

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

The Gay & Lesbian Review

WORLDWIDE

September–October 2017

\$5.95 USA and Canada

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

HUNTER O'HANIAN

Keeping Art Alive in These Times

ERIC ROBERTSON

Stop Everything! Save the Planet!

MEL PAISLEY

Assault on Our Performance Spaces

SEAN CAHILL

Make America Sick Again

INTESAR TOUFIC

Gay and Arab in the Trump Era

FALL BOOKS

The End of Freddie

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

The End of Eddy Reviewed

BY EDUARDO FEBLES

The Black Penguin's Epic Bus Trip

BY ANDREW HOLLERAN

Life & Times of Pauli Murray

BY MARTHA MILLER

EDMUND WHITE

On His Year in Rome

Freddie Mercury



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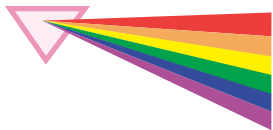
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The Fall: 'Survival Strategies—Reports from the Field'

IT TOOK some time and some intestinal fortitude, but the moment has finally arrived to address the consequences of last November's election. As I write, events are happening so rapidly that anything we say now about goings-on in Washington is likely to seem quaint by the time you read this issue. Instead, the pieces here are billed as "reports from the field" in that they consider various slices of LGBT Americans who stand in harm's way following the broad political shift that has occurred.

Thus, for example, Republican control of Congress and the presidency could have a major impact on the arts, especially those that depend heavily upon public funding. In an interview, College Art Association director Hunter O'Hanian discusses how proposed cutbacks could affect not only college arts but a host of programs for creative and performing artists, with LGBT people especially hard-hit given their overrepresentation in many of the arts.

A similar phenomenon is happening in the area of healthcare, as Sean Cahill discusses here, because LGBT people on average are more dependent upon Medicaid and other public programs than is the public at large. But everyone stands to suffer under the draconian cuts proposed by the administration, while the repeal of the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare")—seemingly dead as I write, but who knows?—would have even more devastating consequences on the uninsured.

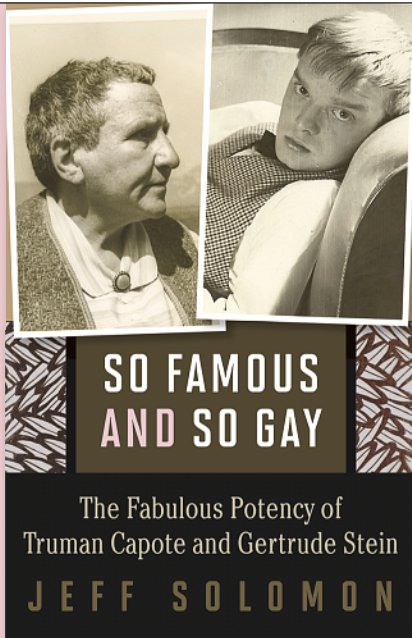
Even before the election, the Trump campaign had unleashed a wave of hatred and harassment of certain ethnic groups, recent immigrants, and other minorities, and the targeted groups have been feeling the sting. From Mel Paisley we learn that LGBT performance spaces, which serve in many cities as sanctuaries not only for artists but also for marginalized members of this community, have been under both physical and cyber attack.

The consequences of the election are coming into focus, but the underlying causes—*what happened?*—will doubtless be debated for decades. An outsider's perspective is offered by Intesar Toufic, a gay Lebanese man living in Japan, who sees the election in the context of several underlying trends: the rise of social media as the dominant source of information and conviction, the lifting of constraints on hate speech, threats, and deception on-line, and the increasingly macho culture of capitalism in the West.

An even wider perspective is offered by Eric Anderson, who harks back to Thomas Malthus in arguing that increasingly our problems derive from the sheer number of people on earth and their rapacity for goods. He calls upon LGBT people to take the lead in resisting the cult of procreation and consumption by promoting a culture of reason and restraint. To save the planet, save the Enlightenment.

RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.

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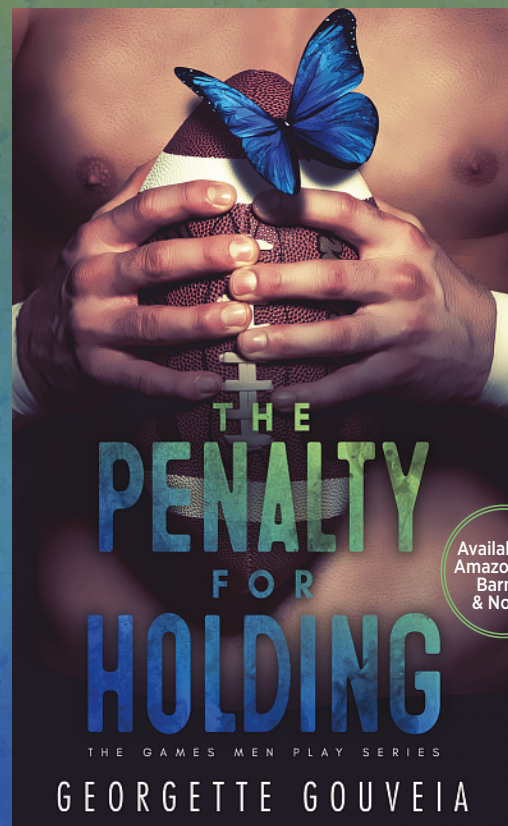


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Why Climate Change Is an LGBT Issue

LEWIS GANNETT

IN MAY of this year, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication reported a startling poll finding: 39 percent of Americans believe there's at least a fifty percent chance that climate change will kill off the human race. A sense that we're doomed seems to be creeping in. Perhaps it's not a surprise, given President Trump's energy policies. He is, after all, cramming CO₂ into the sky like a James Bond supervillain. No wonder the public feels on edge.

So far, though, we haven't seen much protest. Indeed, there's a growing sense of resignation. Friends of mine almost casually mention the appearance of bizarre craters all over Siberia. It seems that the decaying permafrost is leaking CO₂ and methane into underground pockets. They explode, popping out giant chunks of tundra. The entire Arctic, apparently, is fizzing with thawed greenhouse gases. Clearly, the situation is hopeless.

But what if it isn't? Surely we must fight this doomsday trend. There's so much at stake. For example, future generations. Readers of this magazine tend not to have children at the heterosexual rate, but lots of us are raising kids, and we have nieces and nephews. Of course we care about children. We're not just sybarites living for "the now," are we?

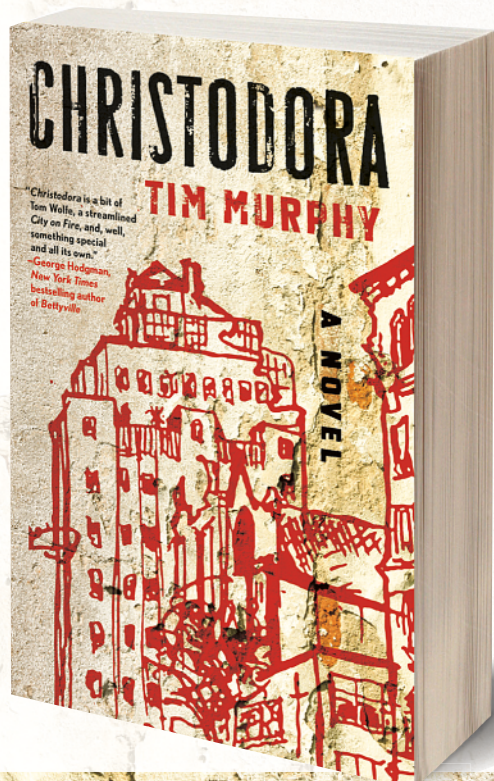
But for the sake of argument, let's say that many of us live for the present and avoid having children. Why should we care

about the future?

Let's start with the question of art. Isn't civilization worth saving for the beauty it produces? An informed love of art requires an eye for developing trends. In fact, it's a truism that lesbians and gay men exert disproportionate influence on the avant-garde. We care about what is to come. The essence of hip is knowing what's next.

That forward-looking knack also has a flipside, in the realm of art history, which is something of a gay specialty. There's some validity to the notion of a "gay sensibility" that imparts an appreciation for art and how it developed. Perhaps this has to do with a talent for empathy. The ability to understand other points of view—to see as others see—is central to homosexuality's penchant for crossing boundaries. To be able to see the world from other people's perspective is a crucial element of art and of art appreciation, and it extends to art preservation: curatorship, connoisseurship, and the collection of art objects.

How do these observations bear on the end of the world? I should think it's obvious. LGBT people must defy the larger culture's malaise. We must fight the dismal slide to climate ruin. Our very nature demands that we save civilization! We need to think of ourselves as hard-wired to protect beauty. Harry Hay said as much all those years ago: natural selection placed us here for a reason. It is our responsibility to take the lead in showing humanity how to protect the planet and preserve civilization.



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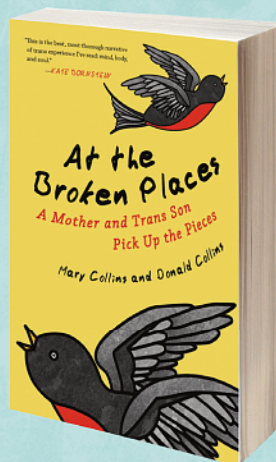
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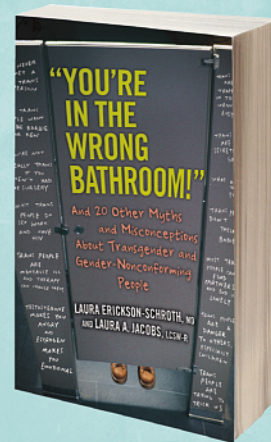


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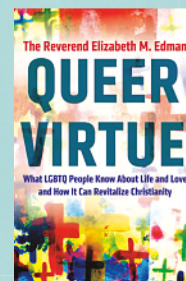
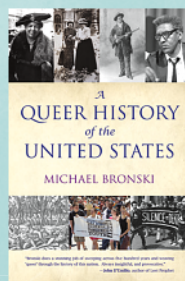
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Author Responds to a Book Review

To the Editor:

Reviewing my memoir, *My Father's Closet* (July-August 2017 issue), Dale Boyer captured the essence of my lifelong dilemma as the child of a closeted father. During a recent book tour, a man approached me to say that my father and his gay partner frequented his antique shop. I hugged him and honestly said, "Oh, so I didn't make them up!" Along with my mother and grandparents, father's secrets led me to creative interpretations about hidden elements in my family narrative.

Boyer's discomfort with not knowing what was true in the story and what wasn't, accurately describes this uncomfortable experience. I only wish he had also mentioned that I have filled the gaps with acceptance and love.

