FICTION IS A LIE ABOUT THE TRUTH: LESBIAN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF JANE CHAMBERS

by

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Approved by:

Major Professor

In Memory of Jane Chambers,
whose life and works inspired me

With many thanks to Beth Allen,
without whom it would not exist

Special thanks to Cindy Baker, Kate
Anderson and Harold Nichols

And dedicated to Angela, my love

[W]e gays are kind of like the hobbits--no matter how repressive earthlings get, we continue to thrive in Middle Earth. We're survivors. We straddle both worlds and try to keep our balance.

Lil
Last Summer at Bluefish Cove

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INTRODUCTION

When surveying pre-1970 literature, portaying lesbian characters, one finds a severe lack of positive and emotionally healthy characters. This is probably a result of the attitudes about homosexuality and women in general prevalent during that era as well as before 1900. The women's movement of the 1960's and early 1970's brought some changes in those attitudes, which were then reflected in the literature by and about lesbians.

Chambers did take the risk of writing plays with postive, non-stereotypical lesbian characters and found both publishers and producers for her works. She was the first person to present sympathetic, true-to-life lesbians on stage. According to Beth Allen, Chambers' agent and life partner, Chambers' first play about lesbians, A Late Snow, was "the first out lesbian play, the first one affirmative of the lesbian lifestyle as a positive experience."[1] The fact that Chambers' was the first to portray lesbians as multi-dimensional

human beings rather than stereotyped characters makes her important.

The questions which prompted this investigation into Chambers' plays include ones like these: 1) To what extent was Chambers able to avoid stereotypical characters in her work? 2) Did her characterization of lesbians change as her career progressed? A short biography of Chambers and a history of stereotypical lesbian characters until 1970 are necessary in order to understand the changes which Chambers made with her plays.

"Life is not a crapshoot; it is what we who love each other do together, and that is, in itself sufficient meaning."[1]

Jane Chambers

THE LIFE OF JANE CHAMBERS

Jane Chambers was born in 1937 and died in 1983. In the years between she lived her life according to the philosophy that everything we do is important and has meaning. She left us a priceless legacy in her plays, novels, and poetry and espoused many causes in her lifetime: women's rights, civil rights and gay rights, to name a few.

Chambers was born in Columbia, South Carolina on March 27, 1937, and her family moved to Orlando, Florida when she was two years old. In 1945, at the age of eight, Chambers hosted a children's radio show called "Let's Listen."[2] During this time, Chambers was also writing plays. She was an only child and entertained herself by making cutouts of imaginary friends, setting them around the house, and having dialogues with them. Soon she began molding the dialogues into little plays.[3] After several other radio shows, she

became the moderator of a teenage television show for a Southeastern Network.[4]

In 1956, Chambers moved west, to Los Angeles, California, to train at the Pasadena Playhouse. She wanted to study as a playwright but was told that women were not allowed to study playwriting there. She next asked about directing and again was told no; the only thing a woman could study at the Pasadena Playhouse was acting-so she did.[5] While in California, she acted in two films: Easy to Love and Jupiter's Darling.[6] After two years at the Pasadena Playhouse, Chambers left for New York, where she studied acting with Ervin Piscator. She landed a role in Single Man at a Party, which opened at the Theatre Marquee on April 21, 1959. During the two year run, Chambers worked with actress Ruth Warwick and director Peter Flournoy.

In 1963, Chambers left New York, moving to Poland Springs, Maine where she worked for WMTW-TV as a staff writer. She also wrote, produced and acted in a children's show called "Mary Witch" (she played the witch) and hosted her own talk show. While she was in Maine, she began to work with the Job Corps (1966). In 1968 the Job Corps transferred her to New Jersey. She attended and graduated from Goddard College with a Bachelor of

Arts degree in Adult Development on February 5, 1971. She began writing for Educational Television; her teleplay "Christ in a Treehouse" won the 1971 Award for Best Religious Drama on Connecticut Educational Television.7 At this same time, Chambers was writing screenplays, two of which were purchased but never produced (Grass Roots and Gotcha!, both 1971.). The outline and plot for a prime time television series, Here Comes the Iceman, were purchased first by Screen Gems (1971) and then by Paramount (1972). It was the first situation comedy about blacks to be optioned by a major production company. However, Sanford and Son came along and was produced rather than Chambers' work. She was told by the producers that a black show by a white woman did not have the potential for success as would one by a black man.8

During this time, Chambers was writing for Search for Tomorrow on CBS. She received the Writer's Guild Award for the Best Daytime Serial in 1973. The years of 1972 and 1973 also saw the production of her first plays: Tales of the Revolution and Other American Fables at the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre (1972), Jamboree at Town Hall in New York City (1973), "Random Violence" at the Interart Theatre (1973) and two one acts,

"Mine!" and "The Wife," also at the Interart Theatre (1973).9

Then, in 1974, Chambers' play A Late Snow was produced at Playwrights Horizons. It was her first play dealing with lesbians. Although she worried about the repercussions of staging a lesbian play at a mainstream theatre, she eventually decided that it was worth the risks. As a result of the production, she lost her job writing for CBS and was blacklisted in the television industry.10

Chambers' next success came in 1980 with Last Summer at Bluefish Cove at the Westside Mainstage, but the years between were lean ones. In 1976 she had a play produced at the Mark Taper Lab in Los Angeles; it was called The Common Garden Variety and had nothing to do with lesbianism. She had been forced back into the closet as a playwright. During this time she wrote a column for a pornographic magazine in order to survive.11

Her success in 1980 with Last Summer at Bluefish Cove at the Westside Mainstage Theatre allowed her to be open about her sexuality as a playwright and won her two awards: the Dramalogue Critic's Circle (1980) and the Villager Downtown Theatre Award (1981). The next two years were fruitful ones for Chambers. The Glines, a gay

production company, staged My Blue Heaven as a part of the Second Annual Gay Arts Festival in 1981; Kudzu played at Playwrights Horizons in November and December of 1981; and "The Quintessential Image" was presented as one of four plays celebrating the sixth anniversary of The Glines at Town Hall.

Kudzu was optioned for Broadway and was in rehearsals when Chambers became ill in 1982. She was diagnosed as having brain cancer and the option was withdrawn by the producer.[12] She received the Fund for Human Dignity Award from the East End Gay Organization for Human Rights in that year also. During the last year of her life, Chambers wrote mostly poetry. She died at her home on Long Island on February 15, 1983. The American College Theatre Festival has established a playwriting award in her memory.

What makes Chambers and her plays important is that she was the first person to write about positive, healthy lesbians. Each lesbian in the audience could see herself or someone she knew in Chambers' plays and that was her intent. In giving the world her plays, novels, and poems, Chambers hope not only to reach lesbians, but also to educate and touch straight people as well. Her

works have been criticized from within the radical lesbian community because they do not contain masculine, 'dyke' characters. The complaint was that they were too androgynous and too middle class. Chambers' own words answer these criticisms very well: "I'm a middle-aged, middle-class, WASP dyke. That's what I know. I wouldn't ask you to write about a situation outside your experience. I write what I know.13

"The lesbian who is not a sadist is in any case a sickie. . . She is often a confused, hysterical personality. When she does not cause others to suffer, she suffers herself and is doomed to be an outcast and lonely."1

Lillian Faderman

THE LITERARY STEREOTYPE OF A LESBIAN

Before the 1970's, there were very few positive, non-stereotypical portrayals of lesbians found in literature, according to Lillian Faderman, author of Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Love and Friendship Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present. Fiction in the twentieth century associated lesbianism with everything horrible.2 The relationships between women were always shown as hell or matyrdom.3 Before this time, relationships between women were not portrayed as sexual because of the Victorian atmosphere which treated women as virtually passionless and asexual beings. The idea that a woman could be sexually involved with another woman was unthinkable.4 Two basic stereotypes, which sometimes intertwined with one another, became apparent in the early part of the twentieth century.

