

DRUMMER FEATURE ARTICLE

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BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER...

THE JANUS SOCIETY: KISS AND DON'T TELL

Cynthia Slater and the Catholic Priest

by Jack Fritscher

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AUTHOR'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT INTRODUCTION



DRAFT VERSION



Written November 1978 and published in *Drummer* 27, February 1979. While dating both the Catholic priest Jim Kane and playing around with Cynthia Slater, the founder of Janus, I conceived this feature interview-essay, which I assigned—so I could step away from by-lining and writing so much of each issue—to reporter Eric Van Meter, who under another name worked for the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Having directed Eric Van Meter's objective reportage as base, I shaped this article with my own backfill to reflect the personalities of my intimates Kane and Slater, because we were all friends together. During this same period, I introduced Robert Mapplethorpe to leather players willing to appear in his West Coast photographs, including Cynthia Slater, who was my straight brother's part-time playmate. While Allan Ginsberg was bragging he'd slept with someone who'd slept with someone who'd slept with Walt Whitman, we were all sleeping with each other—and very conscious that the degrees of separation were a lot less than six.

Because of my personal relationship with Cynthia Slater, I wanted to introduce women into *Drummer* to reflect how the women's movement was following gay men into the sexual arena. (In the late '60s on the Western Michigan University campus, I was for several years the faculty advisor for events such as Women's Awareness Week—probably because I was the brash, young associate professor, openly living with a gay man, David Sparrow, and because I initiated and taught courses with sassy titles such as "Women in Film.") This *Drummer* article is first leatherstream mention of women advancing into male venues of S&M, and is also the first mention in *Drummer* of the personality then known as the woman Pat Califia who had been excommunicated by the Mormon Church

and come as one of the many sex-refugees—one of the many erotic immigrants to San Francisco, all of them running from Mormons in Salt Lake or Anita Bryant in Florida or Catholics in Boston or, as the immigrant *Drummer* itself had, from the LAPD in Los Angeles.

Drummer publisher John Embry, actually had fled the LAPD who arrested him and busted *Drummer* over a “Slave Auction” the LAPD thought was real. Embry’s lover and partner, Mario Simon, was an immigrant from Spain. San Francisco in the 70’s was what San Francisco has always been, a haven, refuge, and sanctuary for immigrants. In the song made popular by Jeanette MacDonald and made camp by Judy Garland, “San Francisco,” the lyrics written by German immigrant, Gus Kahn, say San Francisco opens its Golden Gate and lets no stranger wait outside its doors. In 2002, in fact, San Francisco’s current population is thirty-seven percent immigrants. In the ’70s, our whole group were sex-immigrants fleeing political and religious persecution. In that state of being immigrants, we all bonded together in a cordial way of co-existence until the politically correct fad of the 1980s divided the melting-pot of university into the boiling-pot of diversity.

In this Janus article, “Frank Cross” is the coded name for the Catholic priest, Jim Kane, with whom I had been playing S&M games in Colorado since 1968. In June 1969, three weeks before Stonewall, with my knees wrapped around his leather butt, I rode a thousand miles on the back of Jim Kane’s Harley-Davidson on our very “Easy Rider” road-trip from Denver to Taos and Santa Fe. Along the way, floating in a hot springs pool full of families, we met Jim Ward whose shocking nipples were romantically pierced at this time before such a practice was common. Ward, of course, later became the piercing guru of the Gauntlet. In Santa Fe, we floated in a swimming pool and I spent an evening wearing Ken Kesey’s brown leather jacket grooving, as we used to say, on the vibes. [As priest-editor of the Colorado Springs diocesan newspaper titled *Dateline Colorado*, the Reverend Jim Kane published a continuing essay column on Catholicism and American pop culture written by Jack Fritscher from 1969-1971. In 1971, Jim Kane introduced Sam Steward/Phil Andros to Jack Fritscher who received a State of Michigan grant to the arts to chronicle the career of Sam Steward on audio tape. —Mark Henry, editor]

