



The North Meridian Review

Manuscript 1163

A Face From Uranus: Correspondence Between Tedd Burr and Henry Bellamann 1943-1945

Nicolas Dowling

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/thenorthmeridianreview>

Lenny Pinna, ed. 2022. *A Face from Uranus: Correspondence between Tedd Burr and Henry Bellamann 1943–1945*. Johnstown: Ecclesia Arts, 346pp. ISBN 979-8987121313.

Reviewed by Nicolas Dowling

A Face from Uranus collects the correspondence between Tedd Burr and Henry Bellamann from 1943 until 1945. Lenny Pinna, the book's editor, provides an introduction that details his personal connection to Burr, how he came by the letters, and his opinion of their value. Pinna also includes a postscript explaining his goal of transforming the correspondence into a dramatic narrative as well as the results of his research into Bellamann's life.

On September 20, 1943, a teenage Burr wrote a fan letter to Bellamann in praise of his novel *Kings Row* and in the hope of reaching a consoling, kindred spirit. The young Burr kept this opening letter brief except to explain a kinship felt with one of Bellamann's book's central characters, Jamie Wakefield, a 'pretty' young man: "I fell into an utter storm for it was not of Jamie I read, but of myself."⁸² Bellamann initial response is politely welcoming, willingly reading Burr's history in minute detail and offering advice. Their conversation quickly focuses in on Burr's gendersex conflicts⁸³: preferences for makeup and longer hair; previous sexual contact with men; and daydreams of womanhood. The following quotation illustrates Burr's distress:

"I want to lie down and close my eyes – I am not Tedd Burr – I am a beautiful woman desired, loved, and cherished."⁸⁴

Bellamann's responses demonstrate an attempt at mentorship:

⁸² Lenny Pinna, *A Face from Uranus: Correspondence between Tedd Burr and Henry Bellamann 1943–1945* (Johnstown: Ecclesia Arts, 2022), 3.

⁸³ The reviewer has chosen the term 'gendersex' because the separation between gender identity and sexual orientation is never made by Tedd Burr and Henry Bellamann.

⁸⁴ Pinna, *A Face from Uranus*, 47.

“I am told that such utterly repellent people as Goering and Hitler and many of that horrible gang are sexual inverters and perverts. Do you wish to be of that terrible company?”⁸⁵

Bellamann’s advice shows an overarching argument for conformity and what we now understand as heteronormativity. Burr follows Bellamann’s advice unquestioningly, putting away the makeup and keeping a short haircut, even avoiding certain friends. Until the beginning of 1944, discussions of Burr’s gendersex issues are intertwined with their more lighthearted conversations about theater and various novels. Burr sent Bellamann copies of multiple writing projects in the hopes of receiving constructive criticism and praise (although Bellamann is usually less than complimentary): a novel, *The Surf*; a poem, ‘We Regret to Inform You’; several school papers; and a poetic soliloquy.

However, by May 1944, almost all talk of Burr’s gendersex uncertainty ends. Pinna notes, in his introduction, that nearly all the letters after January 11, 1944, are missing. He acknowledges the likelihood that they were destroyed by Burr. On November 20, 1944, Katherine Bellamann writes to Burr for the first time to explain that her husband is too ill to write but would still appreciate receiving letters. From this point on, the letters take on a more personal tone. Burr and Bellamann refer to each other in familial terms and discuss the possibility of meeting in person: “I am as concerned as much as, well, any son could be.”⁸⁶ Another bout of illness leaves Bellamann unable to write in early 1945. Burr received a final letter from Henry Bellamann on June 12, 1945, and a letter from Katherine Bellamann on June 16 that informed Burr her husband had died.

While the introduction contextualizes Pinna’s relationship with Tedd Burr and the letters themselves, the postscript utilizes his research into Henry Bellamann’s life to reveal the lies told

⁸⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 228.

to Burr. Pinna details the ways Bellamann's educational background was misrepresented to gain teaching positions and allay the discomfort of being younger than Katherine. But the most important discovery was Bellamann's relationship with Albert Berghauser, a childhood friend and the inspiration for Jamie Wakefield. Bellamann tells Burr in multiple letters⁸⁷ that the real-life Jamie was unsuccessful and that his life ended poorly, but Berghauser was a professor of French and German at Furman University. Furthermore, Berghauser lived with the newlywed Bellamanns for five years, including a sabbatical in Europe alone with Henry Bellamann, before Katherine made him leave. Pinna ends the postscript by empathizing with Henry Bellamann despite his lies and manipulation.

These letters are certainly valuable as queer, personal histories. Although there is a great deal less personal information given by Bellamann, both sides of the exchange explore the difficulties of gendersex nonconformity in the 1940s. Internalized homophobia, misogyny, and classism mix with hero worship and impressionable youth to mold the person that Burr became. While I am cautious against attributing contemporary labels to people of the past, Burr's story feels particularly similar to my own experience as a transgender person. Readers who would benefit most from examining *A Face from Uranus* are transgender youth looking for echoes of their own experiences through history. *A Face from Uranus* is Pinna's labor of love; he rescues from oblivion a queer platonic relationship and an account of historical gender nonconformity.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 21, 53.