The first of the two stereotypes is that of the mannish or 'butch' lesbian. This stereotype has some basis in fact. Probably the most famous mannish heroine is Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon in The Well of Loneliness. As a writer, Hall belongs to what has been called the Second Generation of New Women. These women came of age in the early decades of the twentieth century and included such other writers as Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Margaret Anderson and Natalie Barney.[5] The first generation of lesbians has often been termed "passing women" meaning that they passed themselves off as men in order to have the same freedoms and rights granted a man of that time. The second generation carried the image of a mannish lesbian with them as they became more public about their lifestyles. Hall describes these women in her novel, The Lamp (1924), as

> active, aggressively intelligent women, not at all self-conscious in their tailor-made clothes, not ashamed of their cropped hair; women who did things well, important things. . .smart, neatly put together women, looking like well-bred young men.[6]

By appearing to be young men, these women had access to opportunities reserved for the male gender. They drank, smoked, had careers and autonomy; did things which women could not do.

Other examples of the mannish lesbian include Christina in Vita Sackville-West's The Dark Island (1934), who is described as ". . .rather heroic and over lifesize, all on a big scale; no feminine charm at all";[7] Matt in The Microcosm (1966) by Maureen Duffy, who is so masculine that she is referred to throughout the novel by masculine pronouns and has need of manly possession and constant reassurance;[8] and Nellie in The Fox (1918) by D. H. Lawrence, who wears breeches and men's coats and runs the farm, while Jill takes care of the house.

The second stereotype found in literature is that of the vampire lesbian. The vampire lesbian is an older woman, quite often the mistress of a school with power over other women, who feeds on the youth of the younger women whom she seduces.[9] These women are obsessed with controlling another human being completely and leading it to destruction.[10] The vampire lesbian is incapable of feeling love or of being a partner in a giving, tender relationship. A self-sufficient, calculating, tall, handsome woman, who is very decided in manner, extremely competent or beautifully tailored is most likely a vampire lesbian.[11] Most vampire lesbian fiction includes a

component called "heterosexual rescue," when the younger, seduced woman is swept off her feet by a man and able to leave the destructive relationship with the vampire lesbian.

Dorothy Baker's novel Trio (1945) provides a good example of the vampire lesbian/fragile virgin relationship. Pauline is an independent woman, a teacher and a vampire. Janet, an unsuspecting student at least fifteen years younger than Pauline, is held prisoner and coerced into taking drugs by her captor.[12] Pauline is also a sadist: sadism is an important part of literature dealing with vampire lesbians.[13] An earlier example of the vampire lesbian is Clare Hartill (heart ill?) in Clemence Dane's novel, Regiment of Women (1915). Clare seduces her students, eventually causing one to commit suicide. She is cruel and emotionally frozen. As the novel ends, Clare accepts the position of headmistress of the school where she has been a teacher and prepares to seduce another young girl.[14] This image of a lesbian-teacher-feminist vampire remained a popular device in fiction for decades.[15] An example can be found two decades later in Francis Brett Young's White Ladies (1935). Miss Cash is the cruel and ruthless headmistress who convinces her victims that

marriage must never happen to them. This novel may have been responsible for the term "vampire lesbian" because one of Miss Cash's victims describes her as ". . .quite ageless. You see she's a vampire."16

Even fiction written by lesbians after 1970 contained negative images. Daugters of the Moon by Joan Haggerty (1971) uses the characters to affirm the idea that sex between women is somehow inferior to sex with men. Sarah says to Anna after making love

> Afterwards, you know, afterwards,
> I often feel like being fucked by
> a man too. . .You tune me, d'you
> see, and then I want a man to
> counter me, but we together, we
> just keep traveling to strung out
> space. We can't comfort each other.17

Sarah eventually goes back to her husband, giving the heterosexual rescue a slightly different meaning because she is not swept off her feet by a man but merely returns because of financial security.

Very few images of lesbians have appeared on stage, and they do not differ greatly from those found in the fiction of the same period. Edouard Bourdet's The Captive (1926) portrayed the homosexual woman as a "carnivorous lesbian flower, desiring to devour female flesh and succeeding."

Irene is the captive; she is being held prisoner by Madame d'Aiguines, who is a married woman. Both Irene and Madame's husband are "inhabitants of hell" because of Madame's lesbianism.[18] Irene eventually convinces Jacques to marry her and take her from the clutches of Madame d'Aiguines, thus fulfilling the heterosexual rescue requirement of the plot. As is the case with novels contemporary to The Captive, the relationship between the women does not contain any hint of romance or love: it is about one woman abusing another.

The Killing of Sister George by Frank Marcus is probably the most famous play about lesbians and makes use of the butch/femme stereotype. It appeared in 1966, eight years before Chambers' drama A Late Snow. One reason The Killing of Sister George uses stereotypes may be that it was written by a man, as were many of the novels and plays which existed before 1970. As a man, Marcus did not know what it is like to be a lesbian involved with another woman and only had the images of previous, mostly male, authors as examples. June (Sister George) is the abusive, mannish lesbian while Alice (Childie) is the abused, feminine woman. The lesbian relationship is portrayed as a power struggle between women.[19]

George and Childie feel no affection for one another, only a mutual dependence based upon stereotypical butch/femme roles. Mrs. Mercy's rescue of Childie from George is a little different than the earlier heterosexual rescues, but it is still a reinforcement of this statement: lesbian relationships are all destructive and one partner must escape from the other in order to survive.

Jane Rule, novelist and author of Lesbian Images, provides another characteristic of stereotypical literature written by and about lesbians: humor is missing.[20] The authors seem to take the sexual or romantic relationships between women so seriously that they cannot possibly see a place for the characters to exhibit humor or laugh at themselves. Of the examples discussed before, none of them includes this type of humor; the comedy employed involves humor at the expense of the characters, rather than characters who can laugh at themselves and their foibles. Perhaps this is because the subject matter is often confined to abuse, suicide and the need for one person to escape the other. This contributes to keeping the characters from seeming real and three dimensional: even the most morose person has a sense of humor at times. (Rule, however, does not

discuss Marcus' The Killing of Sister George in this context.)

Of Jane Chambers' ten plays, half of them are about lesbians; or, more in keeping with her attitude, plays whose characters just happen to be gay. These plays are A Late Snow (1974) , Last Summer at Bluefish Cove (1980), My Blue Heaven (1981), The Quintessential Image (1982) and Kudzu (1981). They contain a total of nineteen lesbian characters, the majority of whom do not respresent the mannish or 'butch' lesbian or the vampire lesbian in any way. However, as with any stereotype, some truth exists and each play with its individual characters must be examined.

"I want it all. I want the chimes, I want to tremble. I want that kind of crazy desire that surmounts reason. I want someone to live for, to die with. Someone to climb mountains for, slay dragons for, someone to snuggle with when the world is cold. Someone to show the first marigold of spring. I want a lover consumed by the greatest passion, a partner possessed of the greatest loyalty, a friend committed to the greatest love. I want it all."[1]

Ellie

A LATE SNOW

Chambers' first play with lesbian characters is A Late Snow (1974). It cast consists of five women, all lesbians, each in their own stage of coming out or denial. They end up stranded together by accident at a cabin in the country.

