

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Poetry

Dr. Henry Anonymous Speaks at the 1972 APA Convention

by Willa Schneberg



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The panel "Psychiatry: Friend or Foe of the Homosexual?" had a gay astronomer and a lesbian activist. There was no psychiatrist, so one was recruited. In the DSMII queerness was labeled a "disturbance of sexual orientation."

*I am a homosexual.
I am a psychiatrist.*

I'm not using my name.
I'm donning this ridiculous mask,
a baggy tuxedo, a bow tie,
a wig of wild curly hair,
to retain my current position.
Since Tricky Dick is still president,
it wasn't hard to find an easy-to-alter
Nixon mask in a joke shop.

*We homosexual psychiatrists must deal
with what I call 'Negro syndromes.'
We must know our place and be more healthy
than our heterosexual counterparts.
When your fellow professionals denigrate
'the faggots,' ...don't just stand by idly.*

I've always been theatrical or flamboyant.
That's what I was called at my last position
when they fired me. I've been known
to wear wild patterned dashikis and bring
a room to order by ringing a cowbell.

So here I am, facing you,
speaking into a microphone
that warps my voice—
beseeching you to see this psychiatrist
not as a pervert, but merely a person
who prefers male partners to the female sex.

I'm wearing a mask,
but the one I always wear
doesn't peel off.

Notes

1. Dr. John E. Fryer was “Dr. Anonymous.” His speech has been cited as a key factor in the decision to de-list homosexuality as a mental illness from the APA’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The words in italics are taken directly from his speech.
2. Today, comparing the homophobia Fryer experienced to “The Negro syndrome” would be unacceptable.

Willa Schneberg is a poet, essayist, visual artist, curator, and psychotherapist in private practice. She has authored five poetry collections including: *Box Poems* (Alice James Books); *In The Margins of The World*, recipient of the Oregon Book Award; *Storytelling in Cambodia* (Calyx Books), and her latest volume, *Rending the Garment*. Willa has read at the Library of Congress and has been a fellow at Yaddo and MacDowell. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and literary journals, including: *American Poetry Review*, *Salmagundi*, *Poet Lore*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and *Psychohistory Review*. This January, her newest collection, *The Naked Room*, will be released from Broadstone Books.



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