Jim Kane was one of the world’s great letter writers and I have every 1960s and 1970s word he wrote to me with a blue typewriter ribbon on crisp white stationery—particularly detailing the beginning of his tempestuous love affair with the former New York Jets professional football player, Ike Barnes. Jim met Ike a couple years after I met David Sparrow, July 4, 1969. Ike lived in upstate New York where David and I visited him to audition Ike emotionally and sexually in S&M for the wary Jim Kane. Ike’s house in the woods was quite remote and suited for outdoor leather games. As a couple, Jim Kane and Ike Barnes appear together in three photographs in *Drummer* 17, July 1977, page 9, in the article “Famous Dungeons of San Francisco,” shot by Gene Weber with whom I traveled to Japan in 1975. (The first of my very few photographic appearances in *Drummer* was at the top of page 11, *Drummer* 17, shot by Gene Weber in the playroom where he also shot Russell Van Leer and me in the 35mm slide show, “Blood Crucifixion,” now in the Lesbian and Gay Archives, San Francisco.)

When they first immigrated to San Francisco, Jim Kane (from Colorado Springs) and Ike Barnes (from upstate New York) had lived in one of the flats owned by S&M player, Tony Perles, near the corner of 19th and Castro. Perles, a founding member of San Francisco’s first uniform club, The Pacific Drill Patrol, was one of the earliest pioneers to move in to gentrify the Castro in 1966, about the same time that the other S&M legend, German immigrant, Hank Diethelm, former member of the Nazi Youth and founding

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owner of the Brig, and murdered by a hustler years later, took up residence also in the Castro where David Sparrow and I—immigrants ourselves—lived with him in the summer of 1970. The “famous dungeon” in the photographs was in the basement of the fixer house, Kane-Barnes bought at 11 Pink Alley, San Francisco, where upstairs Jim Kane and Ike Barnes hosted many of the most connective dinner parties of the 1970s. There, early on, over Ike Barnes’ production numbers of paella and sangria, I first met the immigrants Sam Steward, Tom of Finland, and Durk Dehner who was squiring Tom on his first trip to the United States.

In the Leather Renaissance of the Titanic ’70s, our little Bloomsbury—when not traveling together from Amsterdam to New York to Tokyo—bounced between “salons” at my 25th Street home to the Kane-Barnes Pink Alley address to Gene Weber’s media-rich home on Buena Vista Park West to the original Castro Café, the Norse Cove Café, Fey Way Gallery, and, beginning in 1977, the *Drummer* office. It was a very glamorous and sexy time, and gentlemanly as well, before gay lib became gay politics and the civil wars broke out in the lesbian culture where everyone was fighting everyone for column inches and pissing on the rights to revisionist history. There is a difference between nostalgia and history, but it’s not just the fog of pretty memory that nominates the ’70s as a most remarkable time full of cooperation and creativity when everyone said to everyone else, “Come on! You absolutely must meet everybody!”

That is not a naive “take” on the decade, because this very feature article itself shows how divisive politics and civil war began as Janus had trouble getting permission to march as a group in the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade. Also, I worked into this piece—trying to make *apologia pro vita sua*—another of the infamous thinker Richard Goldstein’s anti-leather, anti-S&M, anti-fisting pieces, “Flirting with Terminal Sex” which continued his cautionary rant in “S&M: The Dark Side of Gay Liberation,” *The Village Voice*, July 7, 1975. (One letter to the editor in the *Village Voice* asked something like “Is Richard Goldstein on crack?”) In *Drummer* at that time we should have taken killjoy Goldstein on, and not let him get away with his crackpot trashing of leather culture, but we ignored him because we had better things to do. Actually, it’s too bad that in more than twenty-five years, leather culture and its magazines has ignored one of its worst enemies.

As back drop to the times, there was also this pop culture event: at the end of the ’70’s many in the vanilla queerstream—like Goldstein, mainly New Yorkers living far from San Francisco group—were becoming *mondo disturbo* just hearing about the *verite* script for the William Friedkin film *Cruising*, which was about sexual risks dramatized with the metaphor of leather.