A Late Snow begins as Quincey, Ellie's current lover, and Pat, Ellie's former lover, are bringing Quincey's anniversary gift for Ellie to the cabin. When Pat and Ellie broke up, Pat took Ellie's favorite antique cabinet out of spite, and Quincey has bought it from Pat's antique store. While they are there, Ellie, a college professor, enters. She has been at conference for the weekend and has brought Margo, a distinguished writer, to the cabin in the hopes that Margo will consent to be a guest

lecturer for the English Department where Ellie teaches. Since Ellie has not told Quincey anything about bringing Margo to the cabin, Quincey is somewhat jealous, and Pat fuels that jealousy in hopes of winning Ellie back. All this time, Margo seems oblivious to the fact that these three women are lesbians.

Margo insists that Pat and Quincey stay for dinner, and Ellie reluctantly consents. This means that she has to keep an eye on Pat, so that she will not talk too much, and on Quincey, so that she does not overwhelm Margo with her overexuberant praise. By this time, it has begun to snow. Ellie makes it clear that she expects Quincey and Pat to leave right after dinner; she does not want them there overnight.

During dinner preparations, Peggy, Ellie's college roommate (and sometime lover during that time), appears. She is having problems with her marriage and has come to Ellie's to find refuge. This brings back pain for Ellie because their parting had been hard on her. Peggy never admitted that their relationship was anything but platonic, even though they slept together. She adheres to the idea Joan Haggerty set forth in her novel: sex

with women is a only a preparation or substitute for intercourse with men.

Ellie's desire to be rid of her unexpected guests is thwarted because the snow has fallen heavily during dinner and they are all snowed in. Margo, of course, comes to the realization that these women are lesbians. She sees that Ellie is unhappy with Quincey. She also sees that Ellie is attracted to her. Margo admits to Ellie that she, too, is a lesbian. With this barrier broken, Ellie and Margo can say what they feel and begin their relationship. Peggy goes back to her husband, Quincey leaves heartbroken, and Pat still thinks she is in the race to get Ellie back. For Margo and Ellie, and even for Peggy in a certain way, this story has a happy ending; for Pat and Quincey it does not.

Of the five lesbians presented in A Late Snow, Pat needs to be examined in relationship to the image of the 'butch' lesbian. The attitude which Pat projects is that of a strong, independent, tough woman. She is, in truth, a philandering, wounded alcoholic. She has a very rough exterior, trying not to show anyone what she truly feels. In order to maintain this facade, she acts cocky and untouchable, always ready with a joke or cute

answer to divert attention from herself and the problems she creates. Another tactic she employs to remove herself from scrutiny is to set up confrontations between others. She does this with Quincey and Margo, with Ellie the object of the plot. Pat attempts to get Quincey to flirt with her, saying that this action will make Ellie jealous and make her pay more attention to Quincey than to Margo. The real purpose of this is to get Ellie to notice Pat, not either of the other women. When that does not work and it becomes apparent that Ellie is leaving Quincey to be with Margo, Pat tries seducing Margo. Pat also tries to seduce Peggy in her efforts to regain Ellie's affections, or at least hurt her if the first goal is unattainable. Pat attempts to display no emotions during the play, always joking and using sexual doubletalk to hide what she is feeling. She is almost successful, except that she shows Ellie that she is hurting. However, this too is mostly an attempt to capture Ellie's attention and affection. After this brief glimpse of the woman behind the mask, she returns to her hiding place which is filled with lousy jokes and lots of booze.

All of Pat's decisions in the play are based on what she believes to be the best strategy for

winning Ellie's love again. The sad part of it is that she truly believes she has a good chance of being Ellie's lover, despite the fact that she treated Ellie badly during their relationship. She always had affairs and was gone on drinking binges. Ellie tells Pat that she felt like she was just someone to come home to between those affairs and binges and that she is not going to put herself back into that position.

Pat comes the closest to embodying the 'butch' stereotype because of her philanderings and her macho behavior. Her masculine body image is apparent: she is the one who volunteers to bring in the heavy items, pushes cars out of ruts and admonishes others for what she perceives as physical weaknesses, as in the case of Quincey struggling to help carry in the cabinet. What saves her from completely filling the role is that she does open up and show her emotions, if only to one person, Ellie.

On the other end of the spectrum is Peggy, who is willing to defer to her husband in everything and feels, as does Sarah in Daughters of the Moon, that her relationship with Ellie during college was not real, that it was only preparation for her role as wife and mother. She leaves her husband to find

refuge with Ellie, but finds once she is there that she cannot handle being with Ellie either. She leaves at the end of the play, returning to her unfulfilling life, unable to come out and embrace her sexual orientation completely. She will, however, continue to have her "friendship" with Wanda, with whom she works at the thrift shop.

The other three women, Ellie, Quincey, and Margo fit somewhere in the middle. They are living independent, autonomous lives as the passing women of Radclyffe Hall's day did. For example, Ellie is a college professor who is supporting herself, making her own decisions and surviving well without a man. They do not, however, fit the stereotype; because in the context of society in 1974, they are not attempting to pass as men. They are women, they dress as women, they do tasks which are commonly assigned to both sexes--they cook and clean as well as build furniture and lay flooring. These women are more androgynous than anything else.

On the surface, the relationship between Quincey and Ellie could be considered like that of the vampire lesbian/fragile virgin stereotype, but not for long. Ellie is a professor in the department where Quincey was a student. Quincey,

however, is hardly a virgin or fragile, in the sense of the word as it is used here. She pursued Ellie and is in love with her. The fact that Ellie is not in love with Quincey, but does genuinely care for her, moves their relationship out of the area of this abusive type of situation. The abusive relationship in this play is the one which ended years before: between Pat and Ellie.

A Late Snow employs humor, which Jane Rule found lacking in most other works about lesbians. While there are serious undertones to the play, the plot makes use of some stock comedy techniques: the appearance and stranding of unexpected visitors, the desire to deceive one member of the cast (in this case, Margo, of the others' lesbianism), the deliberate misunderstanding of one character by another. These women are searching for love and for a pleasant life, not seeking to abuse each other. As with any ending of relationships, there is pain and suffering. Quincey's pain is fresh while Pat's has been smoldering for a while. The dawning of a new love ends the play on an upbeat note, leaving the audience feeling good about the budding relationship, not in relief because a terrible one

is over or in horror because an abusive one continues.

While some of the characters in A Late Snow seem at first to fit into one of the two lesbian stereotypes, in reality they do not. Pat, the most masculine, is not fully a 'butch' lesbian despite herself; and Quincey and Ellie's relationship cannot be called that of a vampire lesbian/fragile virgin because they truly care for each other. This is the first of Chambers' plays to use lesbians as characters and, as will be apparent later, the most stereotypical of her works.

"I love you more than I have ever loved anyone. For the first time in my life, I understand why knights rode miles to slay a dragon for their lady's hand."1

Lil

LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE

Chambers' second, and probably most well known play involving lesbian characters is Last Summer at Bluefish Cove (1980). It has eight female characters, paired into four lesbian couples: Lil and Eva, Rae and Annie, Kitty and Rita, and Donna and Sue. Each comes from a different background and career to spend each summer at a women's haven-Bluefish Cove.

As the play begins, we see Lil, fishing on the beach. She is approached by Eva, a newcomer to the resort this year. Eva strikes up a conversation with Lil and Lil, not knowing that Eva is not a lesbian, flirts with her. She even invites Eva to her cottage that evening for the first party of the season. Then Eva begins talking about leaving her husband and reading a new book by Dr. Kitty Cochrane, who just happens to be another summer resident of the cove. Lil realizes with horror

that this is a heterosexual woman and that she has made a mistake inviting her to the party, since several members of the group (Dr. Cochrane especially) feel that it is important to remain in the closet publicly.

