as a prehistoric archetype. Fairy retreats held at remote country sites, with neopagan rituals, serve to affirm solidarity among the fairies. This movement, combining counterculture survivals with elements of the hermetic tradition, is part of a larger complex of New Age religious phenomena that are characteristic of the western United States, though they also enjoy some following elsewhere.

FALLA, MANUEL DE (1876-1946)

Spanish composer. Falla ranks as a key figure in both the renovation of Spanish classical music and the flowering of Andalusian culture in the early twentieth century. His homosexuality is not known directly, but the circles in which he moved in both Paris and Granada, his friendships, style of life, and enthusiasm for the Andalusian past, enthusiasm which was frequently associated in Spain with homosexuality, permit it to be inferred.

Falla was born in the ancient Andalusian city of Cádiz. As his compositions were received with indifference in Madrid, in 1907 Falla moved to Paris, where he was successful. He left that city at the outbreak of World War I, and influenced by his librettist Gregorio Martínez Sierra, author of *Granada, guía emocional* (1911), made his home in Granada from 1919 to 1939.