The Titanic ’70s cruised with a happy face among such icebergs while the party continued and the band played on.

Ultimately, when my first lover of ten years, David Sparrow, passed away from AIDS, he died in a house owned next door by Jim Kane at the corner of Pink and Pearl, San Francisco. David Andrew Sparrow who was born May 7, 1945, was my partner from July 4, 1969 to March 17, 1979, and died February 20, 1992. On David’s 27th birthday, May 7, 1972, Jim Kane, the actual Catholic priest, wearing full leather, performed a marriage service between David and me on the roof of the brick building where we always stayed with the painter George Chauncey Agustinella, 2 Charlton Street, New York. —Jack Fritscher, August 29, 2002

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Cynthia Slater and the Catholic Priest **by Jack Fritscher**

Frank Cross [Reverend Jim Kane], a 51-year-old former priest and proficient S&M Top, demonstrates his homemade trapeze, a wondrously wicked device for securing a Bottom to tit clamps. The clamps attach to ropes. The ropes go along a pulley, and on the other side of the pulley are knots in the rope for hanging lead fishing weights. "If he's a heavy Bottom," Cross says, "you can increase the weights to increase the pull on his tits."

HIGH PRIEST

Cross, who wears leathers and sunglasses like they were papal vestments, pulls out a large leather hide. An admitted fetishist, Cross adores black leather. He speaks of its "bouquet" and handles it with the awe and respect one associates with fine wine.

Cross moves to the subject of flagellation, speaking in rhythmic, ritualistic tones. "You're possessing the Bottom's mind, his body, his sensitivity," he says. "You're whipping out every sense of reality except pain. Pain...your brain...pain. Pain. You get his full attention."

"I love this man!" a woman shouts out.

Cross smiles, just slightly. He respects adoration from the Bottoms.

SHOW AND TELL: CYNTHIA SLATER

It's Show-and-Tell at a Society of Janus meeting, and the motley San Francisco crowd, sardined into a small room above a Market Street bar, gobbles up Cross' bits of S&M lore like manna from heaven. Cross was, after all, once a priest; and once a priest, always a priest. Now, the Society of Janus is his parish.

Catacombs opens May 1975
Society of Janus founded August 1975

Cynthia Slater, an earth-woman in her hot 30's, wearing stiletto-heeled boots and spurs, takes the floor moments later, demonstrating particulars on her human bridle. Slater shoves the bit into her Bottom's mouth, straddles her, and picks up the braided reins that extend back from the headpiece. Slater yanks on it expertly. "Some people," she cautions, "have sensitive gag reflexes."

The litany moves along to thumbcuffs, more whips and cats, ideas on shaving a partner's genitals prior to splashing hot candle wax. (Never use beeswax. It burns for real, not ritual!) When handcuffs get locked, and the key is lost, we're told, don't panic. Call

the San Francisco Fire Department. “In this town,” Slater says, “they don’t even bat an eye.”

In all, 16 “toys” that Mattel never heard of are discussed. What one person doesn’t know about the most sensual refinement of a device, another provides.

“Grease up the end of the flange for whipping,” Slater says. “It makes a greater sting without any mark.”

Cross smiles his benediction at her wisdom. If he is the priest, she is the priestess.

Janus members know the best saddle-and-tack shops in the Bay Area, the friendliest leather gear outlet, the finest surgical supply store. You might say what the Juilliard School is to music education, Janus is to S&M.

EDUCATION BREEDS SAFE PLAY

All information, by Janus policy, aims at safety tips and precautions. Toys aren’t capriciously brought in and creamed over, but instead discussed reasonably and practically. The erotic element is primary. “We try to tell people to never play over their heads or beyond their skills,” Cross explains. “You can achieve an S&M high without crucifying people.”

The meeting charges on with good-humored, and even playful camaraderie. These folks are all friends.

“Sensuality,” Cross says, with no note of preachment in his voice, “is the name of the game.”