Karen A. McClintock, *Ashland, OR*
Author, *My Father's Closet* (Trillium, 2017)

Depiction of Marc Blitzstein Challenged

To the Editor:

In Martin Duberman's third article on the new Lincoln Kirstein archival finds ("Kirstein's Letters 3: Rivals and Idols," July-August 2017), he spends four substantial paragraphs on Kirstein's dislike for composer Marc Blitzstein. The production of *Danton's Death* was controversial indeed. However, Kirstein's word "lousy" should not be left as the final one on that production. In my biography of Blitzstein I also speak critically of his machinations on behalf of the Communist Party to alter the representation of Danton and Robespierre, but Blitzstein's musical contributions were recognized appreciatively. John Gutman in "Modern Music" actually called for "a more ample score" to help the play. These, of course, are subjective and debatable points.

However, I cannot imagine what happened to Duberman's famously impeccable scholarship in the final paragraph on this subject. Blitzstein was called before HUAC surprisingly only very late: He gave testimony in a closed "executive session," chaired by Rep. Morgan M. Moulder of Missouri, on May 8, 1958, seven years after Duberman claims Blitzstein was indicted. Blitzstein did indeed speak bravely and did not name names. But he was never called to testify in an open session; he was never indicted under the Smith Act or any other act; and he did not spend "four years (1954-1957) in prison." Those were the years he was enjoying his greatest commercial success Off Broadway as the adaptor of Brecht and Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. He was

working on his 1955 Broadway opera *Reuben Reuben*, and on the choral piece *This Is the Garden*. It's true that he was beaten badly by sailors in Martinique in 1964 and died of internal injuries; "murdered" implies a very different motivation and is not accurate. A little over a year later his attackers were convicted of assault and theft. And just for the record, he was 58, not 59. As far as the Smith Act indictment and prison sentence are concerned, clearly Duberman is either grossly misremembering or confusing him with someone else.

Incidentally, that summer of 1958 Blitzstein wrote musical scores for two of the productions at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Conn., directed by John Houseman, and served as overall musical director for the whole season. Lincoln Kirstein was a founder of the Festival and on its board. Anti-Communists picketed because of the recent HUAC testimony by another company member, but Houseman, Kirstein, and the rest of the board refused to dismiss anyone, because the rest of the company would have resigned in protest and there would have been no season. Apparently Kirstein had made sufficient peace with Blitzstein by then that whatever hatred for the composer he might once have felt no longer interfered with their working relationship.

Eric A. Gordon, *Los Angeles*

Martin Duberman Replies:

Eric's account of Marc Blitzstein's involvement with HUAC is the accurate one. I should have made it far more clear than I did that I was following Kirstein's version of events, and then pointed out how it diverged from reality.

I don't understand Eric's objection to my use of "murdered" in describing Blitzstein's death. Eric himself repeats my description of Blitzstein's death: "badly beaten" by sailors in Martinique, he died of internal injuries." They killed him. Isn't that "murder"?

As for Kirstein continuing to work with Blitzstein despite his dislike of him, that should come as no surprise. As I made clear in Part I of my essay, Kirstein often said foul things about and to people—and then went right on collaborating with them as if nothing negative had ever happened. Perhaps Eric didn't read Part I of the essay.

One More Time: How Did T. Williams Die?

To the Editor:

While I am a great admirer of the prolific and articulate writings of Andrew Holleran, I have to take issue with his claim in his "I'll Go Forth Alone" essay in your July-August 2017 issue, which cites the 2014 John Lahr

biography of Tennessee Williams to the effect that Williams' death in February 1983 "was most likely suicide," because "there were too many clues to ignore."

While that conclusion may cohere with the main theme Holleran was trying to articulate in his otherwise excellent article, it cannot be claimed that it is a decisive verdict at all. Granted, Holleran concedes that "No one can know," but I believe a more robust agnosticism is called for.

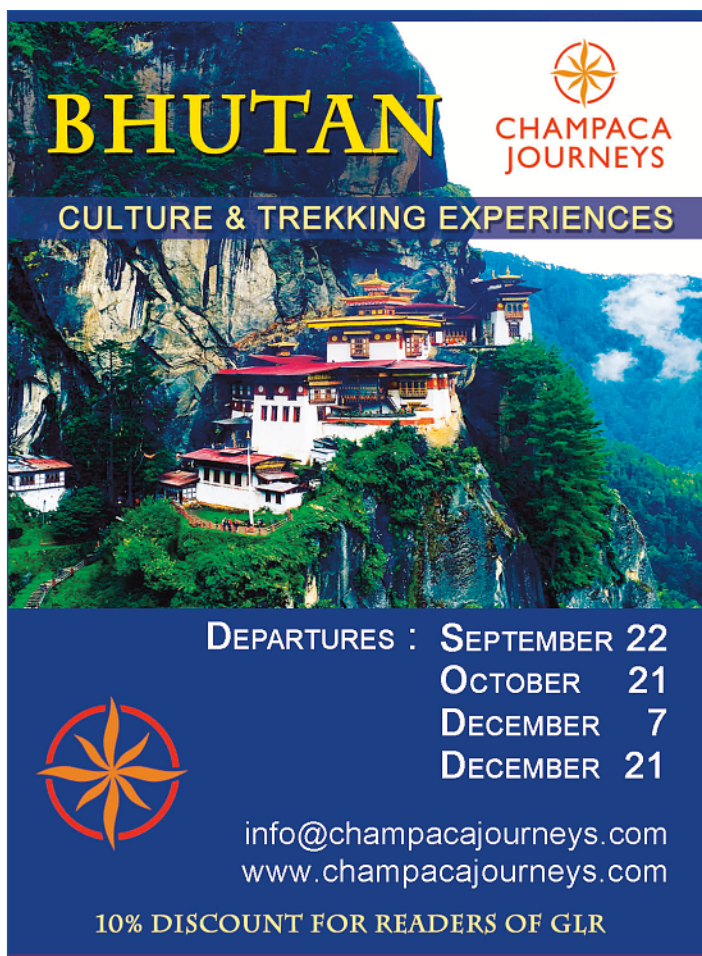
When I asked recently about this of perhaps the most qualified scholar of the late works of Williams, CUNY professor Annette J. Saddik (author of *Tennessee Williams and the Theatre of Excess: The Strange, the Crazy, The Queer*, 2015), she offered this: "I don't think we can ever know if Tennessee Williams actually took his own life, but it seems that it was an accident due to Seconal intolerance mixed with alcohol. It could have been intentional, perhaps subconsciously so, but I don't think he can definitely say it was suicide. It seems more like an accidental overdose. He was writing regularly up until the end and even finished another one-act play in January 1983."

The case for an accident and not suicide exists much more abundantly than the other way around, principally by virtue of his ongoing and unbroken dedication to his creative work. While no doubt in poor health (as always) and complaining about that (as always), Williams was scheduled to deliver remarks to a class of students the next day and had notes in his briefcase making the case that his playwriting was actually a form of poetry.

It is the misguided, poor opinion of critics to his later works that may lead one to conclude it was suicide, but it is Dr. Saddik, whose scholarship is now spearheading a reappraisal of his later work, who claimed: "He was not the 'played out,' self-obsessed, Southern relic that the press tried to suggest he was from the 1960s to the end of his life. ... Nor could he be dismissed as a drunk and 'sick' old queen, a sad victim of his own personal excesses."

According to Saddik, his later work "was rooted in a theoretical and theatrical tradition of excess, and he remained in touch with current styles of theatre and the work of young playwrights, taking risks to experiment with tone and style in his work. ... He was aware, he was current, he was brave ... he was a survivor. Never abandoning his lifelong habit of waking up at five every morning to write, he was as 'in-her-face' and not going away. When he died at the age of 71, Tennessee Williams was young."

Nicholas F. Benton, *Falls Church, VA*



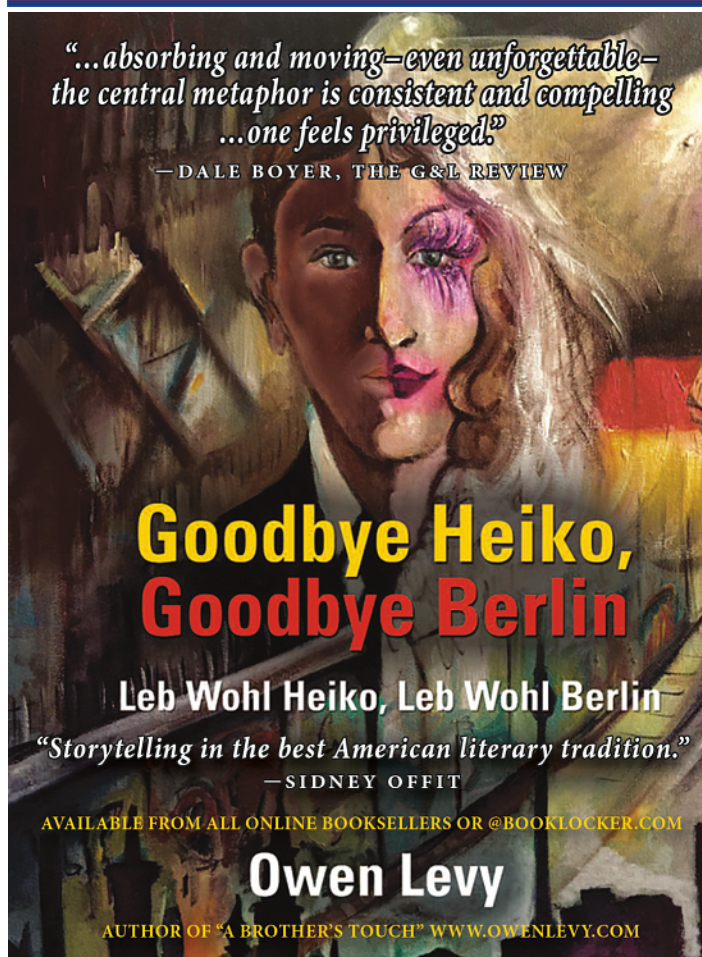
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BTW

Purity on Parade The biggest story of the past cycle was undoubtedly the ousting of several women from the Chicago Dyke March in July. Their crime: carrying rainbow flags on which were superimposed a Star of David. According to reports, on seeing the contingent the Dyke March Collective stopped the three flag bearers and questioned them about their views on Israel, trying to smoke out if they were anti-Palestinian (a major no-no). Also asserted was that their banner bore an Israeli flag, which also sports a Star of David, though it's surprising that the Collective couldn't see the distinction. Eventually, the women were judged to be insufficiently pro-Palestinian and told to leave; and things blew up from there on the blogosphere. For anyone in New York or Boston, this action brings to mind the many St. Patrick's Day parades from which LGBT groups were excluded. Only now it seems to be not the presence of the group or even the flag they held but instead their ideological purity that got them thrown out—grist for the right-wing propaganda machine, to be sure, which lives for this kind of thing.

