

sexuality – they are not *all* hung-up. Both appearance and behaviour are not very stereotyped (except perhaps for Emory and the Cowboy). This does not deny such pointers as a typecast preoccupation with aging and appearance. The language, too, marks these men out as members of a particular group.

I am now going to look in similar ways at four novels – *A Single Man*, Christopher Isherwood; *Patience and Sarah*, Isabel Miller; *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Iris Murdoch, and *Another Country*, James Baldwin.

Actually *A Single Man* (8) is only going to be used for some excellent quotations which reveal the view that George has of himself and the way he sees society as viewing him. While negotiating the freeways Isherwood has this to say, “George loves the freeways because he can still cope with them; because the fact that he can still cope proves his claim to be a functioning member of society. He can still *get by*.” (page 25). Better still is a long section where all the common “enlightened” prejudices of the people who know George:

Mr. Strunk, George supposes, tries to nail him down with a word, *Queer*, he doubtless growls. But, since this is after all the year nineteen sixty-two, even he may be expected to add, I don't give a damn what he does just as long as he stays away from me. Even psychologists disagree as to the conclusion that may be reached about the Mr. Strunks of this world, on the basis of such a remark. The fact remains that Mr. Strunk himself, to judge from a photograph taken of him in football uniform at college, used to be what many would call a living doll.

But Mrs. Strunk, George feels sure, takes leave to differ gently from her husband; for she is trained in the new tolerance, the technique of annihilation by blandness. Out comes her psychology book – bell and candle are no longer necessary. Reading from it in a sweet sing-song she proceeds to exercise the unspeakable out of George. No reason for disgust, she intones, no cause for condemnation. Nothing here that is wilfully vicious. All is due to heredity, early environment (shame on those possessive mothers, those sex-segregated British schools!), arrested development at puberty, and/or glands. Here we have a misfit, debarred for ever from the best things in life, to be pitied, not blamed. Some cases, caught young enough, *may* respond to therapy. As for the rest – ah, it's so sad; especially when it happens, as let's face it it does, to truly worthwhile people, people who might have had so much to offer. (Even when they are geniuses in spite of it, their masterpieces are invariably *warped*.) So let us be understanding, shall we, and remember that, after all, there *were* the Greeks (though that was a bit different, because they were pagans rather than neurotics). Let us even go as far as to say that this kind of relationship can sometimes be almost beautiful – particularly if one of the parties is already dead; or, better yet, both. (pages 21–2)

The next excerpt is a speech that George makes during a lecture, he digresses onto the topic of minorities and how they react to persecution. It's a long speech so I have only picked out three important extracts from it:

A definition of a minority: “a minority is only thought of as a minority when it constitutes some kind of threat to the majority, real or imaginary. And no threat is ever *quite* imaginary.” (page 58)

On the intrinsic (?) goodness of persecuted groups: “*Because* the persecuting majority is vile, says the liberal, *therefore* the persecuted

minority must be stainlessly pure. Can't you see what nonsense that is? What's to prevent the bad from being persecuted by the worse?" (page 59)

On the nastiness of minorities: "A minority has its own kind of aggression. It absolutely dares the majority to attack it. It hates the majority — not without cause, I grant you. It even hates other minorities — because all minorities are in competition; each one proclaims that its sufferings are the worst and its wrongs are the blackest. And the more they all hate, and the more they're all persecuted, the nastier they become!" (page 59)

As is evident in the extract about the Strunks Isherwood has a definite comic turn of phrase — he even has something to say on pornography:

Not that one Isn't broadminded, of course; let them write about heterosexuality if they must, and let everyone read it who cares to. Just the same, it is a deadly bore and, to be frank, a wee bit distasteful. Why can't these modern writers stick to the old simple wholesome themes — such as, for example, boys. (pages 70–1)

*Patience and Sarah*, (9) is about two women in America in 1816 who leave their homes to set up house together. Because they do not have any models to guide them, their whole affair is very much hit and miss. Sarah (the younger woman) has had a very masculinised upbringing — however, Patience is able to see through this and rightly realises that it is a sort of game. Very early on when Sarah is hesitating (before they *admit* their love) about Patience coming with her, Patience thinks:

"I knew she'd let me go with her, and that she was only trying to play the man, all slow and steady, not impulsive, weighing carefully. I was amused but didn't say so. Time enough later to teach her that it's better to be a real woman than an imitation man, and that when someone chooses a woman to go away with it's because a woman is what is preferred." (page 23)