“And mutuality,” Slater adds. The lady knows pleasure in private, and guest-lectures on human sexuality at college symposiums.

A surge of applause endorses the sentiments.

Nobody’s here to score. Not officially, anyway. The assortment of men and women, gay and straight and bi, Tops and Bottoms and Negotiables, comes not to orgy or to swap, but to share information. Janus was formed, according to the group’s literature, “to exchange insights and to learn more about S&M in an accepting social atmosphere.”

GROUP PURPOSE

Janus, almost unique in the United States, is rivaled only by the older Til Eulenspiegel group in New York. Til Eulenspiegel also features rap [rapport] and consciousness-raising sessions. Aside from the Show-and-Tell described above, Janus schedules programs like “Bondage Workshop,” “Ask the Doctor,” “The Gentle Art of Flagellation,” and “Playroom Tours.” Interested in an S&M speaker’s bureau? Call Janus for a good time. A monthly bulletin with consumer reports, occasional S&M book and film reviews, as well as social events like a Halloween party are included in the membership package.

Janus has roughly (no pun intended) 50 members, and has recently branched into a women’s C/M group named *Cardia*, and a Lesbian offshoot, *Samois*. Janus maintains a plurality of gay men. (Home-base is, after all, SFO.) A membership survey determined that 20% in the group are clearly-defined Tops, 55 to 60% are exclusively Bottoms, and the rest are Negotiables.

TAKE MY WIFE. PLEASE

I ask Slater what motivates a person to join Janus. “First a chance to share information and learn more,” she answers. “Second, a chance to meet partners. And third, a chance to be in a supportive, validating environment. Like when you first find out you’re gay, you’re afraid you’re the only one in the whole world.”

Slater, who founded Janus, frequently lectures on the group’s behalf. She identifies herself as a bisexual-Negotiable basically into sensual bondage. She sprinkles her talk with pop-psych vocab. “Validating” comes up a lot. The “OK-ness” of being a Top or a Bottom. Slater stops well this side of est. What she says is intelligent, eye-opening, and well-reasoned.

Slater moved to San Francisco in the 70’s, and began actualizing her S&M fantasies. She and her male lover had problems making “trips” and Tops “click” in the scenes because of their lack of information. You can’t go to the library and check out a book on *How to Safely Tie up Your Partner*,” she says.

The groups they discovered by reading *Berkeley Barb* ads were mostly swing-swap-n-clap clubs. Commercial. Heterosexist. Very much “I’ll kiss-off my wife for yours.” The women were traded around like fuckable commodities on the New York Stock Exchange.

At the same time, Slater grew tired of her non-S&M friends whose “heavy vicarious curiosity” became a judgmental mindfuck. “They never really shared themselves other than saying, ‘I’m not into that.’ At the same time they’d be squirming on the edge of their seat and clenching their wet thighs. I felt ripped off. Even psycho-sexually molested.”

Slater never minces, despite the psycho-babble sentiments.

Finally, she and her lover decided that in order to meet other S&M people, without the bullshit of the existing clubs, they’d have to start their own organization. It was August, 1975. Their first move was a newsletter, advertised in the *Barb*, listing the monthly meetings at Cynthia’s house. In those early days—before gay men started joining—a lot of heterosexual men persisted in “dogging the women,” Slater says. “That was the only reason they came.”

NO PRESSURE-PUNKING

Today, there’s a firm Janus rule regarding pressure. If someone asks for a date, gets turned down twice, he or she must drop it.

“Anyone looking for a hot conquest,” Cross said, “or for a bunch of men stalking and menacing each other, won’t find it here.”

CROSS PURPOSES?

The focus of Janus has been changed in the past three years. Whereas information and support were the steady diet before, now there’s a kind of cross-communication between Tops and Bottoms as well. “We try to get both sides be more tolerant of each other,” Cross says. “So many times a Bottom lets the Top take over completely, thinking he’s done everything the Bottom needs to do just by presenting himself. Big deal! He expects the Top to be his animated dildo.” Cross strokes his heavy leather. “On the other hand,” he says, “Bottoms complain that Tops lack patience. They keep saying the Tops

need to go to school.”