Ken Just Got a New Look! Lots of new looks, in fact: new body types ("slim," "broad," and "original"), new skin tones, and nine hair styles (including the man bun). And those outfits! Take the three Ken Dolls pictured here: you've got your basic surfer dude, a construction worker, and a jock—kind of like the various "macho" roles in the Village People, which were basically drag versions of a sailor, a policeman, et al. In Ken's case, he can also be undressed (hold the jokes), and here the offer of three body designs is intriguing, as the many Barbie models must have different "types" when it comes to men. Then, too, if the rumors about Ken are true, there *should* be a range of types to choose from. Indeed it was always vaguely unsettling that two Kens stuffed into a toychest or dollhouse would each be making out with his clone.



The Vatican Rave A "drug-fueled gay orgy" is how the police report described what they found upon arriving at an address just outside Vatican City. Its host was a Catholic priest who was the personal secretary to Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, one of Pope Francis' top advisers. This isn't the first time a Church official has gotten into trouble in approximately this way right under the Pope's nose, but this guy decided to do it in style. Using his position under the Cardinal he managed to commandeer a special apartment that's reserved for high-ranking Vatican officials but *not* support staff. To transport the drugs, he used a car with an official Vatican license plate,

thereby avoiding inspection by Italian border police. He even seems to have worked in some symbolism: the elite apartment is located inside what was until recently the palace of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the office that strictly enforces Catholic dogma. Nicely executed!

“Man on Siri” Theory Voided The Utah Attorney General’s Office has stated in a court ruling that there is no constitutional right to marry one’s laptop computer. The rebuke was directed at one Chris Sevier, who has waged an ongoing legal battle to be allowed to do just that. That he litigated this thing all the way to the AG’s office is impressive: perhaps a lower judge saw the movie *Her* and bought the premise that one can fall in love with Siri. But, of course, this was a stunt lawsuit brought by an opponent of same-sex marriage who wanted to make a point. His case derived from the old saw that gay marriage will open the floodgates to people wanting to marry their Chihuahuas (recall Rick “Man on Dog” Santorum). That argument never got far with judges or normally intelligent people, as clearly the key ingredient to a marriage contract is consent, which is absent in a dog or a goat—or an inanimate object. Nor is Sevier alone in trying to create a *reductio ad absurdum* of marriage equality—one guy recently tried to marry himself—as a way to ridicule this newly acquired right. Still, one has to wonder whether it’s gay marriage that’s being ridiculed when, in defense of “traditional” marriage, the guy finds himself before a judge saying that he really, really wants to tie the knot with his laptop. And a footnote: Sevier has been accused of stalking by country music star John Rich. Now it’s starting to get weird.

Where the Boys Are From the annals of recent experience: a visit to Marshall’s to buy a pair of boxer briefs. Well, I can remember when the bulges on the packages were air-brushed so thoroughly that you wondered where the willies went. Today, of



course, quite the opposite effect is cultivated. As luck would have it, minutes earlier I’d been in the locker room of the Boston Sports Club, where after showering all the (straight) men clutch their tow-

els to their waists while struggling into their underpants lest their junk be exposed for an instant. *There seems to be a disconnect here.* In the media, even on prudish old TV, sex is everywhere: a dick joke for every sitcom, a shirtless hunk for every reality show. Back in real life, at the beach, the young men sport bathing suits that extend below the knees, similar to what they wear at the gym: baggy and black and unrevealing. Could it be that all this covering up is a response to the presence, real or imagined, of gay guys checking them out? The days of swimming nude at the Y are long gone; maybe it’s true that gay liberation ruined everything when it brought cruising into the open. Still, there could be another explanation. Most men in Speedos don’t look anything like the models on those labels or the dudes on reality TV. Going back to Victorian gym- and swimwear could just be a way that men have tacitly agreed not to compete with Calvin Klein.

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Cassandra Langer talks with the head of the College Art Association

Keeping Art Alive in These Times

HUNTER O'HANIAN

IN HIS ROLE as executive director of the College Art Association, Hunter O'Hanian is in a unique position to understand how government policy and funding affect the arts in higher education. Other positions he has held in arts management have given him a broad overview of the art world from both a creative and an institutional perspective.

For almost a decade, starting in 1997, O'Hanian was the executive director of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Mass. He served for three years, starting in 2009, as a vice president of the Massachusetts College of Art (MassArt) in Boston. Prior to taking his position at the CAA last year, he was the museum director for the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art in Manhattan.

Public support for all of the arts is under threat in the wake of last November's election. In this interview, which was conducted by phone in May, O'Hanian addresses the challenges facing both artists and arts organizations in the current political environment.

— CASSANDRA LANGER

Cassandra Langer: Let me start right in with a question about the arts in the new political environment. What do you see as the most important threats to the creative arts?

Hunter O'Hanian: Two things come to mind right away. First, one of the most pressing problems is the current economic situation and how it impacts today's students in the arts and humanities. I am deeply concerned that the high cost of undergraduate and graduate education has left today's students and recent grads burdened with a near-lifetime of debt. These grads are virtually living hand-to-mouth because of carrying so much debt. Many are barely paying for rent, food, and necessities, much less paying back their loans. The very idea of having the energy and time to make art becomes a tremendous challenge. It seems unrealistic to expect the arts community—teachers, students, and working artists—to find the energy to focus on making work and exploring new ideas while they go from job to job just to make ends meet. This is a major threat to their creativity in the years ahead. How can they possibly participate in the arts and humanities without basic support?

CL: And the second problem?

HO: Without question it is the current administration's openly

hostile stance toward the arts and humanities and marginalized communities. This is a problem especially for GLBTQ artists and writers as the administration appears to be actively working against them. Given the president's budget—with the proposed elimination of the NEA, NEH, CPB, IMLS,* and other vital agencies, along with the billions of dollars in additional funding for the military and tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations—the only conclusion one can draw is that this government wants to strip culture from our society. They also intend to roll back progressive accomplishments for the gay community.

It really goes against what this country is founded on. Many of those involved in the creation of this country—from Washington to Jefferson—spoke to the need for an educated population, one schooled in science, arts, and humanities. However, today, the government is trying to eradicate as many federal agencies as they can. It's stunning to realize that we live in a

society that has systematically targeted all humanities and arts programs for elimination. It's not that they are trying to *reduce* funding—they want funding *eliminated*. Unfortunately, if they get their way, it will embolden state governments to follow suit. These state budgets support many grants to artists, education in the schools, and other enrichment programs. It could have a chilling effect on the arts and humanities at the local level. These cuts would further undermine the advancement of marginalized minorities nationwide.

There is a bright side to this, however. Over the past few weeks, I've had the opportunity to visit many congressional offices and conducted numerous conversations on the current funding situation.

Despite the efforts of the current government to eliminate culture from our society, I remain optimistic that sanity will prevail and Congress will reject the President's plan and save these vital agencies. We saw this happen with the recent passage of the 2017 budget, where some arts and humanities budgets were actually increased over Trump's expressed wishes that they be eliminated. Many members of Congress, including both Democrats and Republicans, understand the social role played by culture as well as its economic impact. They know it's foolhardy to simply scrap these programs.

* National Education Association, National Endowment for the Humanities, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Institute of Museum and Library Services.



Hunter O'Hanian

CL: You mentioned that America's founders wanted a progressive foundation in the humanities and sciences. As an Americanist art historian and critic, I was very much aware of the culture wars of the 1980s and '90s, as I am sure you were. We seem to have lost our way not only because of economics but because of the constant struggle with a white patriarchy determined to stay in power regardless of what's best for the country. Do you have any thoughts on what has contributed to the nation's turn away from the progressive ideas of the founders?

HO: It's complicated. I think a lot of this is backlash against the progress made during the previous administration. During Obama's eight years, the concerns of diversity and marginalized communities were brought to the forefront. I remember having tears in my eyes hearing the President and U.S. Attorney General openly and proudly defend the rights of the LGBT community.

But while that was happening, a large part of the country was suffering from a loss of jobs and opportunities. They were left behind—blue-collar workers whose industries were being phased out, among others. They are coal miners, steel workers, and other skilled workers. They didn't realize that the jobs that had sustained them through generations were a thing of the past. Some didn't want to change and learn new skills. Honest labor was what they knew, what they were proud of. So the current president's campaign exploited their anger and, in truth, conned them into voting for him.

Those of us in the Northeast, West Coast, and other "blue" areas of the country often live in our own bubbles. This is especially true of many artists, academics, and progressive members of the gay community. In many cases, we have failed to reckon with the disparities in education and economic opportunity and the continued sexism, racism, and homophobia that were not vanquished during the progressive years. At times, we were happy to focus on loftier issues and topics, but we missed the extent to which right-wing fringe groups were able to grab hold of power and promulgate policies that furthered control by white male heterosexuals at the expense of communities who have traditionally been marginalized. Just look at those with whom the president surrounds himself at points of celebration—almost all white, straight, middle-aged men of wealth and power. And *they* are the ones who gather to decide what women should be allowed to do with their own bodies or how gay people should be treated in housing or the workplace?

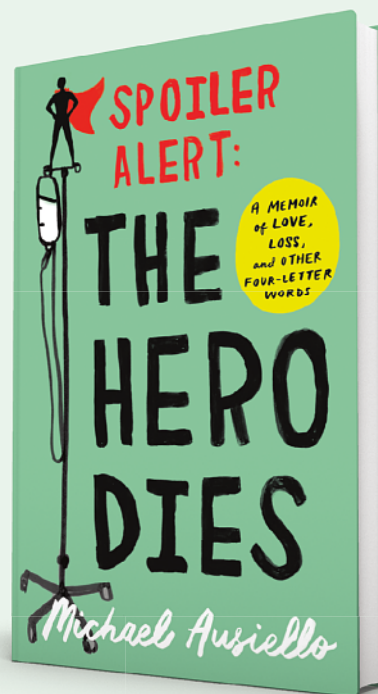
CL: Do you think their conservative ideology will adversely affect the humanities and the sciences?

HO: Without a doubt. The humanities and sciences are fact-based disciplines. Science is about what can be proven or what we can discover based upon evidence. The present government and many of its supporters seem to have no problem in ignoring facts—whether about the size of the crowd at an inauguration, what someone said in public, or the causes of climate change. They simply make stuff up as they go along to suit their agenda.

The mainstream media, always looking for ratings and readers, often goes along and is not as vigilant as it should be. So, we have a confused American public. This could be especially true in more conservative states as they listen to media outlets like Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, Laura Ingraham, Ann Coulter, and others who feed them a steady diet of misinformation. But

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many of us on the Left are just as guilty, as we too live in a bubble, getting our news from like-minded sources found at MSNBC, *The New Yorker*, *HuffPost*, and other left-leaning outlets.

