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**LOUD GAY SILENCE
A MINI-BOOK REVIEW
LEATHER HISTORY ERASED IN *GAY L.A.*
A MODERNIST AUTHOR FRAMED IN A
POSTMODERN CULTURE**

Larry's friend and *Drummer* editor, Jeanne Barney (1938-2019) wrote me her bitter opinion that her friend, Stuart Timmons (1957-2017), and his co-author Lillian Faderman, known as "the mother of lesbian history," reduced leather culture to four or five whispered asides in their 2006 book *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*. Faderman was a professor at UCLA; and Timmons, the author of *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, had been mentored by *Advocate* editor and Radical Faerie Mark Thompson.

It pains me, a messenger not wanting to be beaten, to cite this exclusion which I mention only because Richard Fullmer predicted it and Larry suffered from it and Jeanne brought it up. This otherwise admirable book, which won two Lambda Literary Awards, seems a bit, well, fraudulent in its skirting of colorful LA "sexual outlaws" who wear leather. Was there not room in its 464 pages for one page about leather culture, politics, and activism? It does not mention the crusading Larry at all, and reductively flips off the heterosexual Jeanne (rhymes with "Queenie") with only three nods as the "straight woman" who edited *Drummer*.

Two years earlier, while Faderman's *Gay L.A.* manuscript was in production, was she reminded of Larry when her *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* and Larry's *The Leatherman's Handbook* were listed together in the Publishing Triangle's "100 Best Lesbian and Gay Novels"? Even though neither book is a novel.

Jeanne complained about the omissions on November 19, 2006, because Stuart had interviewed her for the book and had sent her a scan of his draft manuscript for input. In confirmation, John Embry had written to Jeanne on November 13, 2006, that at the ninetieth birthday party for Harry Hay's partner, John Burnside, that "Stuart Timmons...said you were most helpful with his new *Gay L.A.*"

On November 20, 2006, Jeanne wrote me an email titled "Gay—But Not Leather—LA":

There are three (3) citations for me, one (1) each for John Embry and *Drummer*, and zero (0) for the Slave Auction, nor any mention of the Mark IV Baths. Stuart is one of those people who likes to pretend that he's "into leather." And Lillian is a Lesbyterian. On the other hand, however, there are two (2) citations for "Leather and Lace" and one (1) for the "Sado-Masochist Organization of Lesbians of Los Angeles," but zero (0) for the Leather Community; likewise for Larry.

While Jeanne's angry calculations were a bit off, Faderman and Timmons' à la carte servings of "LA history" dished up only passing mention of *Drummer* while ignoring the enormous gay-roots fact that it was a local magazine founded and filled in LA by local political activists, artists, and writers including local superstars like Larry and Jeanne. In 2010, Yale scholar Kate Kraft, advised by George Chauncey, noted Faderman and Timmons' failure to report on leather culture in the crucial eighth line of her thesis, *Los Angeles Gay Motorcycle Clubs, 1954-1980: Creating a Masculine Identity and Community*.

The LA authors snubbed the homomale magazine's cultural and gender-identity importance. They gave a cold shoulder to the hot scene of thousands of very real local "sexual outlaws"—as advertised in their book's bold subtitle—who were using *Drummer* and Larry's *Leatherman's Handbook* as their leather lifestyle bibles right there on location in LA. Was it systemic Marxism, feminism, separatism? Whatever it was, they canceled Larry Townsend. In their loud gay silence, the authors reduced

the twenty-four-year history of *Drummer* to the one night the LAPD arrested forty-two leatherfolk at the famous Drummer Slave Auction on April 10, 1976—for which the LAPD has yet to apologize.

Distilling that event which was difficult history to vanilla folk, they invoked that night of injustice to make a cold point—not of specific empathy for leather culture, or for the victims targeted for being gay and arrested for being leather—but about the general anti-gay abuse systemic in the LAPD.

While creating the content of their book, they may have taken a tone from very vocal activists who, romancing Communism, rather typified the kind of far-left folk who drove Larry and average gay guys nuts with politically-correct agenda that twisted the reporting of gay history. One activist, who was a co-founder of the Gay Liberation Front in New York, and a member of the Trotsky-Communist Lavender and Red Union in Los Angeles, poked his head up and denounced the concept of the charitable Drummer Slave Auction as racially insensitive, which was a bit of a stretch, but was no reason for anyone to throw leather culture itself under the bus.