“The real coup,” Cross says, is getting away from inflicting your fantasy on someone else. Both need to recognize the need for mutual turn-on, mutual susceptibility. Sharing. I found I have a built-in circuit-breaker. Unless my Bottom is enjoying, I don’t want to play.”

JANUARY: TWO FACES

The name *Janus* comes from the two-faced Roman god of doorways, symbolizing beginnings and endings. To quote Janus literature: “Some of us believe that the intertwined drives toward domination and submission are common to all humankind... that expressed creatively S&M can develop an exquisite and beautiful trust.”

Trust is the operative word.

Slater corroborates: “The more I have gotten in touch with my S&M fantasies,” she says, “the stronger a human being I’ve become. Even a bit of a humanist.”

Fantasies. Myths. Guilt. What S&M person ever had a smooth coming-out? Cynthia is articulate and moving on this subject. Perhaps she’s used the speech in her lectures. No matter. With Slater, practice makes perfect.

“Anyone who’s a member of a sexual minority in this country,” she says, “no matter how much work they’ve done on their head or how much external support they get, always carries a remnant of the crap that society has laid on them. You never get 100% clear of it. I have my moments when someone looks at me funny, and it pushes those buttons for me. But I deal with it now because I have something that balances it out. I can walk into a Janus meeting and be surrounded by great people who validate me.”

SOME CRAP NEVER DIES: GAY PARADE SAYS “NO”

The crap she recalls lives right now, alive and sick, within the uptight, vanilla-gay, kissy-face gay community. Feminist circles, like queenly circles, go down in a nosedive of fear, resentment of, and a downright attitude toward S&M.

A tremendous amount of flak rained down on the Janus Society with they applied to the SFO Gay Freedom Committee for float privileges. Janus was finally begrudged a space. When they paraded that day on Market Street (with a placard saying “A Woman’s Right to Choice Is Absolute!”), the howl could’ve been heard in San Jose. Middle-class gay pressure groups ultimately caused the parade committee to say: “We’re sorry we let you in.”

S&M COMING OUT: PAT CALIFIA

Women probably have the toughest time coming out as an S&M person. Even in “soft” or “vanilla” sex, society’s heavy thou-shall-not hand tells them to be less exploratory and adventuresome than men.

“If you want to come out with gay men,” Slater says, “you’ll find a lot of men equate being a Bottom with the traditional woman’s role in the home. They show the same insensitivity that exists in daily life, so that playing them can’t be mutually satisfying. It’s awfully scary to be a *maitresse* to any American male considering the lack of permission women are given to be assertive and initiatory.”

“Coming out to gay women,” Slater continues, “you can expect to be trashed. I’ve been verbally attacked and abused by my so-called sisters in ways that utterly appalled me.”

Pat [now Patrick] Califia, 24, one of the coordinators of Janus, says the anti-S&M mentality is typified by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media. The WAVPM is a righteous, indignant, erotophobic group that made news by getting the Rolling Stones’ Black and Blue billboard (depicting a bruised and bound woman) removed from the Sunset Strip.

“Spanking, bondage, torture, and murder are lumped together in their minds,” Califia says. “They want to ban pictorial sex altogether.” She sees the group as reactionary and playing directly into the hands of neo-right anti-gay and anti-porn groups. Instead of attacking S&M people and the erotic art industry, she feels WAVPM should focus its tight little vaginal wrath on ineffective rape laws and capricious police enforcement.

Califia, who took her name from the Amazon figure that appears on the California State Seal, is also incensed by WAVPM because of its bigotry toward gay men. “If there’s any group in our society that’s supportive of sensual sexuality, it’s gay men. It also infuriates me to see one minority dump on another; it’s like watching lobsters fight in a bucket.”

Califia seems to have her head “right on.”

“The majority of lesbians think sex is nasty unless it’s someone you want to spend your life with,” Califia says. “I like to play in public. I’m exhibitionistic. But there’s no way I could march into a dyke bar and drag out a hot woman in handcuffs. Those lesbians would be up in arms.”