The election should have been a wake-up call for everyone. Unfortunately, the federal government in all three branches is dominated by straight white men who have no intention of giving up their power. They felt that the progressive coalition that was changing the country and allowing others to have a seat at the table had to be stopped. They used a combination of religion, economics, and envy to regain lost territory. However, the push-back by people who voted for Hillary Clinton presents an opportunity for liberals, progressives, and moderates to get involved and effect change. It will take time, but the signs are hopeful: the Women's March, the Tax March, the Science March, the Climate March—these are all important actions.

CL: Are you concerned that curators and museums are self-censoring rather than confronting issues around racism, sexism, and homophobia?

HO: The effect of commercialization and industrialization on today's cultural organizations is staggering. In many cases, the arts, humanities, and academia are driven by broader economic concerns. Consequently, we are in danger of raising an entire generation less attuned to arts and culture than previous generations. In some cases, museums are less concerned about content and messages of artists than about exhibitions that will draw the biggest crowds. This leaves many gay artists out in the cold.

This trend has spilled over into our universities and colleges.

Faculty members have told me that their administrators have advised them not to "rock the boat." Many have been silenced by students who complain of being impacted by "micro-aggressions"—so much so that creative dialogue has become impossible. Arts programs have been advised to avoid controversial visiting artists, thus putting a chill on inviting people who can stimulate lively discussion of contemporary issues and intersectionality in the arts. Teachers have been told that "mum's the word," because controversial speakers on both left and right would compromise the financial interests of their institutions.

CL: Do you see this as affecting the delivery system of the arts to the public?

HO: There's no question that this has become an ongoing problem, particularly with our larger and more established museums nationwide. The strength of our institutions is the individuals who support them: museum-goers, local governments, and boards of directors. These in turn impact the ability of curators to address controversial issues or take risks. Fewer risks means shutting out new voices.

CL: To what extent do you think this administration is going to undercut the progress the LGBT community has made in the last decade?

HO: We must remember the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Today over 130 laws attacking gay rights are pending in state legislatures around the country. The states of Texas and North Carolina are trying to roll back gay marriage and other equal rights protections that gays have sacrificed and fought for over many generations. Those in power actively do not want parity for women, racial minorities, or the LGBTQ community. We now have a situation where the powerful are empowered to roll back the gains we have made in the last eight years. It appears driven by moralistic judgments of the far religious Right that seek to disadvantage marginalized communities. Given the direction the country is going in and the rise of retrograde forces worldwide, we are going to have to come together with other liberal, progressive, and radical forces in an activist way to challenge government powers at the national, state, and local levels.

CL: What is your sense of how the Internet and social media have changed how we see things today and how a younger generation of Millennials sees things?

HO: Millennials are the future. Information for them comes from the web. We are living in an era of momentous change. Facebook, Instagram, and other platforms are part of their everyday life. We live in a global world with a global vision. That said, it is refreshing to see that many young people are turning to an older generation of gay folks for advice on how to fight the fight. It's encouraging that many of them believe that we are all connected. That bodes well for the future. Our young people, as well as the older generation, are finding new ways to winter this political ice age of the patriarchs through digital media. For gays, this may mean revisiting our roots and questioning the assimilation of the past decade. It may mean returning to our subversive and revolutionary roots and restructuring the way we think about acceptance in today's world. Artists and gays have always put themselves on the front lines and no doubt we will continue to do so in the future. It is our only hope. 🏳️‍🌈

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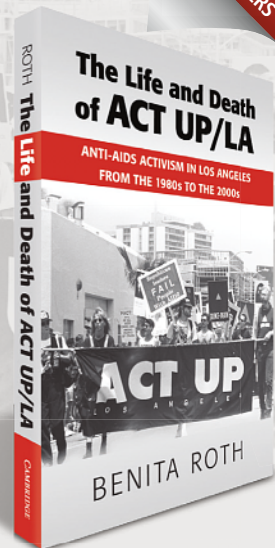
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Stop Everything! Save the Planet!

ERIC ROBERTSON

AS A QUEER ECOLOGIST, I'd like to say something about population. But I cannot. What I would say if it were permissible is that, as queer people who want families, we are uniquely positioned to raise and develop the multitudes of the neglected and unwanted. Yes, cleaning up the procreative messes of straight people sounds unsavory—particularly in the light of the 2016 election—but altruism of this nature carries a measurable ecological weight.

If it were discussable, I would share the stories of my contra-sexed and coupled friends who tell me that, if their truth be told, they're terrified to have children. They recognize that modern parenthood is based more upon market consumerism and human ego than upon securing some imagined brighter future.

Let me say to all such couples: come with my partner David and me, and we'll spend our lives drinking wine from local vineyards, growing food in our backyards, playing music, walking in parks with stray dogs, and designing small, sexy, efficient homes while enjoying more evening sunlight and windstorms and bird migrations. We'll stop buying one another useless gifts for hollow made-up occasions. We'll indulge our senses for no reason at all, at any time we like, never beholden to absurdly explained, consumption-based justifications. There'll be no need for greeting cards, gift certificates, or specialty cakes baked by bigots (or not baked by them).

One is not allowed to say that most parents are incompetent and many of their kids are zombies. *I* can't say these things because I'm just some gay guy who can't possibly know what it's like to be a parent. Criticizing parents and their children is like telling people to stop breathing because you're annoyed with the mouth noises they make. I can't say these things because of God and Republicans and capitalism and because of Macy's and Disney and Coca-Cola and every company that automatically defaults to the image of the family as the single most effective means to sell a product. I can't say these things because I believe in politically protected, procreative personal choice and self-determination.

But because people like me cannot say these things and be taken seriously, there is no serious conversation taking place around the damaging effects of today's reproductive cultures. I'm just some self-centered white guy who has sex with other guys like myself while we spend a lot of money on organic pro-

duce, drink more than we should at Sunday brunch, and experience pleasure for no reason at all. Gay men like me have no reproductive value. Our sexual efforts amount to nothing. And that is precisely the point: that is what just might save the planet. Nothing. We need more humans engaged in more activities, sexual and otherwise, that amount to nothing.

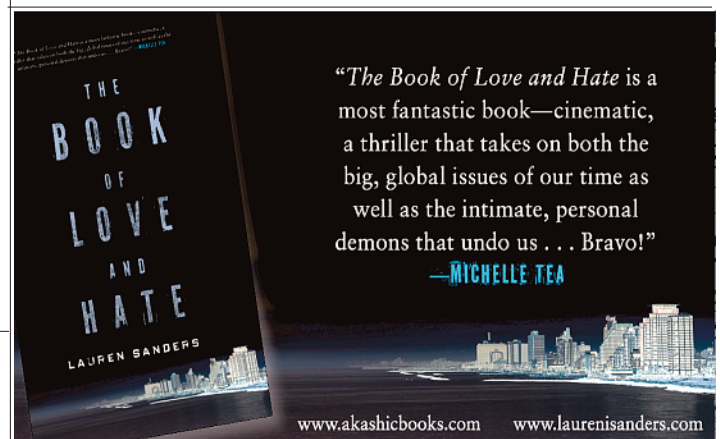
The reason I feel justified in criticizing human parents and parenting and human children and childhood is because I study animals. Mother apes (and the occasional father) hold their babies until the infant is ready to let go. If we knew this first, how other apes operate, we may well solve a host of sociological problems by ensuring that the neurochemicals most needed for a healthy social development, produced by a human parent constantly touching an offspring, take root early in life.

You don't want to hold your babies? Then don't have babies. Strapping them into plastic molds welded to multi-axled pushcarts, some doublewide with lofts and cargo holds, not only isolates and frightens human babies, it disrupts the calm of other human apes in coffee shops and on public transit, at concerts and baseball games. Not only does *not* holding human babies make for more cranky, maladjusted adults, it pisses off many other human apes just going about their business, not expecting to have a phalanx of plastic machinery disrupt a comforting cup of hot chai. I criticize parents and children because I'm concerned about the species to which I proudly belong. We need to ape what it means to be an ape.

I criticize parenting because I see the epidemic of rampant consumption (originally a Victorian disease) instilled at an early age, and it never goes away. Even at one's beloved Trader Joe's, one is menaced by swarms of neoliberal consumers-in-training dressed in synthetic tutus and bright knee-socks tearing off chunks of real flesh with the front wheels of their trolleys as they fill their miniature shopping carts full of or-

Because people like me cannot say these things, there is no serious conversation around the damaging effects of today's reproductive cultures.

Eric Robertson studies and practices queer ecology among the mountains and Mormons of Utah, where he teaches environmental humanities at Utah Valley University.



ganic gummies and salted caramels.

I criticize parents and parenting because I see my straight friends forced to come out of their nonreproductive closets to admit—in full defiance of the supposedly universal “norm of pronatalism”—that they aren’t having children, only to face the shock and disappointment of family and friends. Accused of being selfish and careerist, they face as much disdain as many gay couples do just for existing as such. But this kind of self-centeredness has an essential role to play as an ecological imperative.

QUEER ECOLOGY mounts a challenge to a fitness-focused Darwinism by examining the importance of human behaviors that appear to accomplish nothing. Under the influence of Darwinian feminists like Patricia Gowaty and Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, anthropologists are going back into old data sets collected decades ago to reassess the contributions made by nonreproductive individuals as documented within hunter-gatherer communities in Africa and South America. These self-identified homosexual individuals helped provision related offspring, provided protection and education, and in many cases were also shamans and spirit healers. They created and helped pass on sets of cultural genetics and ensured the survival of their own genes in the bodies of nieces and nephews.

The nature-versus-nurture debate collapses when we realize that nonreproductive individuals, influenced by genetics and

purposefully integrated into cultures, have a huge influence on how societies sustain themselves and how they evolve. Queer people today have an opportunity to help redirect human ecological trajectories by resisting economies of increase, ones championed by the current political malignancy in power, and can instead help foster a slowdown in human growth and environmental exploitation. Queer ecology compels us to study ecological limits and the urgently needed social mechanisms of *limiting*. If we choose to limit, our behavior becomes a vital part of human ecology as we address climate and habitat change. How do we creatively learn to desire less, buy less, procreate less, eat less, develop less? Limits are essential to the study of any ecosystem.

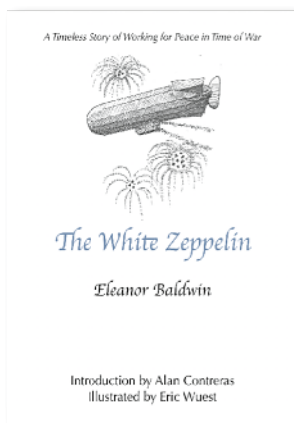
When you think less of yourself as human and increase your ape-awareness, you have the opportunity to think less of the culture that made your *self* and more of the forces that produced your *species*. When you think less of the self and more of the species, you become wonderfully strange. You become queer. You enter the strange poetic beauty of Robinson Jeffers: “Mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. ... Turn outward from each other, so far as need and kindness permit, to the vast life and inexhaustible beauty beyond humanity.” Queer ecology asks us to include the choice of non-procreativity into the brave, thoughtfully conceived, and beneficial pantheon of life choices that enjoy social acceptance. But is this even possible? Can we allow people without progeny to help shepherd a human ecology into and through contraction?

