

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

I agree with Robert Hauptman—certainly a champion of intellectual freedom if ever there was one—that we live in an age of linguistic vulgarity and decline (July 1995, p. 359), although I would take the Freudian course and argue with D. H. Lawrence (*Sex, Literature and Censorship: Essays*) that anglo-saxonisms sometimes serve as a healthy outlet for violent feelings. I write, however, because I do not want the importance of Louise S. Robbins's article (October 1994) to be lost in "astonishment." It is indeed astonishing to see the word "cocksucker" in perhaps the most venerable library journal. It is horrifying to realize that it was used, not with hatred or with violence, but with apparently cynical indifference, by none other than the Librarian of Congress about a group of people who could not defend themselves in the courts of the day against bigotry. It is terrifying and it is exceedingly painful to be the recipient of such an epithet when it is hurled in contempt by people who want to reduce homosexuals to a physically intimate act, transformed, by the power of handy anglo-saxonisms, to a pornographic cartoon. A friend of mine had the epithet hurled at him last year, and was nearly beaten to death in his home in Wilmington, North Carolina, by an unknown assailant who decided that homosexuals did not have souls, minds, or anything useful to contribute to society except as convenient, disposable fellators.

Since I know Robbins and her work well, I am acquainted with the decisions which preceded the publication of the article in its present form, including the advice received to modify the title so that the offending quote follow the colon rather than precede it. Frankly, I am proud of *Library Quarterly* for keeping the epithet at all, considering the sensitivity of some readers to "language of the street." Yet we should be made aware that homophobia is part of our professional historical baggage, however liberal our intellectual freedom credo. With more fine historical investigations like Robbins's, we may move the climate of professional opinion about homosexuality from one of denial to one of acceptance. Many people assume that such issues were resolved in the heady 1960s and 1970s, and are heartily sick of hearing about them, but one only has to examine the "Reader's Forum" columns of *American Libraries* over the past several years to be convinced that librarianship is still far from tolerant of homosexuality. Homophobia is among us and, to use a grammatically shoddy regional expression current down here, "it ain't very purty."

Personally, I feel that the title of the article draws attention to the ugliness of these gay purges—which were, of course, nothing compared to the measures adopted by Nazis against ten to fifteen thousand homosexual inmates of concentration camps only a few years before—and paints the perpetrator with his own brush. However, the facts of the case should be the real cause of astonishment, not the inclusion of a historically accurate quote which is usually found on men's room walls. The full measure of pain wielded by the federal program on the gay and leftist employees involved can perhaps never be gauged in words.

Bravo, Robbins; bravo, *Library Quarterly*.

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