Why did the scholarship of these authors ignore not only Larry but also the local treasure-trove diary and gender archives of the vivid homomascularity preserved in LA-born *Drummer*? Why not dig into a motherlode of 20,000 pages of gay history, customs, and desire written, drawn, and photographed mostly by the sexual-outlaw readers themselves during twenty-four years of 214 monthly issues from 1975-1999?

Because every author has every right to set parameters for a project, Faderman and Timmons must not be blamed for their choices or for Larry's mental state of reaction to them in 2006. But can you imagine how the veteran gay-elder Larry, age 76, who was such a famous and dominant and proven activist, author, and LA personality felt about this perceived cut? "Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." (Folk wisdom in Mark 6:1-6) Through no fault of his own, while he was born male, white, and privileged, he nevertheless grew up, as have so many gay men, traumatized by the relentless homophobia of straight society. Learning empathy from

that suffering, he tried never to exploit his white-male privilege, and he never felt entitled to anything he did not earn or merit. Larry may have been one of those alpha people who speak straight from the shoulder and straight from the heart, but he never told anyone what to do. He never canceled anyone.

Not being included in *Gay L.A.* the same year Fred died, added gay insult to existential injury. He lost his cool. Excluded from a book composed by, he thought, a faux leatherman, and a distaff peer who came out in LA near the same time he did in the 1950s, was the last straw. He fumed, “This is the thanks I get?” Did academic radicals accidentally radicalize him more? The way he turned pain into pleasure in an S&M scene, he turned his widower’s grief into an author’s survivalist rage. Feeling shunned, he took his operatic *Götterdämmerung* fury out on friends who fled, but he never kicked the dog.

He felt dishonored and cornered, but what novelist doesn’t like to twist a big surprise into his plot with a big fat climax? Distempered by his bad experiences with separatists, he figured if gay Marxist radicals—not meaning Timmons or the scholarly Faderman who is a better writer than he—have an appetite to destroy what they cannot change, he, the author of *Master of Masters*, could cook up a dish of instant creme of revenge served not cold but hot by terrorizing gay bookstores and a gay publisher with a dramatic lawsuit—if it was the last thing he ever did.

And it was.

In the way the Catholic Church dismisses homosexuality itself as a moral disorder, this sex-negativity erasure is typical of vanilla authors confused by the seemingly dark texture of the leather pop culture which is beyond the ken of their dainty moral order. Michel Foucault, that un-dainty S&M leather player who enjoyed fisting at the orgiastic Barracks and Slot baths on Folsom Street in San Francisco, might have given counsel to Timmons and Faderman in the line from his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”: “The purpose of history is to make visible all those discontinuities that cross us.”

Because of the seemingly purposed censorship and bias inherent in such academic exclusions, I fear for Larry what Richard Fullmer/Dirk Vanden warned, and what Larry himself pointed

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK

out: that male authors of gay pop-culture erotic literature will continue to be excluded or marginalized by critics and historians who otherwise exclude very little other alternative queer writing from their stated inclusivity which eclipses the light these leather authors brought to their thousands of readers who learned from them ways for masculine-identified gay men to live a gay life. The shunning of these authors is a self-inflicted wound on gay studies. The double standard is a double cross. Literotica is a valid genre that need not be segregated in quotation marks. If exclusion is transactional apartheid, inclusion is transformative sodality.

My email acquaintance Aristide Joseph Laurent (1941-2011), co-founder of *The Advocate*, who at the invitation of Jeanne Barney moved his “Astrologic” column from *The Advocate* to *Drummer* for a dozen issues, explained how the thankless *Advocate* ignored Jeanne who, as one of its founding columnists, worked four-times longer for the infant *Advocate* than she did for the infant *Drummer*. Aristide, at the blog of William A. Percy, III, testified how Jeanne (and for that matter Larry) was snubbed by *The Advocate* at its fortieth-anniversary party in 2007, just one year after the publication of *Gay L.A.*

September 19, 2007. “Hobnobbing in West Hollywood.” *The Advocate* celebrated its 40th birthday in West Hollywood last night. Being the last of the Big Four who started *The Advocate* back in 1967, I was invited to attend ... not by the latest powers that be but by my friend Stuart Timmons, acclaimed author of the tell-all tome *Gay L.A.*

The Hollywood Cat Lady (aka Jeanne Barney) was similarly snubbed but invited by Stuart to attend as one of the remaining Founding Fathers/Mothers of the gay press movement. She snubbed back and refused to attend. You don’t go, girl. For anyone old enough to remember, Jeanne B used to write the advice column, “Smoke From Jeannie’s Lamp,” for the old *Advocate*.