What being a queer ecologist may mean is that *less is more*. It is an ecology of contraction as a human choice (favored by culture) as opposed to a demographic collapse at the hands of natural selection. Less now or less later. We can do this the hard way, or we’ll end up doing it the harder way. The problem with choosing contraction, a life with less, is that our social constructions, predetermined before we were born, demand increase—increase in progeny, in comfort levels, in control. Increase is what defines both Victorian Darwinism and American-style consumerism. Increase equals happiness. Contraction equals death and chaos. In a culture hoarding seemingly limitless stores of different commodities, any loss, no matter how small, causes panic. This is the primary effect of the grand American bloat obstructing and disabling our current political system. No one wants to propose actions that might challenge the ideology of perpetual expansion. Such proposals can only arise at the grassroots level.

Human ecology is not a stagnant concept. Constant change is the one hard-nosed reality of thinking like a queer ecologist. For now, there is no normal. No normal highs or lows in temperature. No above or below normal rainfall or snowpack or water levels. During times of dramatic shifts in ecosystems, there is no normal. Here’s where queer theory comes in handy.

“Normal” is a made-up construct. Normal is based on what excites and girds power structures. Ski industries, monoculture agriculture, oil producers, stock markets, daily calorie counts, wedding planners, diaper makers, plastics—all are established and maintained by straight white men. If it serves the landowner, the general, the CEO, or the politician, normal can be manipulated according to conditional metrics designed to maintain con-

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trol. How is it possible to wrest control from the mechanisms fueled by increase? Do more of nothing. We can choose to do less of what keeps these institutions in power.

How then to navigate contraction? How to live with more of nothing, more of expenditure without return? More sex without babies? More home gardens instead of home businesses? More walking without weight-loss goals? Being ecologically queer amidst normal means dropping everything to the ground to stare change in the face—this burning house, these melting walls of ice, this explosion of insects, these whirling winds, this present, terrifying but terrifically ecstatic moment in time.

This message may be first one of caution to the gay community—a community of which I count myself a proud member. I worry about gay people becoming “normal”—reproducing, over-consuming, aerating thick green lawns praised by the executive next-door who has recently “evolved” on the issue of gay marriage. The danger is that gay becomes less queer (in the old sense), and the push against all that is normal becomes sluggish. The same power structures remain. Being accepted into society—which for Americans means being accepted as well-vetted, well-vested consumers—has long been the prize for the gay rights movement. But shouldn’t the prize also include the right to remain different? Shouldn’t the prize include having a place at the table to make the announcement that my partner and I have decided not to marry, and not to have children?

Living with less seems impossible inside current normativity. The existential shift from growth to contraction is inconceivably frightening. After all, contraction, in economic terms, means recession. This shift must be championed by people who worship less. Maybe gay folks need a moment to examine what our place could be as material agents of change as nonreproducers. Can we lead others into these ecologies of contraction?

Queer ecology is a post-humanist ethic that seems impossible to embody or enact. Acting more like an ape does not mean shedding clothing and copulating in front of strangers in public parks or stealing food off the tables at outdoor cafes. But we can adapt to our new and changing habitats by re-examining the genus to which we belong. Letting go of normal sexuality means better understanding the unique ape-ness of homo sapiens. Letting go of what is socially appropriate and embracing more of what is ape-congruent means letting breasts hang out with no cover when a child is hungry. More ape, less human means strapping a child to your chest wherever you are for as long as the child needs. It means freeing those infants from the plastic cocoons, strapped and restrained and disoriented. More ape, less human means taking cues from our cousins, the bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) and using sex as a means of social organization and recreation. More ape, less human means we know where our food comes from. We know where we leave our shit. We see once again our naked bodies.

The queer ecologist asks that we uncover ourselves: drop the robes, wipe off the makeup, put down the implements, cease using so much language and simply see flesh and bone as they exist without the manipulation of human culture. Less speech, more grunts and groans.



SEX CULTURES

Amin Ghaziani

University of British Columbia

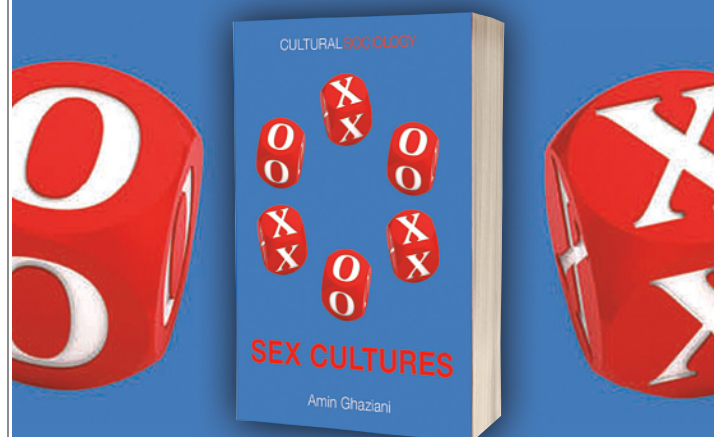
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Gay and Arab in the Trump Era

INTESAR TOUFIC

I PROMISED MYSELF I wouldn't, but I scrolled through my cousin's Facebook wall the other day. This cousin is Arab, as am I, and we used to be very close—until he moved to Texas for university. He was born in the U.S., something I sort of envied, but not terribly. When he told me this, I was too young to grasp fully what it meant. So, what I found on his wall were the usual reposts of trending memes and phrases, then the odd alt-right media nugget. I had to resist the urge to slap corrections on the comments after these posts, for ignoring someone in cyberspace is as easy as ignoring Syrian refugees. It is a click away.

Seeking to appease my Messiah complex, I set out to understand how an Arab could court right-wing propaganda. What I know about this cousin is that he is a conformist. He can befriend anyone. It is admirable: seeking friendship and good relations with the neighbors is part of our heritage. But popularity is a double-edged sword, and with him it had drawn his own blood. He used to be friendly and approachable to his family but has grown aloof, less enthusiastic about life, more sober, cynical, like a child who has discovered a magician's tricks. Now, his profile picture is him standing strong, as if you'd just insulted him or stepped on his lawn. His frequently shared phrases include things like "sorry not sorry" and "I do X. Respect that!"

I dug deeper to further understand his social circle. I found his "likes" on his friends' neo-conservative posts, but not a peep when they posted things demeaning Arabs or Muslims or presenting mistruths about us as facts. I can hardly imagine him discouraging or disagreeing with those who would seek further war and bloodshed in the Middle East. In short, he has become the token conservative Arab friend, insulting liberals along with the misinformed and remaining quiet when his allies discuss his own people, including the violent ones.

THE ON-LINE JUNGLE

One certainty is that nobody will allow anyone to get the best of them on Facebook. Facebook is about saving face. It is about showing the best side of yourself to everyone in your life, and even when you nag or complain or seek help, the end result is to serve *you*. It is your own territory in cyberspace and you can be as totalitarian or democratic as you please. If you post something and someone corrects you, it can be rather embarrassing, because this correction will serve as a record of your fallibility, and it is not going anywhere unless you delete it, concede with poise, or respond. Then, if your response is responded to and you are again

corrected, you relive the humiliation until one side lets it go. How many times have you seen "Oh, you're right" or "I stand corrected" on Facebook? It is not a place where humans concede any ground, perhaps because there is no real ground to concede.

This dynamic is a symptom of our times. We come to battle armed with arguments given to us by our media outlets of choice, and the more stubborn *the other side* is, the more they become a nuisance to us, an enemy of the proper functioning of society, an obstacle to our personal utopia. *The other* becomes an idiot, a buffoon, a snowflake, a "libtard," a bigot, a moron, a racist, a homophobe who needs to have their mind purged. We cocoon ourselves in the news of the world that satisfies our paradigms, and we fuse our worldview with this new information, ready to emerge as a pawn of its source—"us"—and prepared to ravage the enemy colony.

This is why I try to keep an open mind and dip into right-wing waters. I comment with corrections, and in come the trolls. I don't read their responses. It is understandable to me why I receive them, though. Counterarguments pop up in our minds

because refuting *the other* has become a staple of the internet's news outlets. All the talking-points are on the tips of our tongues and fingers, and it's easy to type them out. We've memorized them. In contrast, it is redundant to elaborate on why someone's comment is valid or insightful. A simple thumbs-up will do.

In this post-truth era, anything we don't agree with is labeled as "fake news," whether it comes from an established media source or some upstart sensationalist who profits off fear-mongering, intolerance, and semantic distractions. Even when commenting within our own ideological orbit, step outside the prevailing opinion on some issue and we're likely to be called an "idiot" or some insult. Thus are we whipped—disciplined—into agreeing. If we say that this person is being too aggressive, then we are weak or stupid. There is something convincing about forcefulness. Public events in the U.S. are aggressive affairs. You will never hear an American crowd cheering for a calm Jesus over a charismatic Lucifer. "Keep fighting" is a favorite watchword, which makes sense when your side is that of absolute righteousness.

THERE'S A WHOLE WORLD OUT THERE

I live in Japan. Here, manliness is about production, not machismo. Here, righteousness is gentle. A loud voice does not show strength but betrays foolishness. Here, charisma is a dish of mellow spices. It has been magnificent to live in such a peaceful and industrious place. I have met Thais and Bhutanese and Koreans and Chinese and Vietnamese and Filipinos. They have their own ways of thinking, of going about things, their

Our best weapon against hardliners and theocrats is a West to admire, not one to abhor. ... But it remains a dream.

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own vices and virtues, and codes for judging what act falls into which of those two categories. It is different from the West, and it puts me at ease. No matter how great the problems in the West, the Far East is significant economically and politically. Trump wants the U.S. out of the pivotal Paris Climate Agreement. Meanwhile, China is planning to invest billions in renewable energy. The U.S. is a superpower, but not the only significant country on the planet.

I am Lebanese, part of the Arab tapestry, a tapestry soaking in blood and oil. I feel that I must change minds through correct information before it's too late. But who am I? I am nobody yet. As a sociologist, I firmly believe in Max Weber's faith in the agency of the individual, but because of our short attention spans and media becoming flashier and dumbed down, this agency has been undermined. I guiltily admit that I've found myself immersed in all kinds of sweet distractions (*RuPaul's Drag Race*) because thinking about the real world makes me feel powerless, makes me lose sleep.

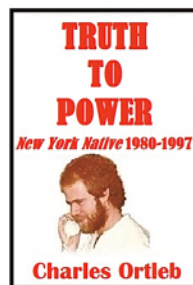
If Americans only knew how desperately people like me long to vote in their elections. In the midst of all this frustration is the dream of the secular Arab Left. Our best weapon against hardliners and theocrats is a West to admire, not one to abhor—a benevolent West that upholds human rights everywhere, without double standards, and prosecutes anyone who breaches them. We want to bring LGBT rights, women's equality, and environmental sustainability to our countries, but without having these imports tainted by Western greed and injustice. But it remains a dream.

