

In the spring of 1990 a forum of long-time homophile activists in Los Angeles discussed outing. They included Harry Hay, one of the founders of the Mattachine Society, Morris Kight, a member of the board of Christopher Street West, which stages the annual Gay Pride parade, and Don Slater, keeper of one of the biggest gay archives. Among their principal conclusions, even the generally unsympathetic old-timers had to concede, was that an outee was in far less jeopardy in the United States today than he (or she) would have been 30 years ago, when with greater reason the code of silence went unchallenged. So outing conforms more to the mood and the political arsenal of the new generation of activists ("Symposium on Outing," 1990). The founders of the movement, had they so much as attempted in 1951 what Queer Nation blithely did in 1991, would have been jailed, physically assaulted, or even murdered in cold blood on the street—with the indifference or collusion of the police. So the controversy sets the older, more cautious age cohort in opposition to the bolder, far more self-assured queer nationals of the 1990s, just as it highlights the conflict between privacy and gay nationhood.

Outing Only the Dead

The second position is that only the dead should be outed, since they cannot personally suffer from the revelation or sue for libel or slander (that the dead cannot be libeled is a legal maxim). Outing the dead would seem at first glance to be harmless and unthreatening. But those whom they have left behind—spouses, children and grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews, business associates, and perhaps most of all, lovers or even casual partners—could be harmed. How long after an individual's demise may the outing most legitimately be done? Can it be in the obituary published the day after in the local newspaper? Or should one wait months, years, even decades before outing the deceased? The problem there is that the subject's fame and importance may have so faded that he might as well never have lived at all—so that the outing is otiose. On the other hand, someone little known when alive may gain in renown and attention, so that the outing will cause history and literary biography to be rewritten.

The question was in fact posed by the outing of Malcolm Forbes in *OutWeek* the week after his death—violating as it were the principle *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* (of the dead [say] nothing but good). On the other hand, the opposite maxim holds: *On doit des égards aux vivants; aux morts on ne doit que la vérité* (one owes respect to the living; to the dead one owes only the truth). Of course, outing the dead is essential to the progress of gay studies, as the old-timers know, busily searching as they have been for decades as far back as David and Jonathan and Achilles and Patroclus. There may well be cases where it might be more admirable to wait until their families and companions would suffer less. At a large public meeting in June of 1990 at Faneuil Hall in Boston, Barney Frank rashly opposed outing even the dead. But when queried by Percy, he said: "I guess the dead have fewer rights than the living." Trying desperately to put the genie that he had helped escape back into the bottle, Barney had not thought this issue through. Earlier, however, he had threatened to out gay Republican congressmen if the Republicans did not stop the gossip that Tom Foley, the new Democratic Speaker in the House, was gay—which Frank denied, though Petrelis maintains that he is. The congressman repeated the old saw that one does not truly believe in a right (privacy) unless others are allowed to exercise it in a manner that runs contrary to one's own convictions. Therefore he opposed outing all except the most arrant hypocrites—a viewpoint that is steadily winning gay adherents and may now have a majority behind it, although it hardly satisfies the demands of Queer Nation.

Lacking outings of the dead, of course, we should have little basis for the study of our own past, and the writing of gay history would become impossible. Remote as their deeds may be from the immediate concerns of the living, outing the dead has a significance of its own. The theologically motivated campaign against homosexuality has entailed a far-reaching suppression of the historic role of individuals more attracted to their own sex than to the other. The importance of *paidērasteia* in Hellenic civilization was blacked out in works other than those printed for classicists in editions of 600 copies—often in Latin! Biographies were rewritten and falsified to deny the sexual interests of their subjects and to involve them in imaginary heterosexual relationships. Major fig-

ures in political or cultural history, from Sappho, Alexander the Great, and Julius Caesar to Melville, Whitman, and Emily Dickinson, were portrayed as exclusively heterosexual, asexual, or having "sublimated" their sexual urges. Heroes that every schoolchild was taught to admire had the homoerotic side of their lives suppressed. Textbooks and standard reference works—too numerous to mention here—will all have to be revised to erase this Orwellian falsification and bring them into harmony with the truth. This task alone will provide work for at least a generation of historians and literary critics.

It has been claimed that even long-deceased persons should not be outed inasmuch as they have no way of defending themselves by "setting the record straight" in case the ascription is wrong. At a certain point, however, as the individual recedes into the past and his (or her) associates vanish, does it not then become proper to suggest the awful truth, even if the evidence for it is equivocal—as it often is, given the customary efforts to destroy and deny it—before that evidence is lost without a trace?

Almost every major book ever written on homosexuality has had its lists of the great and near-great. There have been biographical compendia, ranging from Albert Moll's *Berühmte Homosexuelle* (1910) to Noel I. Garde's (pseudonym) *Jonathan to Gide* (1964) and A. L. Rowse's *Homosexuals in History* (1987), that celebrated, in not always critical or insightful fashion, the great figures of history whose lives included homosexual episodes. Such lists are not easily compiled. It is extremely difficult to prove that historical figures of the Western world were homosexual or bisexual; almost all, except the pagan Greeks and Romans, hid their proclivities and actions in every possible way. Thus it is imperative to out as many as we can who died in recent decades, where the evidence is fresh and, because of the waning of intolerance and persecution, not so carefully hidden. No one can legitimately object in any convincing fashion to outing the dead after an appropriate lapse of time. This interval may last for decades if, for example, publicity would greatly harm the deceased's life companions.