Since she cannot retract the invitation gracefully, Lil must figure out how to make the evening work. Kitty is furious and attempts to make everyone else pretend to be straight. This produces an argument between Rae and Kitty. Kitty fears that her career would be ruined if the public knew she was gay, while Rae, a sculptress, figures they should tell Eva and hope for the best. No one wants to keep up a facade all summer, especially since it will be Lil's last summer at the cove. Lil is suffering from cancer and recently had surgery. The reason her doctor allowed her to come to the resort for the summer was that Kitty would be there to take care of her.

Eva arrives at the party and everything goes haywire, as expected. She asks all the awkward questions: when is your husband coming, do you have any children, I thought you were all married, etc. Donna and Sue arrive late, as usual. Sue is an independently wealthy older woman with a young lover, Donna, who is obviously out to benefit from

Sue's money. Later, Eva puts her foot in her mouth when she assumes that Donna is Sue's daughter.

After figuring out that these women are lesbians, Eva leaves early with Lil following to attempt to smooth things over. Lil was right when she said that Eva would be more upset by them than they would be by her. Eva does not know how to deal with lesbianism as this is her first confrontation with the issue. Lil sends Eva home and returns to her own cabin.

As Lil enters the cottage, Sue announces to Donna that they are leaving. The party quickly disperses after that, leaving Lil alone. After Lil has gone to bed, Eva returns. Reluctantly, Lil lets her in. Eva starts questioning Lil about coming out, living as a gay woman, how she knew she was gay--the normal questions from another who is curious and/or about to come out. Eva eventually confesses her attraction to Lil. Lil responds favorably, touching Eva's lips with her fingers and telling Eva that her mother told never to kiss on the first date. As Eva leaves, we know that this is the beginning of a relationship for the women.

Act two begins in mid-summer with the other six women, Kitty and Rita, Rae and Annie, Sue and Donna, on the beach. Donna opens the second act

with a sarcastic question: "Don't they ever get out of bed?"[2] It seems that the love between Lil and Eva has grown greatly during the first half of the summer. The women discuss the fact that Lil has not told Eva that she is dying. After a disagreement, they finally decide that it is Lil's place to tell Eva, not theirs. Donna is hurt by this and by the fact that Sue told her to shut up during the conversation. She starts off for their cabin, expecting Sue to follow. When Sue stays behind, Donna is even more angry.

Meanwhile, Lil and Eva are planning to move into Lil's apartment in the city. Eva is trying to decide what to do with her furniture and possessions, which will not fit into Lil's small apartment. They discuss whether Eva should come out to her mother. She tells Lil that her mother would not disown her as Lil's did. Lil's greater experience has taught her never to make that assumption and tries to warn her that most parents do not take kindly to a child's announcement that she is gay. To divert her attention from this subject, Lil suggests to Eva that they throw a party for their first month's anniversary, about which Eva has just reminded her. She talks about

what they will do next summer, still denying to herself as well as Eva that she is dying.

While at the party the next evening, Lil has severe abdominal pain and is taken to the hospital. The next scene opens as Lil arrives home from the hospital, full of anger and frustration. She has everything to live for, now that she is dying. The doctors have told her that she needs more surgery and therapy. She does not want to go back to the hospital. She demands that Kitty tell her how long she has to be on her feet and feeling okay. Six weeks is the answer, only six weeks to spend with the person she loves.

Eva is stunned by the discovery that her lover is terminally ill. She thought she had a lifetime to learn to know and to love Lil, now she has only six weeks. When everyone finally leaves them alone, Eva and Lil talk about their future. Lil tells Eva she should leave, which Eva does not want to do, of course. Lil tells Eva that she does not mean that much to her--she has had many women in her lifetime, why should one in particular matter that much. Eva should leave. Eva, not falling for Lil's charade, does not believe her and stays with her.

The last scene takes place in late autumn at the cove. They have come to clear out Lil and Eva's cabin. The funeral was today in Michigan. Lil's parents came to take her body and to bury it there even though Lil had wanted to be buried at the cove. Lil's parents kept her friends and Eva from seeing her at the end of her life. Everyone's life has changed; Sue and Donna have parted; Kitty wants to go back into practice; Eva is taking an office management course. Annie and Rae are planning to dig a barbeque pit in Lil's favorite spot for the next summer. Knowing Lil and missing her, these women's lives have been touched.

With a wealth of lesbian characters in this play, it might be assumed that at least one character would embody one of the literary stereotypes. As with A Late Snow, these women live autonomous lives, independent of men. They are also not attempting to pass as men. They do everything for themselves, sharing the work equally. Lil insists that she be allowed to help carry things, although she knows she is weaker than she used to be. This could be thought of as a desire to appear masculine, however, this is not the case. Lil's attitudes and decisions are affected by the fact that she knows that she is

dying and tries to fight it in every way possible. She feels that allowing the other women to do all of the work would be giving up on herself. This she will not do until she is forced into it by her disease. Lil, like Pat in A Late Snow, has a philandering past. She had affairs with Donna and other women while she was living with Kitty. By the time she appears in the play, she knows she has little time and has changed her ways. She loves Eva and wants to stay with her forever. It is the first time she has ever really been in love. Her faithfulness to Eva is a part of what keeps her from embodying the masculine stereotype. The other way she removes herself from the 'butch' image is that she displays her emotions, especially to Eva. Lil is angry that she is dying and fearful of death.

Other characters could be looked at in terms of the 'butch' image. The relationships between two sets of lovers, Annie and Rae and Kitty and Rita, appear on the surface to be 'butch/femme,' where one partner assumes the masculine role and the other assumes the female role, as a heterosexual couple. Annie is a sculptress and Rae, her lover, has no obvious career of her own. Rae also enjoys cooking, a 'female' activity.

However, neither Annie's nor Rae's attitudes can be placed in the category of 'butch' or 'femme.' Yes, Annie makes the money that supports them, but they share the housework and the responsibilities of raising Rae's children. Annie is Lil's oldest friend and is very loving and often motherly towards Lil, as is Rae. They are both strong individuals. They kid about having been together for so long and about looking at other women, but they both know that they are secure with the other. This security allows them to give Lil and Eva the support that they need. Another aspect of the 'butch/femme' role can be seen in body images. Both of these women consider themselves androgynous, sharing the heavy work associated with a masculinity, removing them farther from the stereotypes.

Likewise, the relationship between Kitty and Rita could be considered 'butch/femme' in some superficial ways. Kitty is a doctor while Rita is her secretary and travelling companion. Since Rita is Kitty's subordinate in terms of work, it could be assumed that she is also her subordinate in their lifestyle. This is not the case, however, because while Rita is dependent on Kitty for money, she does earn her salary, just as she would if she

worked for someone else. Emotionally, she and Kitty are dependent upon each other and can show emotions, unlike the stereotyped butch women. In reality, Kitty and Rita have worked out a wonderful way for them to live and work together. Because of Kitty's schedule for promoting her books, Rita would be left at home a great deal of the time if their arrangement did not make it necessary for her to be with Kitty. Again, neither of these women thinks of herself as the 'butch' or the 'femme.' Instead, they see themselves as partners in a joint venture, each having their particular responsibilities. As with Annie and Rae, these two women consider themselves to be androgynous, sharing the heavy work as well as the 'feminine' tasks.