This idea runs through the whole novel — in fact at times Isabel Miller seems to imply that men and women are essentially different and women are consequently better (complete separatism can be seen in Monique Wittig's strange book *Les Guerilleres*). For example about fights Sarah says, "I didn't *like* to fight. I never really knew for sure till then how much I had the feelings of a woman, and not only that but I rated a woman's feelings higher." (page 79) Cutting themselves off from men they are well aware that they are doing something frowned on by society. Patience says:

"It may be that one must be a male, or owned by one, not to be their natural victim . . . It may be that there is no place on earth for women who refuse to bend their necks to be the wards of males — neatly transferred from father to brother to husband to son to grave." (page 137)

However even the acceptance of homosexual relationships seems to imply monogamy — constant reference is made to the *one* (whether woman or man) for various people. And Patience and Sarah go through a sort of wedding ceremony as they set off on their journey. The novel is soppy and sentimental but probably valuable for those particular aspects as a contrast to the misery of something like *Wells of Loneliness*. And as the end approaches the atmosphere is one of hope — implying beginning rather than finishing.

I felt Sarah's hand and felt the ancient sea and the new wheels carry us to a life we had no pattern for, that no one we knew of had ever



lived, that we must invent for ourselves on a razor's edge, and I tipped my head back and sang three hallelujahs." (page 172)

I have already referred to Iris Murdoch's *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* – I now want to look at it in a little more detail. One of its most striking features is its ability to portray the relationship between Simon and Axel as nothing particularly strange:

In fact Axel did something extremely important for Simon. He made Simon understand for the first time that it was perfectly *ordinary* to be homosexual. Simon had never exactly felt guilty because of his preference. But he had felt it as a peculiarity, something rather nice and perhaps a bit funny, something rather like a game, but definitely odd, to be concealed, giggled about and endlessly discussed and inspected in the private company of other oddities. He had never quite seen it as a fundamental and completely ordinary way of being a human being, which was how Axel saw it. Axel gloomily accepted the degree of discretion which the prejudices of society seemed still to make inevitable. But he refused to belong to a special homosexual "world", to what he called 'that goddam secret organisation.'  
(page 37)

Axel tends to be rather a prig – he's very conventional and doesn't like it when Simon is frivolous. Simon is a stereotype in a lot of ways so that, although they both work, Simon is definitely the domesticated one (cooking and decorating). There is a reference at one stage to the fact that 'sometimes they changed roles' but this seems to refer to their sexual activity rather than lifestyles. Too much emphasis shouldn't be placed on this comment because it only occurs once. Axel's conventionality comes out in a quarrel:

"My private life is my own affair. And would be if I were heterosexual. Why should I tell Whitehall whom I sleep with? I don't reject this society: I live and work in it and make my own judgements how this is best to be done. You accuse us of hypocrisy. All right. Very few human beings are innocent of that." (page 136–7)

The plot is too complex to go into all the details but the strand that involves the two men is mainly concerned with the attempts by the malicious Julius King to break up stable relationships. By his manipulations he destroys one marriage (possibly causes the death of one of the partners) and nearly succeeds in breaking up the two men by sowing seeds of doubt about Simon in Axel's mind. However these two are lucky and the misunderstandings are cleared up. At the end we have Axel realising that they will have to live more openly in order to prevent similar disasters.

"We have lived too much inside our love for each other."

"Axel, you don't mean –"

"No, no, stop being so frightened. I just mean I think we should see more people and live more in the world. We've been so shut in with each other."

"Yes. You know, I think if we saw more people and went about more together it would sort of give me confidence."

"It's probably to do with being homosexual. We're all a bit afraid of society. There's a tendency to hide. It's bad."

"You don't want to send that letter to *The Times* or tell Whitehall?"

"No. It's not their business. But we shouldn't hide it so. I think if we'd been living more in the open we mightn't have been involved in this terrible muddle." (page 432)

There is hope for this couple at the end of the book. Although neither partner (least of all Axel) feel completely sure that their love will last, they seem to be prepared to go on living as if it will. The book leaves a lasting impression in my mind of Simon and Axel driving around in a blue Hillman Minx having perfectly ridiculous conversations. Such as when Axel objects to Simon using the rear vision mirror in the car to examine himself – not because it hampers his driving, but because it drives him to distraction. Iris Murdoch's portrayal of the two men (except for references to Simon's past) seems to be one of impeccable respectability.

