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A Touch of Royalty

Gay Author James Barr

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This article was written in 1996 for *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*. By the time it was published (“Quatrefoil Broke New Ground,” vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 22–24) it had been cut by more than half—some by me (to fit the length insisted on by the publisher) and then even more by the publisher (without my permission). By then the article had lost much of its point. Here is the complete version. I have tried to mention, or at least list, all of Barr’s “gay” publications.

The photograph of James Barr is from *One Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 8 (October 1954), p. 10.

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James Barr

The publication of James Barr's *Quatrefoil* in 1950 made him a gay celebrity. In some ways the novel is as impressive today as it was then—and this in spite of the great change in attitudes toward homosexuality in the past forty-five years—for it has the mark of authenticity and for this reason is a compelling read. The setting is authentic U.S. Navy (the two central characters are Naval officers). Barr had served in the Navy for four years during World War II, as enlisted man and officer, and had observed firsthand the routine of service life. It is also painfully clear that he knew the problems of being homosexual, of even acknowledging one's homosexual urges to oneself, in a hostile world. Indeed, he wrote the novel at the suggestion of his psychiatrist "as a key to solving my problems at the time" (Barr 1955m, 8). Without being autobiographical (or not strictly so—there is a saying that all first novels are autobiographical), it wonderfully captures the psychological and social difficulties he must have confronted, and it then goes on to present a positive view that is also convincing by its note of guarded optimism. Barr died on 28 March 1995 at the age of seventy-three. He is most remembered for *Quatrefoil*, but all his writings are worth recalling, and that is the purpose of this essay.<sup>1</sup>

James Barr was born on 13 February 1922 "in an oilfield boomtown in either Texas or Oklahoma" (Barr 1990).<sup>2</sup> His mother died of childbed fever; he knew nothing of his "natural father except he was said to have paid very well" for his support. Barr was soon taken in by a couple who gave him "a loving, devoted upbringing and a pretty good education." He was a college student, probably at the University of Oklahoma, where a fraternity brother with whom he had sex became the model for the central character Phillip in *Quatrefoil* (1991, Epilogue). Early in 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and sailed from San Francisco for Guadalcanal in a ship loaded with barrels of aviation gas. On returning to the States, he went through Officers Training in Chicago and Amphibious Landing Training in San Diego. Looking back from 1990, he recalled: "Somewhere along

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1. Biographical information has been taken from Barr's published writings and from a three-page typescript (Barr 1990) that he sent to Alyson Publications shortly after agreeing to write an epilogue for the 1991 reprint of *Quatrefoil*. For a personal view from someone who knew Barr intimately, see Kepner 1995.

2. The birth date is given in an obituary published in the *Bay Area Reporter* (San Francisco), 4 May 1995. The anonymous author was apparently unaware of Barr's second novel, *The Occasional Man*, but I presume the birth date is accurate.

the way, I finally tumbled to the fact that I was gay as pink ink, as we said in those days. . . . From then on the Navy became a demi-paradise: fifteen-cent Martinis in the Officers Club bars and half-naked sailors wherever one looked. Sure, we could have been killed making landings in the Philippines and on Iwo Jima, but what a way to go” (Barr 1990).<sup>3</sup>

After the war, he returned to the university in 1946 to study professional writing in the School of Letters. His fraternity brother, who had also been in the Navy, had also returned, but soon left. His suicide before the end of Barr’s third semester prompted him to leave for New York City. “I wanted to get down among the men who lived and fought with the ugliness of life that had killed Phillip” (1991, Epilogue). In New York he earned money by writing advertising copy for television and worked on *Quatrefoil*, which was published in 1950. Boris Todrin gave it the following brief review in the *New York Times Book Review*:

This time, the too-familiar theme of the latent homosexual, and his struggle to find happiness in a hostile world, is played out in Navy uniforms, with a court-martial as its initial spark.