In Lebanon, we recently held our annual Beirut Pride week, and for the first time we received a threat from hardline Islamists. This still did not hamper the event, which simply relocated to another indoor venue discreetly and went on to receive unprecedented media coverage, thus scoring us a victory over the short-sighted strategy of the biased and the pious.

The situation is as ridiculous as it is serious: I am an Arab homosexual. I have a rough beard and it digs out moan after moan when grazing the asses of my lovers. In my native country, I am queer and flirting with danger. Sure, we have our laughs, our transvestite prostitute friends—bless them—our days with eyeliner and not a care in the world. We are simply the queers that most people are too busy to do something about. A sharp quip gets giggles from rough-looking strangers on the corner. First they smirk, then they expect us, then they anticipate us, and finally we become the highlight of their difficult blue-collar workweek. We make a few strides of progress—but then something explodes.

When something explodes, all the West is put under scrutiny: Trump eclipses the glory of democracy, civilian blood stains the Declaration of Human Rights, women's emancipation becomes blasphemy, and homosexuality becomes *treasonous* blasphemy. Now we are told that by being gay we are "copying a Western trend." Your options are to stay and wear what your neighbors wear, speak as your father speaks, refrain from clubbing, and wait for the smoke to clear, or to emigrate.

To be sure, being gay is easier in Europe, in North America, or in Australia, but being Arab is not. I am no longer the default in these lands; I am the wretched. There, I cannot simply wear what my neighbor wears. And will the smoke ever clear? So one waits, but what does one do? Go to work, go on dates, and



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Charles L. Ross was art director of *Architectural Digest* (1978-1985) and the founding art director of *Veranda* (1987-2004).

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go on living? Or does one's heart ache with the injustice that life has dealt and that one wishes to do something about? Peacefully, of course. Jihad, as interpreted by its most notorious practitioners, promises upwards of seventy maidens in heaven. What the hell would I do with them? Choreograph a music video for God?

TOXIC COUPLING

Let me tell you a little story here about a couple that fate damned me to meet. The two women were struggling artists, they stuffed themselves with candy and had other bad habits, and they were rather rude to people. To each their own, of course, and they looked cute together. One half of the couple was my roommate.

She was awful to live with. We shared a bedroom and she insisted on keeping the cat's litterbox in it. When I complained about it—the stench, the effects on our health, the unsightliness of cat shit first thing in the morning—in came my roommate's partner and they united against me. *They* were not bothered by that “faint” odor—I could always crack open a window—and what kind of weirdo looks at the cat's litterbox anyway? *I* was “being too sensitive.” Besides, since each of them paid a quarter of the rent, *both* were my de facto roommates. Democracy meant cat shit stayed in the room.

As for their relationship, suffice it to say that I once went away for a week and returned to find bruises on their faces. They'd had another of their fights. Then I realized that what they had for each other was not love. They merely found someone who put up with the other's unreasonable side. They united *against* something, but not *for* love. Thus when there was nothing to unite against, nature took its course, as it will in all toxic relationships.

Let this couple serve as a metaphor for Trump and his supporters. His most ardent supporters are Caucasians without a college degree. Their lives are difficult, as in the “free market” only the qualified get ahead. Socialized to hate the socialist policies that would even the playing field and make education more attainable, including for them and their families, they nevertheless hailed their savior, who declared, “I love the poorly educated.” They fell for Trump, in both senses of that lovely expression, who himself was not that well educated but appeared to be successful. Indeed, he made it seem that it was no fault of their own that they were downtrodden, but rather that of a sinister system that was rigged against them.

It turns out—surprise!—Trump's policies, ranging from a budget that suffocates Meals on Wheels to scrapping Obamacare, harm most citizens and especially his own giddy flock. But when I, a liberal, criticize Trump, I am throwing fuel on the fire. Liberals already hate Trump. The strategy is to get conservatives to dump him, and right now conservatives are not too impressed by what liberals have to say. There are gas station workers and arms dealers in the Bible Belt who call gasoline “liberal tears.” For them, enraging liberals is pleasurable in its own right, regardless of the issue or its consequences.

There are many reasons why part of Trump's base is not dumping him as quickly as they should. But the main reason is undoubtedly the fear of falling into the shark tank of “I told you so” inhabited by educated liberals. Some would rather save face and defend their choice to their last breath of life than face the

Lube

Penetrates peninsulas and breasts, promontories
And assholes, knuckles and nipples galore.

No whore, no lover, no connoisseur

Of the clammy dares to live without it.

No fuck, no matter how fleeting,

Is in luck without it. So shout it!

Tout it! See how it sizzles in your palms,

Dribbles down your thighs, slithers over

Your butt like sand in the desert,

Dripping,

Slipping unruly rubes all over your

Pubes. Hail this fantasy friction,

Its diction the language of arousal gone viral,

A sliding so primal it pulls every cool moon

Into its oozing orbit, flings you out like a slingshot

Hot and deep into the Milky Way. Then,

It slips away.

No need to forgive it. No need to make amends.

For this is how the world ends—

Not with a bang, but with a shower of

Primordial hurt: the final squirt

From your last tube

Of lube.

MICHAEL M. APPELL

truth. This is why I believe that side-by-side with our unwavering activism and political advocacy, we must provide a less hostile left for those on the right whose faith is starting to crumble. Indeed, we must provide a safe space (ironically) to receive without judgment and ridicule our brothers and sisters who made the human error of trusting a man who used charity money to buy a six-foot portrait of himself.

As an outsider, I view the current American government as a ravaging blob that somehow grows stronger if sliced by liberal rage. The enemy of my enemy is my friend, and this is why some Trump supporters will not proactively take measures to hamper the current administration's efforts. Anything that enrages liberals is ipso facto worth supporting. Just like the toxic couple I knew, their bond is only strengthened by our disapproval; they will have to break up organically, on their own.

As LGBT people, we know what it means to be demonized. As easy and as tempting as it is to label all Trump supporters as stupid, subhuman, bigoted troglodytes, we must view them as individuals with hopes and dreams, loves and fears, just like us. So please hold back the insults, the slurs, the judgment. Lead by example, not by opinion, and remember to love your Texan cousins. You know as well as I do that those who voted for Trump may regret it, but let them know that it's all right to be fallible. Let them know that they will not be judged as stupid, moronic, idiotic, deranged, or deplorable if they admit that it was a mistake, if they begin to waver from showing him fealty just for the sake of saving face. If you argue, be gentle, because being right is not about loudness or charisma or force. But do not sit idly by.



Assault on Our Performance Spaces!

MEL PAISLEY

Author's Note: Due to the clandestine nature of the measures the space facilitators have taken to protect their spaces, names and places have been disguised.

ON DECEMBER 12, 2016, our local queer independent performance space was targeted by an alt-right vigilante group, along with about a dozen DIY (“do it yourself”) spaces nationwide. I got the news while riding a Greyhound up the east coast, heading back home after a visit with my then long-distance girlfriend. My phone blew up with notifications after Ray, the space’s head facilitator, announced that they had been compromised, showing a link to a bulletin board posting peppered with pictures of their house and home address. We were all still shaken by the tragedy at Pulse earlier that year, and the kids and the adults who frequented our space were joined in a frenzy of support and fear—asking if everything would be okay, asking what would happen to the space, asking if they were going to be safe.

Theories started to spring up around who locally might have given the group a tip that we existed, and the next few days were incredibly tense. In the wake of the wave of violence that we had all seen plastered over our news screens and Facebook feeds since the presidential election, we were all uncertain of how much information they had, and what could be done with it. Ray and Tom, who operate a queer performance space in the deep South, described their initial reactions to the incident as a mixture of “shock, horror, doom, and pretty much that the worst has happened or was going to happen: anger that people could cloak their extreme bigotry in memes and jokes; overwhelming feelings of visibility and unsafety regarding our space and our personal identities.” Their space was an eccentric, well-loved bastion of queerness and grassroots activism in the conservative South, run on the edge of a neighborhood being quickly gentrified out of accessibility for the low-income wage-earning residents inside.

As a mixed trans man with a disability that makes it difficult for me to move freely in a lot of venues, even gay ones, that space was one of only a few places where I could really feel welcome and safe. Spaces like this one are (or were) open to all ages, which was great for younger folks who can’t get into nighttime gay bars; they hosted local activist groups and offered tangible solutions for change at the regional level; they cooked

up fresh food for people passing through; put on clothing swap parties; and, most prominently, they gave a platform for Southern queer artists to perform and showcase their work, particularly artists who were typically left out of the punk music scene and had a hard time getting booked in mainstream venues. They fostered a sense of community, love, solidarity, and strength for people who were used to feeling ousted and unwanted—which is precisely why it was targeted for shutdown by the Right Wing Fire Fighters.

The Fire Fighters are a group of alt-right keyboard warriors who stalk DIY spaces through leads across the USA, publish their addresses, infiltrate them, and either incite violence, plant code violations, or exaggerate possible code issues, then contact the authorities to shut them down. Their true mission is concealed under the mask of “concerned citizens” who are seeking to prevent a repeat of the Ghost Ship fire incident, say.* But a scan through their 4chan thread quickly reveals that the real mission is shutting down communication hubs that foster and support “faggots,” “shemales,” “kikes,” and “blackies,” normalizing what they call a perverted lifestyle, “leftist propaganda,” and degenerate dogma.

In an increasingly hostile environment, being public and accessible is both a necessary act of solidarity and a target painted on our foreheads.

Since the start of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, we have seen a tangible increase in the visibility of groups like the Fire Fighters. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Hate Map is a tracking tool that keeps a catalog of organized hate group activity in the U.S. There has been an overall increase in activity since the SPLC started collecting data in 1999. The reported number of groups rose in fits and starts from 457 in 1999 to a peak of 1,018 groups in 2011, after three years of expedited growth following Barack Obama’s 2008 election campaign. The public presence of these hate groups declined during the Obama administration every year from 2012, to a low of 784 groups in 2014. As the candidates geared up for a viciously polarized primary contest starting in 2015, and some Republican candidates tried to rally support with increasingly vehement far-right rhetoric, the number of hate groups climbed to 895 in 2015, then 917 in 2016. The SPLC believes that the official count of hate groups has less to do with the actual number of practicing groups than with the prevailing political climate. Under the

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* On December 2, 2016, 36 people were killed in a fire at a warehouse converted into an underground artist space riddled with code violations in Oakland, CA. It was an art house and a performance space with a very active queer and left-wing presence, like other places targeted by the Fire Fighters, but it actually *was* a dangerous venue, recklessly endangering local lives, unlike the spaces talked about in this article.