This aura of respectability is not found in *Another Country* (10). A great deal of the novel is set in and around Harlem – consequently as well as a concern with sexual relationships there is also an interest in the interracial ones. In fact the highlight of this novel is the stress placed on evaluating relationships as to what they do for the people in them. Not in the sense of balancing them up – but as to whether they allow people to grow and develop. This is especially true of the relationships that Eric (the gay guy) has with various people. Not so much Rufus, which was pretty disastrous – but Yves, Vivaldo and Cass. In France Eric was able (after finally accepting himself) to help Yves build up a certain amount of self-respect (somewhat similar to the Simon/Axel relationship – but Eric was not nearly so priggish. For instance *he* says, “I don't go in for back alley cock-sucking. I think sin should be fun.”) The relationship between Eric and Yves – although it has lasted three years and Yves is coming out to America – is never seen as being absolutely permanent. So that although the ending is full of promise it is also very reasonable. When Cass tells her husband Richard that she has been having an affair with Eric he is absolutely flabbergasted. He cannot understand that Eric would have anything to give her. But, she is able to see the gift that Eric gives all of his lovers. She says, “He has something – something I need very badly.” Richard says, “What is that Cass?” “A sense of himself,” she replies. (page 292) For Vivaldo, too, Eric can give love – he appears to acquire a rather amazing role for the straight man. While watching him in a film Vivaldo thinks:

It was the face of a man, of a tormented man. Yet, in precisely the way that great music depends, ultimately, on great silence, this masculinity was defined, and made powerful, by something which was not masculine. But it was not feminine, either, and something in Vivaldo resisted the word *androgynous*. It was a quality to what it was they were responding. There was great force in the face, and great gentleness. But, as most women are not gentle, nor most men strong, it was a face which suggested resonantly, in the depths, the truth about our natures. (page 257–8)

Probably most important in their relationship is the fact that when they actually fuck Vivaldo finds that it does not really matter what role he takes – it is not a thing to get hung-up about. And he can admit that he loves Eric and accept that Eric loves him even though he is certain that he is not homosexual.

I have tried to indicate some of the ways in which gays can be treated in not *too* stereotyped fashions. I do not feel that we can do away with stereotypes either by wishing them away, or producing more literature. The image of the homosexual is all too pervading, and a lot needs to be done to break it down. More emphasis on critical approaches can help, but this only gets to a small 'enlightened' audience. Radical social change is necessary. Until society is no longer structured along the lines of race, class, and especially sex I can't believe that homosexuals (along with other minorities) will be able to have freedom. Stereo-



types are the official strait-jackets of society and we can't easily escape.

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### TESS LEE ACK

Well, my talk follows on from Dilys's to a certain extent. Well first of all I want to start off by saying this is mainly concerned with the mass media and the kind of influence it has.

1. I think most of us are probably aware when we talk about "in-group" phrases quite often of the influence of the mass media. Its influence is not as strong as that of the family or the school, perhaps even of the peer group, but I think it's very important to see it has a back-up and reinforcing effect of images that are presented. The ruling class or caste ideology – the kind of things like role-playing and so on are reflected and popularised and sometimes simplified by the mass media. I don't know if you've seen it but there's a book called *Media She* which was published quite recently, which has documented the treatment of women by the media, and it's quite interesting.

2. In the past, as far as the mass media is concerned, we have been accustomed to oppression by negation. That is, we and our movements to fight oppression have been ignored.

On the one hand, we've had only straight images, stereotypes (just as false as the traditional gay ones) presented and we've been bombarded by the nuclear family and all its glory. We all know about the nauseating T.V. shows which are particularly aimed at "family" audiences, i.e. they provide an "approved" model for the children. A glaring example of this kind of thing was *Gilligan's Island*, where a group of people were cut off from society and marooned on a desert island . . . and continued to play out exactly the same sex roles and social games. (e.g. the rich man, the movie star). Children have nothing but abnormally pure models to orient to.

On the non-fiction side of things, we've had in the past the only references to homosexuals being news reports of pederasty or "in-depth" studies – a series of articles in newspapers, or a T.V. programme. In these, a body of very earnest men and perhaps a token women, attempting to pull aside the curtain and peer at the dark world of the homosexual, in the same way as they peer at the dark world of criminals, drug addicts, wild animals or the Loch Ness Monster.

Once again, this doesn't offer anything very secure or inspiring for a child with a developing sexuality (or any one else for that matter).

This is what we've been used to.

3. But things are changing. We can no longer say that male homosexuals at any rate are being ignored, or presented only as evil or perverted creatures. Lesbians, of course are a different matter, I'll come back to that later, but it's interesting to see what has happened to male homosexuals as far as the media is concerned.