The relationship between Sue and Donna is like that of the vampire lesbian/fragile virgin, only in reverse. Sue, the older partner, is the one being abused. Donna, the younger one, is the abuser. It is readily apparant that Donna is with Sue only for her money and that her attitude is that of a spoiled brat. On their way over to Lil's for the party, Donna casually requests a second pair of sandals like the ones she is wearing, only in white. She laments that they are not made by Gucci

also. This relationship differs from the stereotype in two ways. First, Sue is very practical in her attitude about their relationship and about life. At least she knows Donna only wants her money and does not really love her or intend to spend her life with Sue. In the past, Sue had not known how her lovers felt about her and her money and that, she thinks, is a worse situation. The second way which this relationship does not fit the vampire stereotype is that there is no rescue of one partner by an outside character, let alone a heterosexual one. Sue removes Donna from her life all by herself.

Last Summer at Bluefish Cove is a love story whose characters happen to be lesbians. It is also a very touching and sensitive story about death, filled with love and caring rather than the hatred and abuse as one might expect of stereotypical writing.

"Me and Molly fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Our jagged parts match perfectly."1

Josie

MY BLUE HEAVEN

Chamber's third play with lesbian characters was written for the Second Gay American Arts Festival. My Blue Heaven (1981) is a set of two one acts, tied together by mutual characters, Molly and Josie, who are homesteading in upstate New York. The style of this play is different than the previous two examples of Chambers' work. The play is set on a stage as the "local fund raiser." The set is a reasonable facsimile of a dilapidated farmhouse, enough to give the audience the idea.

The emcee welcomes the audience to the first part of the show, called "My Blue Heaven" after the song. He tells them that they have brought a troupe from New York City to perform for them and wanders off into speaking about his niece and someone else's son. The actress playing Josie has to remind him that he should be setting up the play for the audience, not talking about his relatives

and friends. While she fumes on the couch, he finishes, explaining that he is responsible for all of the sound effects as well as in charge of the show.

With the emcee's speech finished, Josie assumes her position, lying on the couch while the emcee makes snoring noises. Next we hear Molly, who is in the kitchen fighting to keep her clothing away from the goat Josie gave her. Molly said she wanted kids, and that was the best Josie could do. While Molly is yelling at the sleeping Josie, the goat defecates on the floor, further infuriating Molly. Josie finally wakes up and tells Molly that her book on homesteading says no homestead is complete without a goat.

Molly is a writer, and Josie used to work for IBM in New York City. Molly was a teacher, too. She lost her job after writing Living the Good Gay Life. The royalties from the book bought the farm and paid off all their credit cards and other debts. Now Molly writes a column called "The Adventures of Molly and Joe," for a monthly farm journal, having turned Josie into Joe.

Molly has also been writing novels and has been sending manuscripts to publishers. Each one has rejected her latest attempt, telling her that

they were not interested in a novel portraying a perverted lifestyle. In fact, Molly has received one such letter today, making her feel terrible. Josie is sure that once they build the windmill (Josie's pipe dream) and open her junk shop that they will be financially better off and Molly can pursue the writing she chooses. Molly is not so sure.

After escapades with lighting the stove, although they have little to burn, Arnold, the chicken, attacks Josie and she is sure that her leg will have to be amputated because of the small scratch he inflicts on it. Then a strange man appears hollering, "Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Williams." Williams is Josie's last name (which Molly has been using as a pseudonym for her column), and Josie at first assumes this man has come for her. When he begins to talk about the column, they realize he is there to see Molly. It seems this man (played by the emcee), from the largest Christian publishing company in America, is there because he wants to publish Molly's columns in book form, in exchange for $150,000 and the rights to publicize Molly's family. He assumes, as do all of her readers, that Molly is writing about a heterosexual couple homesteading with their children, Arnold (the

chicken) and Baby (the goat). He has brought a contract already signed by the president of his company and an advance check for $75,000. When he realizes that Molly and Josie are the "L-word," he is horrified. They'll put his desk in the hall when he gets back!

Molly decides that she would like to have her relationship with Josie publicized. After all, what better endorsement could homosexuals get than the largest Christian publishing house in America? Mr. Miller is doubly terrified when Molly signs the contract and takes the check. He leaves in a huff and threatens a law suit.

After all of this, Baby (the goat), gets the check and runs off with it. At this point, Molly comes back into the house and Josie wakes up. It was all a dream! The emcee, who played Mr. Miller, gets up and announces that it is time for intermission and there are refreshments in the lobby. The actress playing Josie sticks her head out of a stage door and asks if she and the actress playing Molly get free refreshments.

Act Two is entitled "For Me and My Gal," also from a song. The emcee explains that it is now summer time on the farm. The women still have no electricity, but they do not need energy for

heating their shack since it is summer. Molly enters, thinking that it is time to begin, and starts typing furiously. This upsets the emcee who stops her right way. Josie enters carrying mail and a shopping bag. She attempts to talk to Molly, who is not listening. Even when Josie says that a kangaroo gave birth to three spider monkeys on Main Street, Molly just answers 'uh-huh' and goes on typing. But Josie has big news and makes Molly stop to listen. The old Victorian couch which Josie refinished and recovered sold for two hundred dollars!

In the mail today is a letter from Molly's teenage boy friend, Johnny. He says he is coming to visit them and will arrive today. Molly begins to straighten up, and Josie gets jealous because Molly is making a fuss over an old boyfriend. Johnny (also played by the emcee) finally arrives, and it turns out that the Dr. on the return address stands for Doctor of Divinity, not Doctor of Medicine as the women had assumed. Josie tells Molly and John to talk about old times while she constructs the prototype for the windwill she keeps talking about building, but then she interrupts them every other line. It does not really matter,

because Molly and John are busy catching up and not listening to Josie.

Then John asks the big question--has Molly ever thought about marriage? Both women are confused by him until he explains that he means to each other. 'Lover' implies no commitment, he tells them. He belongs to a liberal sect and believes that gay people should sanctify their union. He knows that this is a controversial issue, and he wants Molly and Josie to have a ceremony in the local church. Josie is all for it, but Molly is reluctant, coming up with all kinds of excuses. After a while, Josie begins to wonder if Molly really loves her because she will not go through with a public ceremony. John pushes Molly by telling her that Josie really needs the affirmation a ceremony would give her. Finally, the two women argue and try to make up, leaving John out of the conversation for a period of time. After hearing them, John determines that they are neurotic and should take time to consider commitment seriously. At the end of their fight, Molly 'proves' to Josie that she loves her by showing her a poem she had written for her.

Having made up, Molly and Josie insist that John marry them right there in their own home. He

is disappointed that they have not agreed to make a public statement of their love and commitment, but grants their wish anyway. Josie gets a coffee mug from the kitchen, cries 'Mazel tov,' and steps on it. It turns out that it was Molly's favorite mug and now she is upset. She leaves Josie and John in the living room to get a broom to clean up the mess.

During this time, the emcee steps to the front of the stage and begins his closing remarks. He tells about the time he and another man participated in a ceremony just like this one. Molly and Josie make up again and the emcee dismisses the audience, complaining that the world is changing too fast for him.

Neither of these women fit either the butch or vampire lesbian stereotypes. In fact, they are so far removed from them that it is difficult to discuss their relationship in these terms. Both women are the same age and are not abusing each other. They love each other very much and express that love and caring openly. Like real people, they get angry and irritated with each other, but the love they have is deep and a firm foundation for their lives.

However, one instance in the play could be construed as suggesting that Josie is more masculine than Molly. Since Molly is very busy with her writing, which supports them, Josie goes out to chop the wood. She also stops in the kitchen to clean up the the goat droppings, thus performing a 'feminine' task on her way to do a masculine one. Josie is also quite a wimp, as the incident with Arnold, the rooster shows. She has a small cut on her leg and she is convinced that she is going to die or at least need the leg amputated. Molly is the strong one here, calming Josie down and setting things aright.

