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,
walking into a microphone
that warps my voice—
beseeeching 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.