Ensign Froelich, about to appear before the court on charges of insubordination, is the victim of warring impulses—and nothing more—when the story opens. The lieutenant commander who defends him has already succumbed to his own abnormal yearnings—though he maintains a carefully correct facade that includes a wife and a routine social life in Navy circles. Mr. Barr’s exploration of the growing attachment between the ensign and his superior—which ends when the lieutenant commander is conveniently eliminated in a plane crash—is more contrived than convincing. (Todrin 1950)

Needless to say, this dismissive review says far more about its author and the times than it does about the book.

Homosexuals welcomed *Quatrefoil*, as they did his second book, *Derricks*, a collec-

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3. I suspect that distance in time made the earlier period more rosy than it actually was. His writings show him not nearly as accepting of himself as this recollection presents.

tion of short stories set in or near Oklahoma, the following year (1951).<sup>4</sup> Barr received “several thousand letters commenting on my first two books” (1954a, 31), and that winter he “discovered the ‘party crowd’ of gayer New York—a way of life at once entertaining, bewildering and rather disillusioning to anyone of comparatively simple tastes and outmoded honesties” (1954d, 10). (He would use his knowledge of “gayer New York” fifteen years later in his second novel, *The Occasional Man*.) In 1951 he went to Los Angeles, where he was “in line for a job as junior writer for the movies” (Barr 1990), but early in 1952 he “volunteered to return to active duty as a reserve officer in the Navy during the Korean crisis. . . . On my thirtieth birthday, I returned to active duty and was sent immediately to a base in Alaska” (1955m, 8).<sup>5</sup> While reviewing his Top Secret clearance, the Office of Naval Intelligence learned that he was the author of *Quatrefoil*. An interrogation began that lasted eight months (detailed in Barr 1955m) and resulted in a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions. “On my thirty-first birthday I was once again a civilian, wiser but sadder, as the saying goes” (1955m, 41).

The persecution also politicized him. He no longer saw homosexuality as his personal problem, which he had been fighting by trying to be “normal,” and he dissolved his engagement to a woman he called Ellen. He later wrote:

Most important was the change in my attitude toward homosexuality. For the first time in my life it was not a completely personal issue with me. Whether I wanted to do so or not, in defending myself I was forced to defend the rights and concepts of a group numbering hundreds of thousands. . . . For me, homosexuality was at last a workable part of a progressing society. Morally or biologically right or wrong, I realized it was a force to be dealt with, rather than isolated or ignored or suppressed. (1955m, 42)

Barr was in contact with *One Magazine* (Los Angeles) in its first year of publication in 1953 and wrote for it the short story “Death in a Royal Family” (1953) about an aging

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4. Roger Austen (187) indicated that there was a reprint of *Derricks* by Pan Books in 1957.

5. Later, he recalled that he was “called back into the Navy” and “stationed in Alaska for 17 months” (Barr 1990). I believe the earlier account is nearer the truth.

queen who tries to incriminate a young man as a thief, but is a victim of a counterplot when he mistakes strychnine for soda and dies, an apparent suicide. This story was elaborated into a play, titled “Die Halbstarcken,” by Rudolf Jung and Rolf (see Stäheli 1956) and was presented in Zurich in 1956 by the gay group that published the gay magazine *Der Kreis*, in which Jung’s German translation of the original story also appeared (1956d).<sup>6</sup>

In the winter of 1953–54, Barr returned to his family, now living in Kansas, where his foster father was ill with leukemia. He worked as an oilfield roustabout, but also continued his writing, with several contributions to *One Magazine*. In April there appeared “Queer Happenings on Capitol Hill” (1954e), a short satire on Congressional hearings during the McCarthy era (a male to female transsexual insists to a congressman that she is no longer homosexual); in June appeared “On Organized Religion,” a brief condemnation of Christian churches that does, however, have a note of optimism: “Actually [the world] grows steadily better in spite of the leashes and muzzles of those seers and knowers of the unseeable and unknowable” (1954c, 19).

Barr was also in contact with *Der Kreis*, which began to publish contributions in English in 1952. He told them of a blackmail letter he had received from a Catholic woman, the mother of a reader of his books, and of the reply he wrote to her on 7 May 1954. They asked to publish his reply, and after deleting all names, he agreed (1954a); this was reprinted two years later in the *Mattachine Review* (1956b). In it he noted that he had earlier consulted lawyers about blackmail and was immune to her threats, that his family had read his books and his neighbors were aware of them. He also revealed that he was a Unitarian. Although Barr mostly avoided Freudian explanations in his writings, he nonetheless told her: “Remember that he [the son] did not choose to become homosexual. More likely that choice was inadvertently made for him by you” (1954a, 33).