"All my life, I been clipping out moments to protect Mama's sensibilities, I got through clipping, waddn't much left. If you're going to do the same thing to me here, I might as well go home. I can sit with Mama and be somebody that I'm not."1

Lacey

THE QUINTESSENTIAL IMAGE

Chambers' fourth play about lesbians is "The Quintessential Image" (1982), a one act comedy about coming out. This play is not a typical coming out story: Lacey is not telling her parents or her friends, she is making a public statement, and Margaret is trying not to come out at all.

As the audience enters the theatre, they see the set of "The Margaret Foy Show," a television talk show. The crew is busily preparing for the taping of today's show. Margaret appears and addresses the audience. She tells the audience about her special guest, photographer Lacey Lanier (Margaret's idol) and about taping procedures, including the monitor set up especially for Margaret to check her cowlick occasionally.

After the show's theme and credits have run, Margaret blows her "baby kiss" to her mother and launches into her prepared speech about Lacey.

When she is introduced, Lacey shyly peeks around one of the over-size prints of her most famous photographs. Margaret finally succeeds in coaxing Lacey on stage and to her seat. With this ordeal over, Margaret begins asking Lacey questions. Lacey, however, is enthralled with the television equipment, especially the monitor view of herself. This is the first interview Lacey has ever granted, and she is stunned by the set up. Margaret draws Lacey's attention by telling her that her mother must have been her inspiration during her early days of photography. No, Lacey explains, her mother was never her inspiration. In fact, now that her mother is getting senile, Lacey can finally appear in public as she is. Margaret mistakenly interprets Lacey's comment as a desire to protect her mother's privacy. Again Lacey corrects her, saying that she was really protecting herself from her mother. As Margaret tries to gloss this over with the quip, she's kidding, Lacey protests. No, nothing Lacey ever did pleased her mother.

Uncomfortable with losing control of the interview, Margaret directs the conversation to Lacey's photographs. The first photo, of a World War I soldier returning from war, won Lacey her

first prize. However, it seems that Lacey was really attempting to take a picture of the girl she loved, Belinda Adams. Although a mistake, the photo won Lacey ten dollars, which she spent on a Kodak--to take a picture of Belinda, of course.

During the depression, Lacey snapped a picture of a millworker's strike while trying to capture Belinda on film. This won her a college scholarship. Lacey went into education, hoping that she might be able to teach Belinda's children, if she had any. When asked why she had not gone into photography, Lacey replies that she did not think that she was very good, after all she could not take a picture of Belinda.

When Lacey tells Margaret that she had told her mother that she wanted to marry Belinda, Margaret visibly balks and hurriedly changes the subject to the next photo. It is of a janitor mopping up Huey Long's blood just after he had been shot. Lacey's class was touring the Louisiana statehouse, and she had hoped to get a picture of Belinda on the trip. The photo of the janitor was taken merely to use up the roll of film. It did, however, land her a job working for the Tribune.

Relieved to be back on safe ground, Margaret pursues the Tribune job. She wants to know about

Lacey's romances and why she did not get married. As Lacey attempts to discuss her relationships with women, Margaret quickly moves on to the next photograph. Margaret describes it as Guadalcanal, but it is really the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles. The object to be photographed was Belinda's first husband--Lacey missed again.

Lacey herself moves the attention to the next picture, of Belinda's son in the schoolyard. Since Lacey is talking about Belinda again, Margaret changes the subject to Lacey's being called before the McCarthy Committee in the '50's. Lacey was in Washington, D. C. to get a portrait of Belinda's daddy to send to her. As Lacey begins to explain that she believes she was summoned because of her lesbianism, Margaret desperately turns the conversation to the Pulitzer Prize winning photo of an American GI graveyard in Korea. Since Belinda's husband was missing in action, Lacey did not send her a copy of this photo.

At the mention of Belinda again, Margaret hurriedly asks about the Nobel Prize winning photograph. But Lacey is still musing about the woman she met in Washington and admits that she would have married a woman if she could have. Margaret panics and asks that the statement be cut.

This upsets Lacey, who decides to leave. She only agreed to be on the show because Margaret's roommate (and lover) came to ask her to do it. Rachel thought that if Lacey could open up, Margaret could feel better about herself.

This really sends Margaret out of equilibrium. She emphasizes that Rachel is only her roommate, nothing more. Lacey did not really hint at Margaret's sexuality, but Margaret is vehemently protesting that she is not a lesbian. Desperately, she turns Lacey's attention to the photo of Vietnamese girl holding a half caucasian baby. This, it turns out, is a picture of Belinda's daughter-in-law and grandchild. Since Belinda's husband disowned their son for marrying a Vietnamese girl, Belinda had never seen her or the baby. So Lacey sent her the photo, including a note with this one. This is the one for which she was awarded a Nobel Prize.

Lacey realizes that she has wasted her life trying to get close to a woman she could never have had a relationship with. She laments the loss of precious time, listing the things she could have done had she not been so infatuated with Belinda. During this lament, Margaret attempts to announce tomorrow's guest and sign off. Lacey decides that

she will tell her life story to Rachel, who is a writer, after all. This unsettles the shaken Margaret even more. After getting Lacey off the stage, she turns to the audience and confides in them that she has a date with the most exciting man and that Rachel is really just a roommate.

This is a very different type of lesbian relationship, even from Chambers' other plays. These two women are not lovers. That fact eliminates the abusive vampire/virgin stereotype as a possibility. The butch stereotype is even more difficult to discern.

Margaret tries to portray a "with it" eighties woman who has it all. Her basic temperament is one of paranoia and vanity. She tries hard to project a heterosexual image, taking pains to appear feminine and to make sure her audience knows that she dates men. Her overzealousness almost gives her away, as she emphasizes her relationships with men and with Rachel, her roommate. Her vanity is evident in the fact that she has a special monitor set up to check her cowlick while the show is taping.

Margaret attempts to appear cool and happy under pressure. In reality, she is a desperately unhappy woman. She cannot be who she really is,

except in the privacy of her own home with her lover. Her baby kisses to Mom reveal that she is more worried about what her mother would think than about her own happiness or that of her lover. The need to watch everything she does and says has made her life full of fear and overcompensation. She obviously idolizes Lacey, but cannot admit it because of the implication about her own sexual identity. Perhaps in Lacey, Margaret finds a woman who can do the things she feels she cannot and for that reason is in awe of Lacey.

All of Margaret's decisions, to gloss over Lacey's mention of her lesbian lifestyle, to deny her relationship with Rachel is anything more than a platonic roommate, and to inform the audience about her date with a wonderful man (!), are made in order to preserve her public image as a heterosexual woman. Like Peggy in A Late Snow, Margaret does not fit the image of a 'butch' lesbian because she is trying to fit into the straight world and feels that she must project a feminine image in order to sell herself to the public. Any characteristic remotely masculine has been carefully hidden or erased from Margaret's personality.

Lacey, on the other hand, is a reclusive woman in her sixties. Her attitude is straight-forward. She is prepared, after a lifetime, to make the decision to come out on television. Her life as a recluse was imposed on her by her mother's harshness, not as something that she chose for herself. In reality, Lacey puts up no facades and is quite comfortable with herself.

Never having been on television before, Lacey is apprehensive about the taping and all of the equipment. This sets her emotions on edge, and she finally explodes when Margaret says they will edit out her confession that she would have married a woman if they had let her. She is also fervent, almost passionate, about coming out, today and on Margaret's show. The love and infatuation she has felt for Belinda all these years is also apparent.

Lacey's major decision is to come out publicly. In reality, she has made this decision before she came on the show, but everything she does and says is a part of her coming out. In her life before the show, all of her decisions were based on her desire to get Belinda to notice her and to some day have a relationship with her.