Mel Paisley, a writer, illustrator, and sketch journalist focusing on politics, mental health advocacy, and queer history, maintains a website at melpaisleyart.com.

Obama administration, these groups became more secretive, retreating into darker corners of the Web; but recent events have emboldened the newly minted “alt-right” to come out from behind their keyboards in a more brazenly public way. The week of the November election saw the biggest spike in reported hate activity ever seen. These attacks were mostly against Latino and Muslim citizens and immigrants, but also against African, Asian, Jewish, and LGBT Americans.

According to the latest annual report of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence (NCAV), 2016 was the deadliest year for the LGBT community in twenty years, with a seventeen percent increase in homicides (not counting the lives lost in the Pulse shooting). The report collected data from Arizona, California, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Virginia, Vermont, and Wisconsin, and found a total of 1,036 incidents of hate violence committed against members of our community. Of the 28 LGBT homicides covered in the report, 79 percent were people of color (eighteen were black, four were Latino), and 68 percent of them (nineteen out of 28) were transgender or gender non-conforming, largely trans women of color. The majority of these hate incidents were perpetrated by family members, co-workers, neighbors, and landlords—people who were close enough to the victim to know of their sexuality and gender expression.

This pattern explains why trans women, specifically trans women of color, are the most vulnerable and the most viciously attacked subgroup in our diverse community. Life as a queer person is vastly more stressful when you’re already under the microscope for the color of your skin, and gets more complicated when you cannot easily pass for straight, whether on the street or at work. While I was writing this in late June, I heard that the fourteenth trans woman already *this year* was murdered in Athens, Georgia—seventeen-year-old Ava Le’Ray Benton. That’s 33 trans bodies buried in the last year and a half.

I caught up with Sam, the operator of another queer performance space in the Midwest that was also targeted and eventually shut down as a result of the Fire Fighters’ interference. Sam, a non-binary person of color, agreed that one of the most important things that we can do right now is truly listen to one another. We discussed the importance of different elements of the LGBT community showing up for one another in how we vote, how we engage with our representatives at the state and local levels. If there is a town hall hearing on a “bathroom bill,” we need our cisgender gay allies to show up and help mediate that interaction. If a black member of our community reports on an incident of harassment by the police, we need to stand with them in making sure justice is served. The aforementioned NCAV report found that 66 percent of survivors of anti-LGBT hate violence were met with dismissal or some degree of harassment or police misconduct, with African-Americans being three times more likely than whites to experience excessive force when the police became involved. In my city, our police force now has an LGBT liaison in place, following conversations with our local government. The operation is headed by a lesbian officer and a committee designed to field complaints in instances of perceived police oversight and work toward transparency and respect on both sides.

When asked if Sam felt that there was an increase of vio-

lence in the wake of Trump’s election, the answer was a resounding “Yes.” In the months before November, Sam was followed and physically assaulted, and came home to find his name spray painted across the outside of his house. After the election, another trans performer had to regroup before going onstage and tell the crew that they were going to change up and present as cisgender (not in drag) for the performance because of the hostility and level of threat.

As for our space in the South, crisis was averted through some quick and assertive actions taken by Ray and Tom, so the center has recently been able to start hosting events here in our city again. First, they cleared out a lot of online information, de-activated the space’s Facebook page, changed their name, and then re-activated. A phone call was made to the parents of the guy suspected of having made the tip for the Fire Fighters, a local troll and right-wing punk who’d been harassing the space on and off for years. The space’s owners had the local arts paper run a story saying that they were no longer operating, blocked a lot of folks on-line, and went for a “mutual disappearing act.” A few months after the initial campaign, the city fire marshal visited and left a card, and Tom contacted them via phone. He said that they “were extremely understanding even through the confusion of everything. The allegations made against us were patently ridiculous and unfounded, things like smoke coming out of the building consistently.” Tom admitted that it was terrifying for him to go through this, noting that it underlined the importance of keeping quiet about details regarding the space with new or unknown people. Sam in the Midwest gave a similar account, telling me that the fire marshal was extremely understanding after coming to check out their space from the smear report made in the local paper tipped by the Fire Fighters, but that eventually their landlord decided not to renew their lease due to the incident.

While these are small-scale events, there are about seven similar spaces for which I was not able to find contact information. Their secrecy is a prime example of the double-edged sword of queer visibility in the U.S. and abroad. In an increasingly hostile environment, being public and accessible is both a necessary act of solidarity and a target painted on our foreheads. My advice would be that we remain visible and public in our presentation of who we are and in our support for other groups in the LGBT community. Talk to the other queers in your local community, have cookouts, organize events. We are not like those who only crawl out from behind their keyboards when the water feels right. But we also need to include our straight neighbors, including people who don’t look like us.

To end on an inspirational note, Ray asserted that “being visibly queer in America is a pride that, if and when accessible, should be held close to the heart. It is a privilege no law has the ability to encompass in a way that speaks to its power. It says we will not assimilate, we are present, and our beauty is unwilling to be condensed under racism. I believe I should be visible as much as possible in honor of our trans and queer family already lost to violent acts of erasure not only in the U.S. but around the world.” If there is one thing that we have taken from this election cycle, it is that complacency is not an option. Now is the time to get to work forging a stronger safety net of advocacy and intersectional protection at the local, regional, and national levels.



Make America Sick Again

SEAN CAHILL

THE 2016 ELECTION stands to have far-reaching effects on public policy affecting LGBT people and people living with HIV, both in the U.S. and abroad. A number of major advances were achieved during the Obama administration, including marriage equality nationwide, an end to the ban on LGBT people serving openly in the military, the promotion of LGBT equality as a core goal of U.S. foreign policy, and important nondiscrimination regulations covering education and healthcare. A myriad of policy changes increased attention to LGBT health through support for cultural competency training, expanded collection of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data in healthcare settings and on surveys, and the creation of a Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office at the National Institutes of Health.

All of this is now at risk. In February 2017, the Trump administration's Departments of Justice and Education withdrew Obama administration guidelines prohibiting anti-transgender discrimination in schools as a form of sex discrimination prohibited under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The guidance required schools to allow transgender youth to use bathrooms and other school facilities based on their gender identity. President Trump did not declare June as LGBT Pride Month, as President Obama had done, and his foreign policy has been coherent only in the lack of priority given to human rights concerns.

In March 2017, the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), which oversees and funds elder and disability services, announced that it was removing sexual orientation and transgender status questions from the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants, questions that had been added in 2014. Following overwhelming public comment in favor of restoring the questions, the ACL announced in June that it would restore the sexual orientation question. However, it did not restore the transgender question, and it maintained its reversal of plans to add SOGI questions to a national disability survey that it conducts.

WHAT THE ACA ACCOMPLISHED

It is in the area of health policy that the LGBT community and people living with HIV (PLWH) stand to lose the most. Key provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), such as the ban on insurance company discrimination on the basis of a pre-existing condition, have helped more than twenty million previously uninsured Americans gain access to

health insurance. This has disproportionately benefited LGBT people and PLWH.

Under the ACA, in states that expanded Medicaid, low-income people up to at least 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) can qualify for coverage based on income alone. This has been extremely helpful for low-income LGBT people and PLWH who previously could not qualify for Medicaid because they did not have dependent children or a disability, or because they were not poor enough. In many Southern, Plains, and Rocky Mountain states, where Medicaid expansion has been rejected, one must be extremely poor and disabled or have dependent children to qualify for Medicaid. In Alabama, a family of three must earn less than sixteen percent of the federal poverty level—\$3,221 per year—to qualify for Medicaid. In Texas the cutoff is nineteen percent.

Between mid-2013 and early 2015, the percentage of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults without health insurance decreased from 22 to eleven percent. While the implementation of key elements of the ACA undoubtedly played a major role, so too did growth in the number of states recognizing same-sex marriages, and the federal recognition resulting from the 2013 *US v. Windsor* case. The percentage of uninsured transgender people with low income dropped from 59 in 2013 to 35 in 2014.

Before the Medicaid expansion, PLWH had to have an AIDS diagnosis, be pregnant, or have dependent children in order to qualify for Medicaid. In the 31 states that had expanded Medicaid eligibility, those without children and without an AIDS diagnosis can

qualify if they're poor enough. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Kaiser Family Foundation estimate the proportion of people living with HIV who lacked health insurance to be 22 percent in 2012, dropping to fifteen percent in 2014 following implementation of key provisions of health care reform. It is undeniable that the ACA, however imperfect in many ways, has dramatically improved PLWH's access to health care. This is especially important for older people living with HIV, who often require complex, expensive care.

Among the twenty million people newly insured under the ACA, people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds benefited. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that from 2013 to 2015 the percent of uninsured individuals declined in a number of key demographics: from thirty to 21 percent for nonelderly Latinos; from nineteen to eleven percent for African-Americans; from fourteen to seven percent for Asian-Americans; and from twelve to seven percent for non-Hispanic whites. The drops for blacks and Latinos in particular helped to alleviate a structural driver of ethnic health disparities in the U.S.

Indeed, the lack of health insurance and the resulting lack of

It is in the area of health policy that the LGBT community and people living with HIV stand to lose the most.

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access to routine preventative care is a major structural cause of economic inequality between whites and minorities. What's more, black and Latino LGBT people can experience even higher disparities. For example, HIV disproportionately burdens gay and bisexual men and transgender women. Among these populations, blacks and Latinos are the most vulnerable. Lesbian and bisexual women are less likely to get preventative cancer screenings like Pap tests and mammograms, in part due to lower rates of insurance coverage. Lesbian and bisexual women are also more likely never to have given birth, which is a risk factor for breast cancer and possibly ovarian cancer. Obesity, substance use, and smoking are also risk factors—and they're more prevalent among lesbian and bisexual women than among heterosexuals. It is probable that black and Latina lesbian and bisexual women have the lowest rates of preventative cancer screenings, and the highest cancer mortality rates, of all U.S. women.

NIGHTMARE ON CAPITOL HILL

Last May, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed the American Health Care Act, which would repeal and replace the ACA. The House bill would end the Medicaid expansion, dramatically reduce Medicaid spending (by nearly \$1 trillion over the next decade), and permit states to opt out of ACA provisions that mandate coverage for preexisting conditions and essential health benefits such as cancer and HIV/STD screenings.

A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis found that the House bill would result in 23 million Americans losing their

health insurance by 2026. In addition, the CBO estimated that premiums for older adults would skyrocket under the Republican House plan. A 64-year-old American with an annual income of \$26,500 could see his or her health insurance premiums rise from \$1,700 a year under the ACA to between \$13,600 and \$16,100 a year under the Republican plan. LGBT people and PLWH are likely to be overrepresented among the 23 million who would lose their health insurance if the House bill becomes law.