In the fall of 1954, the staff of *One Magazine* asked Barr to visit Los Angeles for a long weekend. Apparently he was given royal treatment. The visit was satisfactory all around: Barr found them serious and dedicated—unlike “the ‘party crowd’ of gayer New York”—and said so in “An Open Letter to You,” which was published in *One Magazine* in October (1954d). It was followed the next month by a commentary on the trial in Eng-

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6. Rudolf Jung was the pseudonym of Rudolf Burkhardt.

land of the so-called Montagu Case. (Three socially prominent men—Rupert Croft-Cooke, Lord Montagu, Michael Pitt-Rivers, and Peter Wildeblood—were charged with committing indecent acts with two Royal Air Force members. The airmen were promised immunity for giving evidence [Weeks 1977, 159].) The men were found guilty by a jury. Barr shows his typical moral tone when he says he believes they should have pleaded guilty instead of lying—and he cites the case of Sir John Gielgud who did just that the year before. “The cases have their similarities and I, for one, believe Gielgud chose the wiser course” (1954b, 13). Barr also completed his play *Game of Fools* in 1954; it was published by One, Inc., the following year (1955g).

In January 1955 Barr’s writings appeared in three important gay publications. For the first issue of *Mattachine Review* he wrote “Facing Friends in a Small Town” (1955d), describing his experiences living as a known homosexual in a small Kansas town. For *Der Kreis* he wrote a vigorous defense of effeminate gay men, beginning: “A growing malady among American homosexuals today, as we are forced into a more closely united group, seems to be a particularly irrational snobbery directed against our more effeminate members” (1955j, 40). It is a very sensitive article and all the more remarkable in that his fiction often presented effeminacy as the worst thing that could happen to a man. And for *One Magazine* he began a book column headed “Camping in the Bush.” The first column is a devastating review of Curzio Malaparte’s novel *Skin* (1955a). In the February column he presented some thoughts prompted by reading Kurt Singer’s “excellent book on the spies and spy systems of the world today,” *The Trojan Horse* (1955b). The third and last column appeared in April. It was prompted by his rereading of *Death in the Afternoon*, “Hemingway’s hymn of joy to ritualistic sadism” (1955c, 31). Barr preferred the writings of Arthur Koestler.

*Game of Fools* was published in June 1955. The month before, in anticipation, he took the major step of revealing his correct name in a very informative article in *Mattachine Review*, in which he told the story of his “Release from the Navy under Honorable Conditions” (1955m). His name is given as James (Barr) Fugaté, and an editorial note disclosed that he pronounced his last name “Few-gay-tee” (6). *Game of Fools* then appeared with this name. The book had limited circulation, since book stores were not asked to sell it, but six months after its publication Barr reported that the comments from

readers were “Favorable to Enthusiastic” (1955f, 18), and he gave a few from unnamed prominent personalities, who all said, “But don’t quote me!”

In the meantime, a short story about a rather dizzy queen in New York appeared in *Der Kreis* (1955e), and a rather unsympathetic review of *Hadrian’s Memoirs* by Marguerite Yourcenar appeared in *Mattachine Review* (1955l). In the latter he revealed the “screams of rage that poured from the back doors of some official quarters on The Hill upon publication of my first novel in 1950. . . .” Barr did not like Yourcenar’s style, noting: “In the same manner we are cheated of few fleshly details of our hero’s passions for the lovely Greek youth, Antinous, though one is apt to be [so] enchanted with the sound that the sense is lost in this carefully packed void. . . . From such lips one feels even a bloody police raid of Finocchio’s [sic] would take on the mellifluous patina of charm and respectability” (1955l, 39).<sup>7</sup>

The following issue of *Mattachine Review* carried an article on “Homosexuality and the Liberal Mind,” the point of which is that “there is as great, or even greater, a Fascist threat to our way of life in this country as there is a Communist threat. And of immediate importance to us, should either of these ideologies win supremacy at any time, the homosexual minority would be the first to be purged as ‘undesirable’” (1955i, 20).