Califia has two lovers (one Top and one Bottom), a budding career as a writer of women’s erotica, and an insatiable desire to transfer some of the “privilege and power of male S&M” into her own life. She has the distinction of being the first woman to violate the once all-male sanctum of the Black and Blue, a once popular San Francisco leather bar. The bouncer refused her admittance, but she brazenly marched past, dragging two women with her.

VILLAGE VOICE

Pain. Torture. Should one believe the famous Richard Goldstein piece on “Flirting with Terminal Sex” in the *Village Voice* some years ago? Goldstein suggested that the S&M aficionado ultimately loses control, finding his passion spiraling into realms of the senses he never dreamed of entering—like death. It’s that old “slippery slope” fallacy so beloved by conservative moralists: marijuana leads to heroin, etc.

The Goldstein piece used words like *Satanic*. It equated S&M with Nazism.

Cross, who hated that piece, insists S&M is not a progressive thing. “You don’t go from dressing up in uniforms, to bondage, to pain, to torture, to blood. No. As I’ve observed it, people have their own functioning level, and as long as they’re comfortable they usually remain at that level.”

“Most of the men at the Black and Blue were amused and titillated,” Califia says. “When I handcuffed both the women, threw them up against the wall and did a number on them, the only one who got blown away was some guy in a jockstrap and dog collar

who kept saying, ‘Is nothing sacred?’”

Frank Cross sometimes offers tours of his totally maxed playroom and water sports den near the corner of Pink and Pearl just off Market Street. Cross is also concerned with dispelling myths. He says, “Phil Andros [legendary erotic writer for *Drummer* and other publications] is always quoting to me a major psychiatric researcher who says that a person’s main interest in S&M lasts seven years and then burns out.” Cross is confident and reassuring. “I’ve been into S&M for fifteen years, and I’m probably better, more accomplished and patient than ever. One of the nice things about S&M is that it’s not ageist, like so much of the homosexual culture. Leather and S&M can add a whole additional decade to a man’s active sex life if he understand’s it and uses it Properly.”

Goldstein also isolated fistfucking as the pinnacle excess of S&M, an “apocryphal gesture.” Cross argues that, though FF and S&M occasionally intersect, most fisting doesn’t carry an S&M element. “It’s purely sensual; it doesn’t have that exchange of domination and sub-mission. It’s more of a direct trust exchange.”

SENSUALITY AND MUTUALITY

Overcoming the kind of incorrect and malicious information in the Goldstein piece is one of the objectives of the Society of Janus. The introductory Janus pamphlet defines S&M as “an exchange of power between two or more mutually consenting persons.” Nothing more.

S&M does not necessarily involve leather or rubber, the literature says, or pain, or even sex. It is “by definition consensual...(and) therefore antithetical to rape, violence, and murder.” Take that, you WAVPM ladies!

THE IDEA! OF A UNIVERSITY?

Is Janus working?

Cynthia Slater replies: “I see us making progress. We’ve gotten some very good press from non-S&M magazines. I see changes in the professional world. When I started knocking on doors at institutions like San Francisco Sex Information and the University of California, I said, ‘You’re the frontrunner in the human sexuality field. You’re taking the most humanistic view of sexuality ever. What are you doing about S&M?’ They all said, ‘Nothing. We don’t know anything or anyone who’s qualified. Will you help us?’ So now S&M is part of their program.”

Slater smiles through opalescent skin and lights up an Eve cigarette.

“Across the country, there are some people in the counseling and helping professions who don’t follow the old approach of ‘curing perversion’ when they encounter an S&M-identified person. Perhaps more important are the changes in S&M people. It’s just my instinct that Janus has something to do with it,”

Cynthia Slater finishes with a grin: “But I think people feel better about themselves because Janus is here.”

“Yeah,” says Cross. “You can see it from the way they walk when they’re out in leather.”

For more information on the Janus Society, write to: Box 6794, San Francisco CA

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