Outing someone whose career had been wholly undistinguished—the neighborhood mailman or the corner grocer—would be pointless. The only characters really worth outing would be ones that had

achieved at least fleeting celebrity or left their mark in some noteworthy endeavor. The most desirable targets of all would be the great and memorable. Mere celebrities of the hour, for whom press agents conjured up romances to fill the gossip columns, will in the long run pale beside those who "had one hand in heaven to write their names in leaves of stars." It is the outing of these above all that can provoke a still intolerant society to rage and intervention.

John Addington Symonds (1840-93), under the influence of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, was perhaps the first in the English-speaking world to become almost what would later be styled a "gay activist." He came out in the older manner—and to his own detriment, resulting in his failure to secure a chair at Oxford—in his *Studies in the Greek Poets* (1875), and then posthumously in the German translation of the book which he coauthored with the pioneer British sexologist Havelock Ellis, *Das konträre Geschlechtsgefühl* (1896). But his heirs put the corpse back into the closet by forcing Ellis to remove the name of the deceased from the title page of *Sexual Inversion* (1897). Symonds' *Problem in Greek Ethics* and *Problem in Modern Ethics* were privately printed volumes that pleaded for toleration.

The late southern novelist and philosopher Walker Percy in 1989 and 1990 attempted to put his first cousin once removed and adoptive father William Alexander Percy (1885-1942), who had come out in the old way, in the subtle allusions in his poetry and in his best-selling autobiography, *Lanterns on the Levee* (1941), back into the closet. Walker Percy and his brothers withheld pertinent data from Bertrand Wyatt-Brown, who is doing a book on the family for Oxford University Press and trying to discover hereditary or at least intergenerational family traits. Of these homosexuality is one of the most striking in the Percy clan. Lest homophobic family members retaliate by withdrawing permission to use private papers, Wyatt-Brown seems reluctant to publish the truth which had been supplied him, among others, by Shelby Foote, one of "Uncle Will's" protégés, and by William A. Percy, III, coauthor of this book, who is as closely related by blood to "Uncle Will" as were Walker and his brother.

One of the topics still taboo is the homosexuality of American presidents. Charley Shively has just outed George Washington and

his circle (Shively, forthcoming) and Abraham Lincoln (Shively 1989). Earlier, Ernest Hemingway and Carl Sandberg had both intimated that Lincoln had homosexual involvements as a young man. Buchanan, the only president who never married, is the most common candidate. While in the White House, which he decorated lavishly with Second Empire furniture, he was openly ridiculed as "Miss Nancy" for associating too much with another middle-aged man. Recently Robert I. Cottom (1975) found evidence that James Garfield may have had a prolonged affair with a male. When Percy and Shively discussed these four ostensibly queer presidents at the American Historical Association meeting in New York in December 1990, a great-great nephew of Buchanan's disclosed to the gathering that the family had told him that the President was attracted to other males.

Jim Kepner, who was present, stated that he has material in the International Gay and Lesbian Archives that may in one way or another implicate 12 to 14 presidents. The lesbian affair of Eleanor Roosevelt, perhaps the most politically active and influential of all first ladies, was brought to light (Cook 1992) with as hysterical an opposition as the outings of presidents have provoked. The newest revelation is Gore Vidal's outing of Franklin Pierce.

The tenacity of homophobia is shown by the insistence with which those still under its spell deny or ridicule the evidence for the homosexuality of great or significant figures of the past. And families, even generations later, will deliberately put obstacles in the path of those seeking the truth. This is, to be sure, just another form of the monumental dishonesty and hypocrisy which the Christian tradition imposed not just on homosexuals, but on the whole of society. The crime of darkening and destroying the lives of those who loved their own sex it compounded by a crime against the truth: plunging the entire social order into a morass of lies and falsehoods in regard to sexuality.

While the dead cannot sue for libel, their homophobic, hypocritical friends, relatives, and admirers bent on preserving their (allegedly) tarnished reputations can put obstacles in the outer's path. But as time passes, all who linger in the closet will have the mounting reproach of cowardice to face, even after their deaths. They will not be able to say to the court of public opinion, like the veterans of ACT UP and Queer

Nation: "In the moment of crisis we proved ourselves equal to the challenge that confronted us; in the hour of trial we were weighed in the balance and not found wanting. Through ages after ages our spiritual descendants will rise up, will remember our deeds, and bless our memory. But those who shirked the call of duty and self-affirmation will escape the scorn of posterity only if they find refuge in a merciful oblivion."

Outing Only Hypocrites

The third position, which has found much favor, is that of outing only hypocrites—closet cases who defame and persecute other queer nationals while secretly indulging—in order to destroy their influence and perhaps also to punish them for their insolence. They, it is felt, have violated their claim to personal privacy by their public, political activity. As Barney Frank has said: "There's a right to privacy but not to hypocrisy." Many believe that one should out only those who publicly and by using their influence oppose queer rights or interest-arch-hypocrites. Such persons forfeit their privacy when their clandestine conduct invalidates their public utterances: for example, Robert E. Bauman (R., Maryland), who routinely voted against measures favored by the gay lobby in Washington; or, more prominently, Roy F. Cohn, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's aide, who furthered his career by outing others who then lost their jobs and were branded as "security risks." This principle would presumably exempt such figures as press magnate Malcolm Forbes, whose publications never intentionally defamed or harmed other homosexuals, or Pete Williams who, so far as we know, never personally did or said anything against others of his kind.

In a phone conversation with William A. Percy in November 1991, Frank Kameny stated this position eloquently. He claimed that three conditions should be met before a person was outed. First, the outee should have a clear and well-established pattern of homophobic pronouncements and/or actions. Second, the evidence should not be mere gossip but should be well substantiated and convincing. Third, the person should be warned in advance and allowed the opportunity to cease the offensive conduct and *if possible* to repent past errors and come out voluntarily. Kameny's thoughtful conditions will seem very reasonable to many, but too