A special number of *Der Kreis* in 1955 was devoted to “homoeroticism in American countries.” It included a review (in French) by Daniel of *Les Amours de l’enseigne Froelich*, a French translation of *Quatrefoil* published by Les éditions de Paris.<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Burkhardt, who became the editor of the English section of *Der Kreis* in 1955, had made a German translation of *Quatrefoil*—he published one scene from it in *Der Kreis*

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7. Barr meant the Finocchio Club in San Francisco, which featured transvestite (female impersonator) shows. It closed 27 November 1999 after 63 years in the same location. Barr’s misspelling may be a simple typo (it is spelled correctly in 1955h), but Nob Hill, another San Francisco landmark, is twice spelled “Knob Hill” in *Quatrefoil*.

Antinous was born in Bithynia (in Asia Minor); that he was of Greek ancestry is Yourcenar’s fiction: “The brief sketch of the family background of Antinous is not historical, but attempts to take into consideration the social conditions which prevailed at that time in Bithynia” (Yourcenar 1984, 315).

8. It was usual for the editors and authors of *Der Kreis* to use only first names or pseudonyms, as was the case, for example, of the American writer Fitzroy Davis, who wrote under the name Hadrian (see Kennedy 1988).

(1957c)—but was still unable to find a publisher a decade later. This was pointed out in 1965 by Christian Helder in the German section of the October issue. He noted that a German translation of John Rechy's *City of Night* had appeared, that it was not helpful, and he asked:

But where is the positive, good homophile novel in German, what publisher dares to defy with it the Philistine and the lover of unnatural experiences alike? There are excellent translations of such novels available: *Quatrefoil* by James Barr, *Lost on Twilight Road* by James Colton, *Les Mauvais Anges* by Eric Jourdan, and others. (*Der Kreis*, 33, no. 10 [1965]: 11)<sup>9</sup>

On Saturday 1 October 1955 the first performance of *Game of Fools* was given in Zurich by the group associated with *Der Kreis* as part of their twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. Actually, only the second act of the two-act play was presented (in the translation of Rudolf Jung).<sup>10</sup> On the eve of the production Barr wrote an article for *Der Kreis* in which he stated what he had tried to do in the play:

I wanted to make it as American as a banjo. I wanted it to cover a lot of territory, to bristle with ideas and people, and to be both complex and simple. I wanted a kind of epic poem without the stagnating forms of poetry and I wanted a pattern that actors could bring to life on a stage, a pattern of words that would flow as smoothly as a ballet. And though it was to concern homosexuality, for a society is often best revealed by its taboos, it was not [to] be for homosexuals exclusively. . . .

Thus, in selecting the actual framework of the play I had to find something that would touch the lives of all my people. . . . Therefore, since it has hovered so menacingly over homosexuality for so many centuries, it was logical for me to

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9. *Lost on Twilight Road*, by James Colton (pseudonym of the mystery writer Joseph Hansen) was published in 1965; Eric Jourdan's *Les Mauvais Anges* (1955) was also published in English as *Two* (1963).

10. An American who saw the play said that the last act was "the only one which lends itself to a studio production and which also contains a theme complete in itself" (RYS 1955, 35).

choose Religion as the background before which I would set my characters and their problems. Homosexuals, like all men, must live by a faith—or a lack of it. I have observed, perhaps too keenly, in some of my less fortunate friends the almost incurable horrors to be suffered from the accident of believing in a faith that is totally incompatible with their natural inclinations. It seemed well to try to expose this situation, and at the same time the reverse of the medal. The result was not to be an all out attack for the annihilation of the churches as such, but rather a pattern of revolutionary thinking to point up to the individual his strength and his precious right to choose or discard as he wishes. . . .

