

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a project that has turned out to be centered in the 1960s and, frequently, on the topic of childhood has made me mindful of how many of the pleasures of the culture of that decade I first shared with my siblings, Bob, Eleanor, Bill, Tony, Charlie—all dedicated connoisseurs of music, movies, and personalities even then. My sister-in-law, Jean F. Moon, was my first friend who shared my fascination with the art and writing of the period. Well before the '60s began, my mother, Mary Catherine Townsell Moon, had already set me on my way as the multimedia aesthete I have remained by making me my first hand puppet, showering me with picture books and phonograph records, and always staunchly supporting my efforts to understand and practice culture making. I thank her for passing on to me her deep enjoyment of and respect for those processes.

I contemplate with sadness the irony for me that my father Sylvester F. Moon, who was born the year Henry James published *A Small Boy and Others*, 1913, has died this year, 1997, as I complete a work of the same title. This book, undertaken as a work of mourning, must remain one for me to a degree I could not have anticipated when I began it.

The way this book has remained steadily focused on New York has also given me many welcome opportunities to reflect on my youth there, which I rejoice in having squandered in the company of Millie Seubert, Leslie Dwinell, and Mary Lamasney, and on the streets of a city that was passing through one of its most culturally vibrant periods. Thanks to Nick Deutsch for first taking me to the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, to see Charles Ludlam perform his play *The Bourgeois Avant-Garde*. Thanks to Hal Sedgwick, too, for sharing many New York aesthetic adventures with me.

From the time I became at all aware of queerness as a human possibility to the time I came out in the late '70s and for years thereafter, the work of four queer New York artists excited and sustained me, continually expanding my notion of the powers of what we now call queer performativity. Andy Warhol, Charles Ludlam, Jack Smith, and Ethyl Eichelberger all died untimely deaths, all but Warhol's AIDS-related, between 1987 and 1990. I intend this book, however inadequate, to convey my gratitude to them and my profound respect for them for having kept alive for several more decades the splendid and perilous cultural role of *monstre sacré*. While in this book I have tended to emphasize what I see as the strength and power of their work, I want to say that being aware of how fraught an undertaking it was to become any one of these figures, and to maintain the achievement over a productive career of many years, much increases my admiration for each of them.

Portions of this book have appeared in essay form: "A Small Boy and Others" in Hortense J. Spillers, ed., *Comparative American Identities*; "Flaming Closets" in *October* (winter 1989), where it benefited from the editorial attention of Douglas Crimp; "Screen Memories" in Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*; "Outlaw Sex and 'The Search for America'" in a special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* edited by Fabienne Worth; and "Oralia" in a special issue of *Women and Performance* edited by José Muñoz.

A grant from the American Council of Learned Societies for Recent Recipients of the Ph.D. enabled me to undertake research for this book in earnest, and a research fellowship at the Center for Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture at Rutgers University helped me complete it. In addition to the already considerable boons of the Center, for which I thank George Levine, Bruce Robbins, and Carolyn Williams, I also began to enjoy there the enduring friendship of Julie Graham.

A long procession of gifted and inspiring graduate students has passed through Duke in recent years. For their interest in and responses to various parts of this project I thank Amanda Berry, Lara Bovilsky, Adam Frank, Daniel Itzkovitz, Katie Kent, Aaron Kunin, José Muñoz, Ada Norris, John Vincent, and Gustavus Stadler—especially Dan, for inviting me to write about Yiddish theater and queer theater, and Gus, for stimulating conversations about the whole project around the time I was finishing it.

Stanley Fish and Marianna Torgovnick, in their respective tenures as

chairs of Duke's English department, have encouraged me and helped make time and other resources available to me at the beginning and end of my work on this book. Catherine Beaver and Roz Wolbarsht stepped in and saved the day—several days, in fact—at a crucial point in the production of the manuscript.

I am grateful to Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant for their friendship and for their respective writings on queer cultural transmission and public cultures of intimacy. Thanks, too, to Stephen Orgel for his hospitality to me and my work from its inception, to Barbara Herrnstein Smith for her warm and enthusiastic responses and for her unflagging intellectual energy, and to Sharon Cameron for continuing interest and support. Judith Butler has also fostered my work with unfailing generosity and kindness, and often on unconscionably short notice. Thanks to Esther Frank for opening a window on the Yiddish language for me, as she has done for many others. Coediting *American Literature* with Cathy N. Davidson for the past six years has provided me with an invaluable model of personal kindness and professional magnanimity. I continue to appreciate as I enjoy the collegial friendship of Nahum Chandler, Wahneema Lubiano, Janice Radway, Kathy Rudy, Laurie Shannon, and Irene Silverblatt. Ken Wissoker has been a wonderful editor and remains a valued friend, as does Richard Morrison; thanks to both, and to two anonymous readers for Duke University Press, whose generous and very thoughtful evaluations of the manuscript helped me reenvision it in its final form. Thanks to Paul Kelleher for copy-editing the manuscript with such intelligent care.

The interest that Jonathan Goldberg has taken in this work makes it more valuable to me. He and I alone can know the care he has taken with it, and of me, during the years of its composition—and this despite his finding *Flaming Creatures* insufferable, and *Terminator* a far superior model of cinematic and artistic possibility. This book is dedicated to the two other friends closest to what I feel is at the heart of it, Marcie Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Marcie and I happily share many pockets of sensibility (Dryden, Cronenberger, Irma Vep), and, over the years, she has contributed many hours of constructive criticism, comparative fan's notes, and friendly enthusiasm to this project in a way that has constantly renewed it for me.

Those who know me know I might not have written a book like this one, about matters I care about as much as I do these, without the example and encouragement of Eve Sedgwick, who has wholeheartedly helped this

project along in innumerable ways, material and spiritual. Eve, let me tell you a story. Circa 1970, I heard Elisabeth Schwarzkopf in one of her absolutely final farewell recitals, this one at Goucher College. That evening, after she gave a studiously ravishing performance of Schumann's *Der Nussbaum*, the audience sat transfixed as the pianist played the closing measures of the song. Just before he finished, a loud, stage-whispered "BRAVISSIMA!" erupted from the back of the auditorium, shattering the silence. Everyone immediately turned to see who had such bad concert manners. Those of us who recognized her were excited to realize that it was the great dramatic soprano Rosa Ponselle, who had started out singing opposite Caruso and had gone on to have a glorious career. When the audience began to applaud, Schwarzkopf smiled enigmatically and bowed mildly, first to one side and then the other. Then she extended her hand in Ponselle's direction and slowly began to lower her body in a deep curtsy, farther and farther forward and down, until her bowed head almost touched the floor. She held the pose for longer than seemed possible before she gracefully rose back up. It was the most dramatic event of the performance. The story is still told in Baltimore opera-queen circles, where it is known as "the night Betty B. went to the floor for Rosa." Eve, with these words, I go to the floor for you.