4. We have T.V. shows where homosexuals are heroes of programmes with which, as Dilys pointed out, people, ordinary people, identify strongly. Many male homosexuals welcome this (e.g. Holly) and in some respects it is a healthy phenomenon but let's not claim it as total acceptance, because it is acceptance within certain very strict limits. Don (No. 96) for example, was not allowed to have any sex life for a long time, while straight couples were fucking all over the

place around him. Don is seen as a nice guy, but one of his defining characteristics, his affection for other men, is kept well hidden. No such restrictions apply to straight men. We mustn't be content with *almost*.

Then there is the whole glitter phenomenon in rock music. This is partly the result of music as colourful, exciting theatre, partly the traditional image of rock as radical, underground, daring, avante-garde etc. The result is a series of highly rich superstars like Jagger, Elton John, Bowie, Lou Reed, Gary Glitter, Alice Cooper, groups like the Sweet, in Melbourne AC/DC and Skyhooks and many others. Whether they really are gay or straight is probably irrelevant, except that it has certain effects. These performers rarely "come-out", their aim appears to be to confuse, to blur the distinctions, to remain ambiguous; and some homosexuals seem to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy "proving" that one or other of these people really is "one of us". The reason for this is fairly obvious. It is the search for an image, an acceptable model to orient to, a justification for existence, a justification for the difference that exists between homosexuality and the stereotyped heterosexual image which is all that is otherwise available. Thus the rock stars could be seen as catering to a need, or if you're a bit more cynical, cashing in on the gay movement.

A side-light — all these groups are male. And young girls idolise them — that is androgynous, ambiguous, camp (in a theatrical sense) people. It might be interesting to explore what effect this has on their own developing sexuality — though I haven't come to any definite conclusions myself. The only female who fits into this category is Suzi Quatro — and girls *are* excited by her, although they might not admit to it in sexual terms. Her aggressive self avowal in the song *Wild One* is significant in that a few years ago a woman could never have sung something which sounds like "I'm a red hot fuck" and got away with it. (Maybe a man couldn't either.)

But once again, how far does it go?

5. The net result of No. 96, The Box and the glitter scene is tolerance at a certain level. But it is repressive tolerance. It is co-option. The gay and womens movements can no longer be ignored so the impact of them has to be siphoned off and made harmless. The challenge to the system that they present has to be diffused, and one way to do this is to tolerate within limits. In certain circles, mainly well-educated ones, it is very trendy to be gay or bi-sexual. In other circles, only superficial changes in consciousness have taken place. A thinking person might from watching No. 96 have changed the attitude from "homosexuality is sick" to something like the shrinks attitude as outlined by Dilys. "They can live as long as they don't try anything on me" — the ultimate put-down. The challenge deflected, the straight world can continue in its oppressive heterosexism.

So gays are given by *the straight world*, reinforced by the media, a new image. Poofsters are no longer invariably evil pederasts lurking in the doorways of public toilets. Rather they can be entertaining, witty, sparkling, artistic, successful TRENDY people. Joe Hasham gets grateful letters from gays. He's an improvement of the old stereotype, true, but do we have to accept, or *should* we accept an image of ourselves *which we have not created for ourselves*, any more than we encourage straight people to accept the media's straight stereotype for themselves? I think not.

Now let's look at women. We can see that elements of the womens movement have also been co-opted in the same sort of way. On certain levels — e.g. the Labor government, the movement, or rather some of its demands, are accepted. It's the same process of deflecting the challenge to the whole system which is



inherent in womens and gay liberation movements. Legal reform by itself is meaningless, as in England.

Lesbians are in a different situation from male homosexuals. As someone said yesterday, lesbians are invisible. Lesbianism is not illegal — partly because women are not supposed to have any sexuality. Therefore the problems for lesbians are vastly different than those for male homosexuals.

We still have *no image*. Lesbians are doubly oppressed — both as women and as homosexuals. The old stereotype remains where lesbians are seen as all man-hating, frustrated, bitchy, ugly women. She can't get a man, all she needs is a good fuck. But this image occurs in the media very rarely. On the whole we are ignored.

But with the co-option of sections of the womens and gay movements, things may, (only may) change. We should learn the lessons and prepare in advance to reject any model the straight world dreams up for us. And if we become a threat, be sure they will. This does not just mean fighting back when they attack. It means starting now to proclaim what we are, to assert ourselves as we are, to create our own models (if we need them) to demand the right to freedom of sexual expression and openly provide models for others — e.g. young children.