I was also determined that the play should have a happy ending. It had to presage hope rather than horror because I believe the ultimate destination of homosexuality in this country, and the rest of the world, is hopeful rather than horrible. (1955k, 30–32)

Regarding the publication of the playscript, Barr said that this “was favored over a production on the stage for, since its ideas are still somewhat unique on the American scene, it was felt that they could reach more people and remain within their grasp longer in a book than in a series of performances. Whether the book will be suppressed, as were my first two books, by the Post Office Department, our official censor in this country, remains to be seen” (1955k, 32). (The issue of *Der Kreis* with this note also included a German translation of 1955m.)

In the Christmas 1955 issue of *Mattachine Review*, Barr reflected on actresses he had seen on the stage. His favorites were Tallulah Bankhead, Cornelia Otis Skinner, and specially Judith Anderson. He was looking forward to seeing Anderson as Hamlet in New York that winter. And he asks: “So long as the sexes are swapping roles, not only in the theatre but apparently everywhere else, why not a male Juliet in the next five years?” He suggests that it could be done with an effeminate 21-year-old boy, adding parenthetically, “And, of course, he’d have to be at least 21” (1955h, 7).

In April 1956 Barr reflected on the psychological state of homosexuals. In an article prompted by the murder of three boys in Chicago, he pointed out the illogic in the subsequent hysteria that called for stronger laws against all sex deviates. But Barr believed that

homosexuality was not a desirable state, that many homosexuals could (and should) go straight, that with the right psychiatric treatment “thousands of homosexuals might hope to lead the lives of normal men if psychiatric treatment is administered early enough and at prices they can afford to pay” (1956c, 10). Looking back, we are tempted to condemn this view, but as Larry Kramer (born 1935) has pointed out: “My generation has had special, if not unique, problems. We were the generation psychoanalysts tried to change” (quoted in Russell 1995, 188). An editorial note with this article identified Barr as “one of the most controversial writers on the subject of homosexuality in this country today,” and after mentioning his two books and the fact that his play *Game of Fools* had been produced in Switzerland, reported that “a second play is scheduled for production in London in the spring” (1956c, 6). This was probably the unpublished play *Mama Doll*, which, according to Jim Kepner, was given a “staged reading” in Los Angeles (Kepner 1995, 9).<sup>11</sup>

Barr wrote two poems for *Der Kreis*: “Facades” (1956a) is a 17-line free verse commentary on the artistry of the American photographer Steffen (to accompany four of his photos). In “New Heroes” (1957b), an ironic 16-line rhymed poem, he wonders if he will carry out his plan or give in and welcome back a former lover. It is more successful than the first and received a German translation (1957a).

Barr was living and working in New York when Rudolf Burkhardt, the editor of the English section of *Der Kreis*, made a six-week visit to the United States in the spring of 1958. Barr showed him the sights of New York from the top of the Empire State Building. Burkhardt’s principal goal was Los Angeles, which “meant above all the long desired and finally achieved meeting with the American colleagues and friends who published *One* there.” These included Don Slater, Bill Lambert, and the “circumspect” (*abwägender*) Jim Kepner (Burkhardt 1958, 10). Burkhardt also visited San Francisco, where the *Mattachine Review* was published, and spoke at a special public meeting there on 13 May, having already spoken to sessions of One Institute in Los Angeles a few days earlier (Logan 1958).

While Barr was still in the Navy in Alaska, his publisher notified him that both his

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11. In the introduction to *Game of Fools*, Barr said it was “the first of a five-play cycle” (1955g, xii), but probably it and *Mama Doll* were his only plays.

books “had run into trouble with the Post Office censors, and that he had cut himself a deal, agreeing to pull both off the market if the PO would not prosecute him for peddling pornography,” adding that according to the contract he had signed he did not have to pay royalties if the books ran into any such trouble (Barr 1990). In New York, Barr sued his publisher for back royalties and copyrights—and won. He then got his first agent, “a dear lady of great good humor” (Barr 1990). This was probably Elsie L. Carlton, who is listed as the copyright holder in the 1965 reprint of *Quatrefoil*. “Under her wing, I wrote and had published *The Occasional Man* for Paperback Library” (Barr 1990). Barr’s second novel was published in 1966. He later recalled: “But by then the pills and liquor had settled into the grain of me too firmly and in the mid-sixties I decided to return to the Midwest to be near my foster mother who had become very frail” (Barr 1990).

