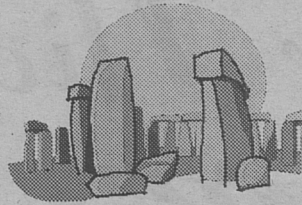


STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL

by charlie emond

A Life in the Theatre



It will come as no surprise that gay men have always been at home in the theatre. In fact, we just about invented it! In the Elizabethan era, they defined 'sodomite' as someone "who is at every play and every night supps with his ingles." In one Ben Jonson play, a father exclaims upon learning that his son wants to act, "What? Shall I have my son a stager now? An ingle for players?"

Remember, too, that the original Juliet was a boy in a dress, as were all of Shakespeare's women.

What's in a name?

'Ingles?' 'Sodomites?' These are two older terms for gay men. Ingle comes from 'angel' and means 'sweet-heart.' Sodomite is derived from the biblical city of Sodom, mistakenly presumed to have been destroyed because it was full of homosexuals.

'Homosexual' is one of two medical terms in common use this century, the other being 'invert.'

Another interesting historical term for homosexuals was 'Uranist' or 'Uranian,' after the Greek goddess of love. (Men are from Mars, women from Venus, and gay folk from Uranus!) This goes back to a time when we were pushing to be considered a third sex.

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was a brilliant and neurotic playwright controversial even in his own day. He is called the "father of English tragedy," and is given much credit for inspiring Shakespeare. He may even have written parts of Shakespeare's plays.

How was he controversial? For starters, he rejected organized religion, and was one of the first to publicly claim that St. John and Jesus were "bed-fellows." In his play *The Passionate Shepherd*, he gave the classical male lovers Corydon and Alexis the lines, "Come live with me and be my love and we will all the pleasures prove..." He opened another play with Jupiter speaking sweet nothings into the ear of the shepherd boy Ganymede. You get the idea.

As the publicity of the period has it, Marlowe was indeed a wild and crazy sodomite. He was stabbed to death at 29 after a quarrel with a friend over who would pick up the check for dinner.

In the words of one critic, "...his was the greatest loss our literature ever suffered." He had a quick tongue and never feared to speak his mind. He declared once, "all they that

love not tobacco and boys were fools."

O, be some other name!

Boys? The use of the word "boy" for a young man, the beloved of an older man, goes way back. You might imagine that a child is being referred to, but even today a 60-year-old man on "a night out with the boys" is most likely not having pizza with a bunch of 10-year olds!

The term "ganymede" was used from medieval times well into the seventeenth century to mean an object of homosexual desire. The use of the word "beloved" for the younger man in a gay relationship and "lover" for the older man also goes back into history, as Marlowe and others would claim, to Jesus and his "beloved disciple."

I know not how to tell thee who I am

The position of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) on the pink team has often been questioned. He was married early to a woman eight years older than himself, by whom he had two children. At this point, we picture a happy family in that thatched cottage on the Avon. In reality, he lived in London for the 20 years of his theatrical career, while Anne trimmed the roses back in

Stratford.

When he died, he willed Anne his "second best bed," and absolutely forbid her and his daughter to be buried anywhere near him. We do not know who got his best bed, but it may have been the man of great charm and beauty he called "the master-mistress of my passion," and to whom he wrote 126 of the most gorgeous sonnets in the English language.

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy

The name "queer" has a long history, most of it unpleasant. That saying "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!" is funny when Homer Simpson says it, but 'queer' shouted by a passing redneck still hurts. And somehow I don't really want Tom Brokaw to report on our community using this term.

I have always wondered who decided that the best way to counter "oppression" is to accept a derogatory name as our name for ourselves. I feel that this still gives power to the "oppressors" because it's still their word! ("Mildly insane, odd, obsessed and sexually deviate" are the words used to define "queer" in my dictionary!) What other oppressed

group has even tried to take back a cruel epithet? Women? Blacks? Hispanics? And why aren't we reclaiming "faggot" while we are at it?

What love can do, that dares love attempt

I know deep in my heart that being gay is the greatest gift of my creator. I rejoice in it constantly. I regard it as a sacred vocation well above any sexual considerations. It is a gift with possibilities more mystical, depths more spiritual and proffered life more beautiful than any other. How about a name that reflects this?

Next time: The French connection: a Sapphic revival

For a look at Gay History in depth, the Community College of Vermont is offering Hidden History: Homosexuality in Western Civilization next term online and at the White River Junction site.

Charlie Emond has a bachelor's degree from Queens College and master's degrees from both Dartmouth and Keene State. He teaches college history courses in Springfield and White River Junction. ▼

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