Lacey's dress is described in the stage directions as "comfortable." In our society, that

type of dress is often reserved for men. For example, women are expected to wear high heeled shoes, which are anything but comfortable. Lacey, like many lesbians, has chosen not to subject herself to this discomfort and might be described by some as physically masculine for this reason. Her attitudes and decisions, however, are not masculine.

As with all of Chambers' plays with lesbian characters, "The Quintessential Image" is a comedy. Margaret's desperate attempts to conceal her identity and Lacey's shy awkwardness in front of the cameras and the audience are funny. Here, Chambers has given lesbians a chance to laugh with and at themselves, rather than taking their lives so seriously.

". . .mostly I didn't want to find out that somebody felt the same way we did, Katy. I always wanted to think that you and me was something special."1

Martha

KUDZU

Chambers' last play, Kudzu (1981), is named for a hardy vine imported to the South to keep the soil from eroding. It turned out to be a pest which can demolish buildings if left unchecked and is nearly impossible to kill. This latter meaning is the one she used for the play. All four characters are elderly and will be there forever.

The play opens in midsummer, in Clay, Georgia. It is early morning. The set is a clapboard farmhouse with a porch. There are three playing areas: the porch, the bedroom and the kitchen. Martha appears on stage with a saucer of milk, calling a cat. Katy joins her, admonishing her to leave the cat alone--they do not need a pet. A wail is heard from the bedroom, where Ginger (described as incredibly old), is in need of the bedpan. Martha and Katy take care of Mama (Ginger) and P. T. Bell, Martha's cousin. All of the characters are retired.

After the ordeal of getting Mama into her wheelchair and dressed, the three women go to breakfast. It is so hot that they decide to eat on the porch. Katy reminds them that they have a visitor coming today. Someone is coming to see P. T., who used to be a state legislator. Mama is sure that it will be that preacher P. T. has taken up with lately, the one who P. T. gave $7,000 to for new siding for the church. It seems P. T. has become intolerable since he was born again last year. P. T. is supporting all of them on his pension, because Katy never really held down a job and Martha got fired before retirement because she had stolen a small amount of money from the company where she worked as a bookkeeper. The house belongs to Mama, but P. T. has been paying the taxes on it and has taken it over as his own.

P. T. had run for governor five times and had failed miserably each try. His views are extremely rightwing; he wants to go as far as to send the black people back to Africa and to keep women in the home. P. T. is also an alcoholic and a philanderer. He was married twice and both women divorced him. He is now living with the three women because he cannot or will not take care of himself alone. For example, he stopped wearing

underwear because he did not want to wash it. Katy states that P. T. never did anything that he could get a woman to do for him.

P. T.'s views are diametrically opposed to Katy's, who is a radical liberal. To make matters worse, P. T. has pursued Katy since they were young. The time that P. T. proposed to Katy, Martha hit him over the head with a table. Martha and Katy, we now see, are lovers and have been for many years.

It seems that P. T.'s expected visitor is a reporter from TIME magazine. He leaves to meet the reporter at the mall in town. After he is gone, Mama and Martha discuss Martha's affliction, as Mama calls it, while Martha works on a picture book for Katy, showing all the places they wished they could have gone. Mama is still trying to place blame for Martha's homosexuality somewhere and to justify Martha's father's reaction to the news that Katy and Martha were lovers. Act One ends as the two younger women rush to get Mama the bedpan before it is too late. They are not successful.

Act Two opens with Martha and Katy on the porch. P. T. is still in town, and Mama is watching her soap opera. Martha and Katy have some time to themselves and use it to discuss their

life. Martha regrets that they could not travel, as Katy wanted to do, but Katy assures her that being together is enough. Martha echoes the sentiment. They talk about their jobs and the protests Katy was involved in, reminiscing about their early years together. P. T. returns from the mall without having seen the reporter. The preacher brought him home and will come to pick him up later to take him back. Mama's soap opera ends, and she hollers to be brought out to the porch. P. T. says he is going to announce something to the reporter, baiting everyone, but especially Katy. After some goading by all three women, P. T. tells them that God has told him to announce that he will run for President of the United States and that he is going to use the incriminating information in his strong box to blackmail other politicians for support. Then he leaves again.

Katy decides that they must find out what he has in his strong box and goes to get it. It contains only his bank books, his will and his legislator's certificates. The women are puzzled because he left everything to Martha in his will. Mama comes up with the reason; Martha will take care of Katy, whom P. T. has always been pursuing. Katy believes that he must have hidden the

strongbox somewhere and goes to look for it. Martha finishes her picture book for Katy while Mama naps. The lights fade and slowly rise, signifying passage of time. It is now evening. Mama's stomach is growling and has wakened her. Katy is still in the attic and Martha is still on the porch.

The women are distressed by P. T.'s announcement that he intends to run for President but try to prepare and eat dinner as if things were normal. P. T. arrives from the mall and the women demand answers to their questions. Did he announce his candidacy? Where is the strong box with the documents? But P. T. is upset; the reporter did not show up. Once he answers Katy that the strong box is in a box of old shoes upstairs under his bed, Katy admits that she threw out that box last month when they were doing spring cleaning because he never wore those shoes.

Depressed, P. T. laments that without his strong box of documents he has nothing to announce to the reporter coming from New York. All this while, Katy is attempting to get P. T. to tell her whether the paltry amount of money in the bank books is all he has--all that is between them and ruin. He admits that she is right, but also that

he gave only $2,000 to the church for siding, the other $5,000 was a loan. He is also still trying to get Katy to marry him.

In all the uproar, Mama lets fly a final insult to P. T.'s daddy, an alcoholic also. When P. T. protests that she ought not denigrate the memory of his daddy, Mama admits that the man who P. T. thinks was his father really was not. Mama's sister was seeing a colored boy and got pregnant by him before she married Leonard Bell, giving P. T. a name and a father. P. T. loudly denies that he has any negro blood in him, but he knows it is true.

Mama returns to reading the newspaper and comes across an article about an auto accident on the highway the reporter had planned to take. It seems that he was killed this morning and that was the reason he had not showed up to see P. T. It turns out that the reporter's mother was an old girl friend of P. T. and that he was born shortly after P. T. stopped seeing her. Then everyone puts the story together. The reporter was really P.T.'s son, coming to meet his father. P. T. goes inside, and a gunshot is heard. He unzipped his pants to urinate and the gun he carried in his pocket went off and shot a hole in the baseboard.

P. T. decides that maybe he should run for the legislature again. Since he does not have a driver's license anymore, Katy volunteers to be his chauffuer on the campaign trail and Martha and Mama will go along, too. Katy finally allows Martha to keep the cat and P. T. takes some preliminary steps to taking responsibility for himself again. But not too much; for example, when Katy asks him to borrow the electric shears from the church to cut the kudzu, he chooses not hear her. He exits, intent on seeing how much it will take to repair the car in the barn.

Katy discovers her picture book and follows Martha into the kitchen. The final scene is between the two lovers. They may not have everything, but they have each other. Martha goes out to call the cat, as she did at the opening of the play.

Neither of these women are the protaganist of the play, but they are important characters. Needless to say, their relationship, like the one between Josie and Molly in My Blue Heaven, is very far from the 'butch/femme' and vampire lesbian stereotype. They are very much in love and are not abusing each other. Their love and fidelity throughout the years is a tribute to their strong,

abiding relationship which cannot be found in any of the stereotypical literature.

There is less in Kudzu to reinforce a lesbian's feeling of community and self-worth than there is in Chambers' earlier plays, but that in itself signals the progression in Chambers' works. The lesbian characters are no longer the center of focus, but exist as a normal part of everyday life.