In western Kansas, Barr became a newspaper reporter/photographer and “took to newspapering like [a cat] to catnip. I even cut out the pills completely and way way back on the booze” (Barr 1990). He apparently enjoyed lots of sex: “For my leisure time I found legions of big, well-fed farmers, ranchers, oil workers, businessmen, many of whom enjoyed a bit of variety, if it were offered discreetly and promptly forgotten.” After his foster mother’s death in the early seventies, Barr collected his inheritance and returned to New York. There something occurred that years later he still did not wish to relate: “Because what happened there is still too painful to contemplate, I will simply say that when the smoke cleared I was broke and my freedom depended in part on working in the Emergency Room of a large city hospital for at least five years” (Barr 1990). He returned to Oklahoma to do the hospital work and instead of five, worked ten years and retired with a small pension.

When Barr wrote “Warts and All” in 1990, he was doing “occasional private sittings with nice, rich gents who have heart problems, cancer, stroke, and who are even older than I am. . . . They become friends quickly and I am very grateful to them, for they are teaching me how to die, for as today is their turn, tomorrow will be mine.” James (Barr) Fugaté died in his sleep on 28 March 1995 at the age of 73 at the Oklahoma Veterans Center in Claremore, Oklahoma, after a long battle with liver cancer.

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A quarter century after the original publication of *Quatrefoil*, literary critic Roger

Austen could write: “James Barr’s *Quatrefoil* is one of the most intelligently written of American gay novels, with the author’s lofty intellectualism appearing somewhat of a mixed blessing as the novel is reread today” (Austen 1977, 159). Rereading now, one finds the positive aspect of the novel even less striking. But times have changed and to appreciate the effect the novel had, we need to recall the situation then. Jim Kepner writes:

Of the scores of gay novels published between 1930 and 1955, I was most impressed with James Barr’s *Quatrefoil*—a great advance over most, both for avoiding the Freudian case-study approach, and for urging gays to accept their social responsibilities (a novel view which may not appeal to today’s readers) and the working-class realism of *Derricks*, prior to which all gay novel protagonists seemed to be shallow pianists or tennis players whose life would have been rosy but for this one unfortunate character spot. (Kepner 1995, 8)

After noting, “In some ways *Quatrefoil* was a wonderful treatise on how to live happily in the closet in 1950,” Samuel Steward added, in his introduction to the 1982 edition: “The world of Froelich and Danelaw is thus somewhat puzzling to the modern reader who comes across it thirty years later. He finds it difficult to understand. Yet here laid out in *Quatrefoil* is a graphic and accurate picture of the secrecy and concealment that was necessary in those days” (xi).

Joseph Cady (1995) has noted that *Quatrefoil* “seems consciously designed to hearten a male homosexual audience as it programatically portrays the developing homosexual self-awareness and self-acceptance of the young naval officer Phillip Froelich under the tutelage of his older lover and fellow officer, Tim Danelaw” (35). But Phillip, the central character of *Quatrefoil*, is such an unpleasant prig that a gay reader today wants to shout at him, “Get a life!” Nor is the matter helped by the often bad writing. Consider the scene early in the novel when Phillip is escorting his fiancée along the line at an admiral’s reception: “He nodded slightly, spoke with assurance, smiled down fondly on Sybel Jo as he presented her, displayed friendly interest in every ravening bitch he met, and all the while thought his own thoughts” (89). I puzzled over “ravening bitch” for the rest of

the novel. And if phrases are topped off in foreign languages—“Man was not created to love man. *Cela va sans dire*” (349)—the thought is still today’s fundies’ “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”

*Derricks*, published the following year, is a collection of seven short stories, which vary from the comic, through small-time crooks, to a high-minded, moral homosexual writer, who gives high-minded, moral advice about homosexuality. One of the stories even has a happy ending.

