

the latter offers a more elaborate and intimate glimpse of Jim Egan, an important figure whose life story helped to shape the larger narrative of gay and lesbian history in Canada.

Given that members of LGBT and queer communities often “do not have the institutions for common memory and generational transmission around which straight culture is built” (Warner 51), *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence* reminds us of the necessity to honor and embrace what we have inherited from the past, least of all as means with which to make intelligible the present historical moment and to shape the future. As Egan eloquently reminds us, “Gay people today have no idea what it was like being gay in those days. Homosexuality was not discussed openly in polite society. There were no positive gay role models” (86). To the extent that the book’s publication coincides with two anniversaries – the fiftieth anniversary of Jim Egan and Jack Nesbit’s relationship (23 August 1998) and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (September 1998) – readers of *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence* are invited to celebrate our role models and the keepers of their stories.

Works Cited

- Kinsman, Gary. *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Heterosexualities*. Montréal: Black Rose, 1996.
- Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: Free, 1999.

Catherine Lake, ed. *ReCREATIONS: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People*. Toronto: Queer Press, 1999. 192pp. \$14.95 (Cdn) ISBN 1-895564-06-9.

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At first, *ReCREATIONS* seemed destined to join the ranks of other anthologies on queers and religion which often chronicle the unfortunate experiences had by many gays and lesbians at the hands of organized religion. Happily, this presumption of mine

was a mistake. As the title indicates, *ReCREATIONS* deals not only with religion as constructed by society, but with spirituality as developed by the individual and with how the two interact in the lives of queer people. Unfortunately, as some of the contributions to the book show, these facets of life sometimes clash. For other contributors, the needs of the spirit were able to overcome the problems with organized religion, allowing for fulfillment either in the birth religion, or in a spiritual system chosen later in life. This is not to say that there is something called the 'queer religious experience' any more than there is something called the 'queer experience.' While this book as a whole illustrates the ongoing conflict between religion and sexuality, it also reflects the diversity of spiritual questing within the multifaceted queer community.

It is precisely this diversity that gives *ReCREATIONS* an edge over other collections. Not only are diverse sexual orientations represented, but a great variety of religious experiences as well: the spiritual transformations recounted range from Christian to Pagan, from Mormon to Quaker. Some contributors stayed within their birth traditions (for instance, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim), and others, in embracing their queerness, found a meaningful spiritual system outside organized religion, including everything from an omni-religious spirituality to Wicca to the Radical Faerie movement.

The book's diversity is facilitated by the method of organization. Eschewing divisions by gender, orientation, or religious affiliation, editor Catherine Lake instead chose the three broad categories "Witness," "Exile," and "Sanctuary." Each section contains offerings in prose and poetry that are loosely based on each theme.

"Witness" records the experiences of those who coped and are coping with the attitudes of their religions. Many of the pieces are "coming out" stories: both coming out as queer to self and to family, and coming out as religious. Harreson T. Cebiliak covers an itinerary of his daily grade ten experience which included not only questions of sexuality, but also bullies, drugs, and a dysfunctional family torn apart by alcoholism. Despite this, Cebiliak writes that "remaining true to my soul's evolution has allowed me to magically transform as a dance with the Divine," revealing the strong spirituality that enabled him to survive his childhood (19). In "My Human Revolution," Kate Greco describes her journey from married Catholic to lesbian Buddhist, asking the question that many spiritual seekers have

pondered: "is it the actual practice that brings about results, or is it the faith in the practice?" (57). With the selective use of certain Scriptural passages deployed as frequent weapons against the queer community, such a question is often on the mind of the queer religious practitioner: is it the institution or the experience of the Divine that one follows? Often, sadly, the two are very far apart. Frequently, the message of love and compassion mysteriously morphs into one of hatred and exclusion when issues of queerness are raised. It is this issue that is explored in the next section.

Certainly, for some contributors to "Exile," both the institution and the religious experience preclude queerness. Daniel Curzon's "Why I am an Ex-Catholic" speaks to the utter alienation many queer people have experienced at the hands of organized religion. Though at some points flippant about his ordeal – "I can't honestly understand why any gay people would want to have anything to do with the Catholic Church, except to picket it. (Or maybe get a job in it.)" – his "roaringly anti-Catholic" mindset speaks to the breadth of the gap between the queer and the religious (104, 103). Unlike Curzon, several of the writers did find their way out of their birth religions and into a system that allowed them to be both gay and religious or spiritual. Yoruba priest Aswad discusses his journey from his Southern Baptist roots to African traditions, via Islam, Witchcraft, and Shamanism. For him, and others of nonwhite heritage, homophobia combined with questions of color, leading led him to pose the questions: "Why is God white?" "Why does God hate Blacks?" and "Why does God hate gays?" (94).

"Sanctuary," the final section, celebrates spirituality that embraces, rather than excludes, the queer experience. Brian Utter recounts his confusion in having to choose between hetero- and homosexuality as the only two choices allowed by his Catholic upbringing, with only one of those two being correct. Embracing his bisexuality meant breaking with all polarities, including those taught to him by the Church, and experiencing spirituality as something individual, "as intricate and entangled as the life I've experienced" (145). Like Greco's musings on religion and religious practice, Utter's experience led him to a belief that spirituality "emphasized living well [rather] than practicing correctly" (145). Some writers did find homes within organized religions. Transsexual Mikki Maulsby turned to Wicca ("a custom-made suit") after trying out several varieties of

Christianity ("one-size-fits-all"), finding a link between the persecution of witches and of queers (147). The joy of being a solitary practitioner was also part of the allure: without the need to have the approval of others, Maulsby is free to experience noninstitutionalized spirituality that transcends prejudice.

One of the most interesting examples of the examination of how prejudice plays itself out in mainstream religion is Avi Rose's "Deconstructing Leviticus." Growing up in a devoutly Jewish family, Rose went from insider to outsider when he came to terms with his homosexuality. Leviticus, which contains those quotes most often used against queer people (18:22 and 20:13), became a focus for Rose's integration of sexuality and spirituality until eventually he "became angry with the text for denying [him] the right to be the human being and the Jew that [he] was" (118). By deconstructing the text and examining the history behind its construction, Rose has not only aided his own quest, but provided logical arguments for use by people dealing with those who use Leviticus as a weapon.

In addition to the prose texts cited above, each major section contains poems which speak to the authors' experiences as eloquently as any of the other entries and add to the overall diversity of the anthology. Cynthia Masson's "Conversion Class" tells of being with her partner in "a room / Full of heterosexual couples / Anticipating huppah" and wondering whether they are fully accepted or merely tolerated (42). In "Growing Up Religious," Brian Day recalls images from his Christian youth of having to reconcile his queerness with the message of the Church: "From the church we had the glass / of a text, the grace / of language. For that other / there was no writing we knew. / Fag jokes were a relief / from the burden of silence, the blank / pages that kept us closed."

The heterogeneity of *ReCREATIONS* makes it difficult to represent the texture of the anthology. I have not mentioned Frank Hull's account of being a gay Mormon who also has cerebral palsy, nor Ace's recollections of growing up Roman Catholic in New York in the 1950s and 1960s as a no-op Female-to-Male. To fully appreciate the work's scope, it must be read as a whole. *ReCREATIONS* is a valuable addition to the body of work concerning the intersection of sexuality and spirituality.

