

# Gay dic(k)tionary

## Gay(s)language: a dic(k)tionary of gay slang

H. Max

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Reviewed by John Kyper

**D**espite the proliferation of writing by and about gays to emerge over the past generation, precious few dictionaries of our particular argot have appeared. Until now, aside from scattered glossaries included in books, the only such work has been Bruce Rodgers' *The Queen's Vernacular* (1972, reprinted in 1977 as *Gay Talk*). This well-researched, comprehensive, annotated volume is now out of print and has become dated by the many changes in the years following its publication.

*Gay(s)language* is a thinner, less ambitious guide than was its predecessor. Such a comment is not necessarily a criticism. A basic, accessible dictionary of contemporary gay language could be indispensable, particularly for those who are just coming out. However, as its subtitle implies, it is also predominantly male-oriented, thus limiting its scope and potential audience.

The book contains 400 entries, with numerous cross-references. Most of the familiar terms are here, as well as many others that I'd never heard before. Some are obviously pre-Stonewall, and it would have been helpful if the author had specified

those that are archaic or local to a specific region. Max has noted disparaging words used against us by non-gays, but I wish he had also noted those offensive terms used by gays that are racist or misogynist (like "fish," which he debatably restricts to mean *heterosexual* women).

There are several other definitions that are not totally accurate: Butyl nitrate (the most common form of poppers) is not a heart drug — *amyl* nitrite is. A drag queen is defined as a "gay who impersonates women," even though there exist many drag queens who are heterosexual. Too, it is misleading to describe a transsexual as a "male gay who has undergone sex change operation" — probably a majority of the self-defined transsexuals never have the operation, those who do generally do not consider themselves gay, and there also exist female-to-male transsexuals.

All this said, *Gay(s)language* has made a promising beginning. The author notes that our language is evolving all the time (witness "safe sex") and invites readers to contribute their suggestions, to be incorporated into a future edition. As stated in the introduction:

May each reader approach this book in the spirit of outrageous fun in which it was prepared. And may each human being go his or her own way, to live and let live, able to laugh at the foibles of life, tolerant and compassionate toward the diversity and complexity of human sexuality and the human race. □