Fifteen years later Barr’s writing in *The Occasional Man* had improved considerably, as he himself later noted: “Though badly flawed, I still think it’s the best piece of writing I’ve turned out” (Barr 1990). Lacking some of the “message” of *Quatrefoil*, *The Occasional Man* is quite entertaining. It also differs from *Quatrefoil* in presenting several gay sex scenes—in surprising detail. The only (homosexual) sex scene in *Quatrefoil* is the one sentence: “Then Phillip felt himself being lowered into a world of incredible satisfaction” (188). James Levin was too harsh, I think, in his sociological study *The Gay Novel* (1983) when he wrote of *The Occasional Man*: “There is some sparkling but artificial dialogue, but it only adds to the sense of unreality. Neither the brilliant, ‘camp’ backbiting nor the erudite discussion about motivation is in the least like anything one ever heard in life” (181). But Barr knew New York gay life intimately, and he used his knowledge to advantage in this story of a forty-year-old trying to recover from the sudden dissolution of a fifteen-year love affair. He does so through his contacts with four contrasting men: Hermie, a black man his age, who owns a gay bar and is wise about gay life; Gus, a young moving-man, who is handsome but dumb (and heterosexual, but willing to be sucked); a beautiful drifter called Pretty John; and Count de Groa, an older and enormously wealthy European (apparently an ex-Nazi living in Argentina), who is also a sexual connoisseur. It is this last who finally wins the protagonist.

Some touches in *The Occasional Man* are astonishingly autobiographical, for example, when the narrator says of the central character, “before David started writing advertising copy and had found himself in on the ground floor of the young television industry” (81) and has David later say, “when I got to New York in ’47, I got sidetracked into advertising ” (137). The title of the novel is used in a comment of Hermie about Pretty John: “He’s strictly the occasional man in my life and I know it” (191).

Barr explained the title of *Derricks* in a brief preface: “The following are derricks—not the structures put together by men with beams, bolts and rods, . . . rather, these are the situations by which men and women here and there rise up above the mundane sweep of their lives for a short while to stand against that which eternally surrounds them.” Similarly, on the title page of *Game of Fools* stands: “A play of those fools, by those fools, and for those fools, who stubbornly refuse to perish from this earth”—an obvious reference to the Mattachine Society.<sup>12</sup> But what is the significance of the title *Quatrefoil*? It is nowhere explained in the novel.<sup>13</sup>

James Barr’s participation in the gay movement lasted only a relatively brief period in the 1950s. Yet his impact was strong, and his first novel continues to gain new readers. Alyson Publications is to be commended for keeping it in print. Perhaps the time has come for a reprint and new appreciation of *The Occasional Man*. Barr may have been thinking of his second novel when he wrote in his introduction to the 1965 reprint of *Quatrefoil*, in answer to the question “What do you think of the future of homosexuality in literature?”: “There will always be ‘gay’ books. After all, there’s a little touch of ‘royalty’ in even the best of us” (7).

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12. In an interview with Jonathan Ned Katz, Henry (Harry) Hay was asked the origin of the name Mattachine. Hay mentioned the medieval-Renaissance French *Sociétés Joyeux*:

One was known as the *Société Mattachine*. These societies, lifelong secret fraternities of unmarried townsmen who never performed in public unmasked, were dedicated to going out into the countryside and conducting dances and rituals during the Feast of Fools, at the Vernal Equinox. Sometimes these dance rituals, or masques, were peasant protests against oppression—with the maskers, in the people’s name, receiving the brunt of a given lord’s vicious retaliation. So we took the name Mattachine because we felt that we 1950s Gays were also a masked people, unknown and anonymous, who might become engaged in morale building and helping ourselves and others, through struggle, to move toward total redress and change. (Katz 1976, 412–413)

13. This may be the reason for the title *Other Than a Man* that, according to Ian Young (1982, 11), was given to a reprint of *Quatrefoil*. Young gave no date for the reprint. [Added 2002: Priapian Tomes offered for sale on the Internet the original manuscript of *Quatrefoil*, which Barr sent to his friend Noel Cortes, 21 December 1950, noting: “Also laid in is a typed note describing the 4 meanings of the title.” There is no indication of what those meanings are.]

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