There is a real need for the gay and womens movements as a whole to attack the media, to be wary of distortion, not to rely on the media for all our coverage in the public eye, to always be aware of the role of the media as the faithful servant of our enemies. We must reject the old stereotypes and any attempts to give us new ones. If our fight for liberation is to be a real one, we have to realise that our fight is one against the whole system, of which the media is one voice. ●



## Summary of Question Time: Session 4

The lesbian, unlike the male homosexual has as yet failed to gain a new "trendy" image. It should be recognised that there is a danger of associating the "trendy camp image" adopted by modern rock groups as the typical homosexual image. Some new rock groups link homosexuality with moral decadence and thus present an invalid image of the homosexual life-style.

On the other hand the shock tactics employed by such rock groups may be a means of stimulating awareness and/or acceptance of alternative life-styles.

Films portraying homosexuality, but primarily designed to be pornographic, exploit the validity of the homosexual life-style.

The discussion then turned towards the need to present alternative life-styles in the mass media. The prevalence now of tokenism (that is presenting images of oppressed groups such as blacks, women or homosexuals) creates a stereotype of these groups. This stereotype is usually presented in a socially acceptable manner but it is usually unrealistic and/or invalid

The volume of heterosexual life-styles presented by the mass media maintain the incorrect notion that stereotyped models are necessary for the endorsement of alternative life-styles. The lack of realistic alternative life-styles presented by the mass media virtually prescribes a white, middle class, heterosexual future.

The discussion then changed to mode of dress. The following points arose:

1. The recognition of the need to breakdown rigid gender identified clothes.
2. The acceptance of unisex clothes has produced styles "in between" and "around" the rigid classification of masculine/feminine clothes.
3. The trend towards more individual lifestyles is reflected in the tendency to adopt clothes primarily on the basis of comfort. ●

# CONCLUSION

These papers have pinpointed the oppression of and discrimination against lesbians in Australian society. This pamphlet was produced to make people aware of how individuals, institutions and society in general persecute the alternative lifestyle of homosexuality.

One of the basic oppositions to homosexuality is the emphasis in this society on heterosexuality as being "normal". Procreation is seen as the basic objective of sexual activity. As a result heterosexuality is seen as essential in any meaningful relationship. The word "meaningful" is thus defined in terms of production of children rather than in terms of mutual respect, love and affection.

In the heterosexual nuclear family, parents and society oppress an individual by assuming that one is born heterosexual. People should be regarded purely as sexual beings and not put into any set category. Thus they would be able to relate to whosoever they choose. Alternative lifestyles to heterosexuality do exist and should be validated by recognition of their existence.

One of the greatest oppressions that the Australian lesbian has to face is sex role stereotyping. Females are pressured into acting "feminine". There needs to be a distinction made between sex and gender. Females are capable of having gender traits from the traditionally "feminine" to the traditionally "masculine". Thus a female should be allowed to express her own personality rather than being channeled into a strict role of dependence and submissiveness. When we eradicate the oppression of the individual in Australian society, we will be one step towards eradicating the oppression of the lesbian.

The female homosexual, because she chooses to live her life alone or with another female is contravening the strict rules society has laid down for women. A woman is supposedly dependent and therefore needs a male to rely on. Thus the lesbian is ridiculed for having masculine traits such as self sufficiency and independence. These traits in women are seen as a challenge to the basic structure of society, the nuclear family.

Lesbians are doubly oppressed. Firstly by being a woman and secondly by being a lesbian. Since women are regarded as second class citizens, automatically lesbians become third class citizens. Lesbians therefore need to challenge the oppression of females within society at the same time as the oppression of homosexuals.

For this to occur, institutions such as medical and legal institutions, the school and the church which present only one mode of behaviour as "right", "good", "healthy" or "normal", must be challenged. Alternative lifestyles can be validated by eradicating the idea of stereotypes. Individuals need to express their own personality rather than the "norm" of being male or female, white, heterosexual, anglo-saxon, protestant.



The papers presented at the first seminar on female homosexuality have outlined specific areas of oppression for the lesbian within Australian society. From the discussion arising within the workshops, definite ways of challenging discrimination of lesbians was put forward. This pamphlet is one step towards educating the institutions within society, by making them aware of the oppression of lesbians in Australian and making them aware that homosexuality is a valid alternative lifestyle.

**SEMINAR 2**

*31st* ~~30th~~ MAY 1 - 5 pm

1st JUNE 9 - 4 pm

**Theme: Conditioning Processes in Society and Family  
CARSLAW 4, SYDNEY UNIVERSITY.**

**For further information on the seminars or homosexuality contact  
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