"No, I'm a liar. All writers are liars. Fiction is a lie about the truth."1

Molly
My Blue Heaven

CONCLUSION

Was Chambers able to write about positive, healthy lesbians? Yes, she was. Her works also display a progression in two ways: the lesbians become less stereotypical and they also are removed from the position of protaganist, as in Kudzu.

A Late Snow includes Pat, the character who is most masculine, but upon closer examination, she does not fully embody the stereotype. Last Summer at Bluefish Cove, produced six years after A Late Snow, does contain some characters which, in part, appear to be embodiments of the stereotypes also. Lil, like Pat, has some masculine attributes. Donna and Sue represent the vampire lesbian/fragile virgin, in reverse, but no one is unknowingly abused or rescued from the situation. Closer examination leads to the conclusion that these characters, while displaying some of the characteristics of the stereotypes, do not embody them and are therefore more true to life.

In comparison to these two early plays, My Blue Heaven and Kudzu portray much less

stereotypical characters, since Molly and Josie and Katy and Martha do not embody any parts of the stereotypes. Since none of these characters fits the stereotypes to any significant extent, one can see that a progression has occured in Chambers' writing. She has moved from hovering on the edge of stereotypical characterizations to the portrayal of lesbians who are no less complex and compassionate than heterosexuals.

The Quintessential Image differs from the other plays because the relationship between these two lesbians is not a romantic or sexual one. Again, neither of the characters can be classified as embodying one of the stereotypes, putting it in the same section of her works as My Blue Heaven and Kudzu.

The second type of progression can be clearly seen in Kudzu. Chambers is moving away from using lesbians as the sole protaganists. At the time of her illness and death, Chambers was planning a series of seven plays to be called "The Georgia Tapestry," of which Kudzu was to be a part. Three of these plays would include the two women from Kudzu and at least two others were to contain no gay characters. Jere Jacobs, Chambers' long-time friend, states that Chambers' point with the series

was to portray lesbians as normal people, not anomalies in our society.[2]

Since Chambers was willing to take the risk of portraying sympathetic characters on stage, others have followed her lead. Many of today's lesbian playwrights owe her a great debt for breaking the barrier which kept the truth about lesbianism silent for so long.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]Tish Dace, "For Whom the Bell Tolled," The New York Native, 24 October-6 November, 1983, p. 47.

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[1]Terry Helbing, "Jane Chambers: A Reminiscence," The New York Native, 11 April, 1983, p. 14.

[2]Single Man at a Party, program notes, Theatre Marquee, New York, New York, 21 April, 1959.

[3]Clare Coss, "On Jane Chambers: An Interview with Beth Allen and Jere Jacob," Heresies #17, 1984, p. 83.

[4]Single Man at a Party, program notes.

[5]Coss, p. 83.

[6]Beth Allen, Agent for Jane Chambers, Personal Interview, New York, New York, 18 March, 1987.

[7]Allen.

[8]Allen.

[9]Allen.

[10]Coss, pp. 83-84.

[11]Allen.

[12]Allen.

[13]Coss, p. 84.

THE LITERARY STEREOTYPE OF A LESBIAN

[1]Lillian Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Love and Friendship Between Women From the Renaissance to the Present (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981), p.349.

[2]Faderman, p. 341.

[3]Faderman, p. 357.

[4]Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," Signs: Journal of Women and Culture, Summer 1984, p. 561.

[5]Newton, p. 562.

[6]Newton, p. 563.

[7]Jane Rule, Lesbian Images (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), p. 102.

[8]Rule, p. 176.

[9]Faderman, p. 343.

[10]Faderman, p. 344.

[11]Faderman, p. 345-346.

[12]Faderman, pp. 343-344.

[13]Faderman, p. 347.

[14]Faderman, pp. 341-342.

[15]Faderman, p. 343.

[16]Faderman, p. 343.

[17]Rule, p. 190.

[18]Faderman, p. 347.

[19]William M. Hoffman, ed., Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York: Avon Books, 1979), p.xxxviii.

[20]Rule, p. 194.

A LATE SNOW

[1]Jane Chambers, A Late Snow, in Gay Plays: The First Collection (New York, New York: Avon Books, 1979), p. 326.

LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE

[1]Jane Chambers, Last Summer at Bluefish Cove (New York, New York: JH Press, 1982), p. 77.

[2]Chambers, p. 65.

MY BLUE HEAVEN

[1]Jane Chambers, My Blue Heaven (New York, New York: JH Press, 1981), p. 82.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL IMAGE

[1]Jane Chambers, "The Quintessential Image," unpublished play, 1982, p. 13.

KUDZU

[1]Jane Chambers, Kudzu, unpublished play, 1982, p. II-5.

CONCLUSION

[1]Jane Chambers, My Blue Heaven (New York, New York: JH Press, 1981), p. 30.

[2]Clare Coss, "On Jane Chambers: An Interview with Beth Allen and Jere Jacobs," Heresies #17, 1984, p. 84.

APPENDIX

WORKS OF JANE CHAMBERS

Plays: "The Quintessential Image," Town Hall, New York City, 1982
Kudzu, Playwrights Horizons, New York City, 1981
My Blue Heaven, Shandol Theatre, New York City, 1981
Last Summer at Bluefish Cove, Westside Mainstage and Actor's Playhouse, New York City, 1980-81
The Common Garden Variety, Mark Taper Lab, Los Angeles, 1976
A Late Snow, Playwrights Horizons, New York City, 1974
"Mine!" and "The Wife," Women's Interart Theatre, New York City, 1973
"Random Violence," Women's Interart Theatre, New York City, 1973
Jamboree, Town Hall, New York City, 1973
Tales of the Revolution and Other American Fables, Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre, Connecticut, 1972

Television: Search for Tomorrow, CBS, 1972-73
Here Comes the Iceman, optioned by Screen Gems, 1971-72, and Paramount, 1972-73
"Christ in a Treehouse," Connecticut Educational Television, 1971
Curfew!, WYNC-TV, 1971
Staff writer, WMTW-TV, Poland Spring, Maine, 1964-67

Screenplays: Grass Roots, Ritzer Productions, bought but not produced, 1971
Gotcha!, Aviscom, bought but not produced, 1971

Novels: Burning, Jove Press, 1978 and JH Press, 1986
Chasin' Jason, JH Press, 1987

Poetry: Warrior at Rest, JH Press, 1987

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FICTION IS A LIE ABOUT THE TRUTH: LESBIAN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF JANE CHAMBERS

by

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FICTION IS A LIE ABOUT THE TRUTH: LESBIAN CHARACTERS IN THE PLAYS OF JANE CHAMBERS

Before 1970, there were very few positive, multi-dimensional portrayals of lesbians in twentieth century literature. There were two basic stereotypes found in the novels and plays of this era: the 'butch' or masculine lesbian and the vampire lesbian/fragile virgin relationship.

With the strength and momentum of the women's movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's behind her, Jane Chambers found the courage to present a play which contained lesbian characters who were true to life and non-stereotypical. Her first play, A Late Snow (1974), is closer to including characters which embody the stereotypes than her later works. There is a clear progression from A Late Snow and Last Summer at Bluefish Cove (1980), with one character in each play who partially fits the 'butch' stereotype, to My Blue Heaven (1981), "The Quintessential Image" (1982) and Kudzu (1981), which contain six lesbian characters who do not embody the stereotypes in their images of themselves and their relationship to others. These

women share the tasks usually assigned to females as well as those labeled masculine by our society.

Chambers' work is important since she was the first playwright to portray lesbians as positive, healthy, multi-dimensional human beings, rather than the stereotypical images presented before she wrote A Late Snow.