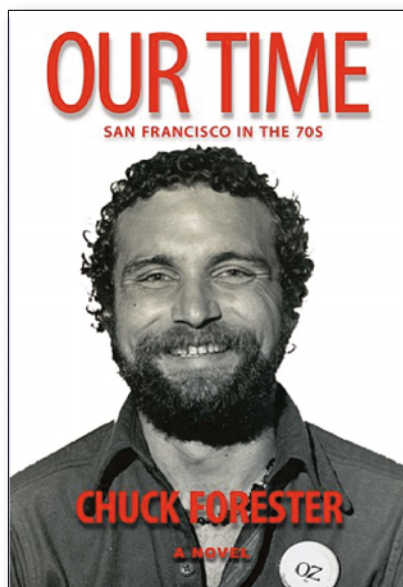
A U.S. Senate bill under consideration as I write would also end the Medicaid expansion, dramatically cut Medicaid funding, and reduce subsidies for private insurance. Both the Senate and the House bills would end Medicaid as an entitlement, instead offering states a lump sum of funding to dispose of as they choose. This would dismantle the public health infrastructure first put in place by President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program in 1965. Under the Senate plan, per capita funding would be tied to the overall rate of inflation, which is typically lower than medical inflation. This would result in a deeper cut to funding for Medicaid than in the House version. The Senate bill would allow states to opt out of many of the ACA's health insurance requirements, including rules for what constitutes a qualified health plan and what health benefits must be covered. The ACA currently requires coverage of essential health benefits, including HIV/STD screening and behavioral health care. These benefits are especially important for LGBT people, those living with HIV, and other vulnerable populations. The bill would also defund Planned Parenthood, which provides millions of STD and cancer screenings to women and men across the U.S.

THE TRUMP BUDGET

The Trump-Pence budget, introduced in May 2017, would sharply cut HIV and chronic disease prevention programs, and eliminate entire HIV care programs that date back to the mid-1990s. It would axe Medicaid by \$800 billion over the next decade and cut the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by twenty percent over the next two years. One in three American children—46 million in total—receive health care through either Medicaid or CHIP.

In addition, the Trump budget proposal would:

- Cut funding for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, and tuberculosis at the CDC by seventeen percent. Nearly twenty million new sexually transmitted diseases are diagnosed each year in the U.S., half of them among fifteen- to 24-year-olds. Diagnoses of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are increasing and cost an estimated \$16 billion a year to treat. Because we don't have a cure or a vaccine for HIV and many STDs, cutting funding for evidence-based detection and prevention programs means that epidemics will continue to grow, costing more resources later.
- Reduce funding of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program—a cut of \$59 million—eliminating the AIDS Education and Training Centers and Special Projects of National Significance. The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program would become even more critical if people living with HIV lose health insurance under the GOP plans. Funding for the Ryan White Program has been essentially flat since the early 2000s, even though the number of people accessing Ryan White services has nearly doubled. The education centers and special projects program also assist with



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rapid response to outbreaks of disease. When nearly 200 people were diagnosed with HIV in rural Scott County, Indiana, over a fifteen-month period in 2014-15, the Midwest AIDS Education and Training Centers provided in-depth training to doctors and care providers and helped get those newly diagnosed with HIV into immediate care.

- Reduce funding for the National Institutes of Health by seventeen percent, and cut funding for the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, where most HIV/AIDS research is conducted, by eighteen percent.
- Reduce by \$1.1 billion U.S. funding for treatment of people living with HIV in Africa and other parts of the world. AmfAR estimates that this cut of nearly twenty percent in global HIV funding would cost more than one million lives and cause

300,000 children to become orphans.

While what ultimately passes the Congress and is signed by Trump may be less draconian, it is likely that major federal policy and budgetary changes will be enacted that significantly reverse the expansion of access to health insurance that disproportionately benefited LGBT people and PLWH. This will have major fiscal implications for the states, many of which are already straining to balance their budgets. The Trump/GOP proposals would make it much more difficult for people with pre-existing health conditions such as HIV, as well as older Americans, to obtain affordable health insurance, and would reduce the health benefits for those who keep their coverage. Both of these changes would disproportionately harm LGBT people, PLWH, and other people with chronic diseases.



ART MEMO

People of Colors vs. the Whiteness House

JAY CRITCHLEY

COLORS play tricks on us. What we see is not always what we get. And what we think is not always what we see. Is seeing the same as perception? Is white the binary opposite of black? Can one exist without the other?

As a queer, white, male artist, I'm closely following the political "deconstruction of the administrative state." The unraveling of our historic democratic underpinnings demands a deep resourcefulness and an intersectional creative response. Issues of race, ethnicity, and the marginalization of otherness are there at the origins of our democratic foundations. Black Lives Matter's agenda is queer-affirming and has as a guiding principal to do the work required "to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk."

There is a heightened awareness of the fragility of significant civic benchmarks such as same-sex marriage, voting rights (particularly vulnerable in cities, with a concentration of LGBT people and people of color), environmental protections, HIV, and affordable health care.

Race and otherness are inextricably linked. Two of my recent projects tackle these issues: *People of Colors* and *The Whiteness House: Tarred and Feathered*.

How white is the White House? What shade of white is it? The house as a national symbol takes on an ominous presence with a white president

whose campaign was substantially based on color—along with misogyny, white privilege, homophobia, fear, etc.—following a black president. How white is a Whiteness House after a black president? How does a white house express its whiteness?

The Whiteness House—Tarred and Feathered proposes to build a walk-in scale model of the White House, tar and feather the exterior, and activate it collaboratively with other artists and activists. Tarring and feathering is a form of public humiliation used to enforce unofficial justice or revenge. It was used in feudal Europe and in

colonial America, mostly as a type of mob vengeance. It is meant to humiliate and severely criticize a person.

So what are some of the associations that whiteness evokes? Let's take a look: White Christmas, white flight, whitewash, a white elephant, Snow White, white collar, a white Russian, whiteout, white supremacy, white race films, white light, white lightning, black-and-white mixed race films, whitened teeth.

The natural materials of down feathers and sand remind us of our connection to the materiality and ecology of the planet. I've been covering up objects, initially with sand, and redefining their significance since the 1980s. *People of Colors* employs naturally colored sand as paint, drawing on recent fashion magazine advertisements. Working with the sands of time for over thirty years—encrusting cars and a motel, sandblasting and filling a car—these sand drawings seem frail and intimate. Fracturing the stylized gloss of the flimsy paper with the rawness of sand exposes the bones and artifice of the human body on the flat page.

How is our perception of an image altered when a gritty veil or mask of sand is applied in this *People of Colors* series? The sand may be black, white, pink, orange, or beige. What shades of color do we perceive? What shades of color do we defy?

Jay Critchley is an installation and performance artist based in Provincetown, Mass.



Jay Critchley, Larger Sand #2

Luca Lanzilotta asks what the novelist was doing in Italy

A Year in *La Dolce Vita* Rome

EDMUND WHITE

EDMUND WHITE lived in Rome for most of 1970. It was his first time living abroad—Paris would come much later—and while his “Roman holiday” lasted less than a year, he included various episodes from his Italian stay in a number of his writings, including in memoirs, essays, and novels. Clearly his time in Rome left an impression, but it must be said that his recollections often have a negative edge when touching on Roman life in general and the gay scene in particular.

In this interview, White reminisces about his Italian experience, shares his perspective on what it was like to live in Rome as an openly gay American in 1970, and sheds light on what drew him and a few other writers associated with the Violet Quill to the land of *La Dolce Vita* (1960). Fully four members of the latter group, which met for the first time in 1980—Robert Ferro, Michael Grumley, Felice Picano, and White himself—had lived in Italy for some length of time during the previous decade, raising the question: what was Italy’s appeal for literary gay men in the ’70s? Doubtless each young man found his own Rome to write about; what follows are White’s reflections on the Eternal City. (For the record, the other members of the Violet Quill, an informal reading group, were Christopher Cox, Andrew Holleran, and George Whitmore.)

I had the pleasure to interview Edmund White at his home in New York City.* — LUCA LANZILOTTA

Luca Lanzilotta: My first question is about the Violet Quill and what it meant to you. I am asking particularly because I noticed that you did not mention the Violet Quill in your autobiography *My Lives*.

Edmund White: I might have mentioned the Violet Quill in another autobiographical work I wrote, *City Boy*. *My Lives* was organized according to themes, like my blondes, my women, etc., so I didn’t have a title for that. The Violet Quill was important to me and to all the members. It was the beginning of publishing gay fiction, and even though we only met about seven times, we divided up the field, without ever talking about it explicitly. For example, Robert Ferro got the family as he and his partner Michael Grumley were trying to establish themselves as a gay couple in Ferro’s Italian-American family, Andrew Holleran got *Fire Island*, I got childhood, and so on. In those meetings we sort of figured out how to divide up the turf.

* The full interview can be found in *Voices in Italian Americana*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2017).

Luca Lanzilotta is a senior lecturer in Italian at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA.

LL: Let’s talk about your time in Italy. What are the first things that come to mind when you reminisce about your six-month stay in Rome in 1970? What were the highlights?

EW: I was drunk most of the time with white wine and I didn’t get as much work done as I’d hoped. However, I met some interesting people. For example, I had a female friend called Diana Artom, who was from an old, important Jewish family. One of her uncles had won the Nobel Prize in physics and another uncle was a politician.

LL: In *My Lives* you write: “[I] moved to Rome for half a year. I’d intended all along to settle in Paris, but my two brief visits there had so thoroughly intimidated me that I veered off toward Italy.” Can you explain more in detail what made you decide to move to Italy, since it wasn’t even your dream destination?

EW: In the middle of the 1960s, I had gone to Rome, Venice, and Florence on a holiday, and I had had a good time. When I had been in France in the same years for vacation, Paris was very anti-American because of our war in Vietnam and because it was a very leftist country, and there was a hostility to capitalism and to America. So I decided to go to Rome instead. I had gone to school in Michigan with Vittorio Ginzburg, the cousin of Italian author Natalia Ginzburg. He had always said to me that he could have introduced me to his family, and that included Diana Artom, if I had gone to Italy. If you go to a foreign city and you know two or three people, it makes a big difference.

LL: In *My Lives* you write that you were in Rome during “the last spasms of *La Dolce Vita*.” Considering that Italy has been in an economic recession for a few decades, how do you remember Italy at that time?

EW: It really was the end of the *Dolce Vita*. You would go to a nightclub where there would only be ten people and huge spaces, beautiful lighting, lots of champagne. It was better than America!

LL: In Rome you wrote a screenplay that you said “no one liked,” and you mentioned that in 1970 you gave it to film producer Carlo Ponti, who was married to Sophia Loren, and he pushed it aside. What ever happened to that script? Did you ever try to have it read again?

EW: The screenplay must be somewhere in my archives, and no, I never had it read again. Let me tell you the story behind that script. One of the students of my Italian teacher was Farley Granger, an actor who had been the star in the movie *Senso*. After that, in America, he had become an alcoholic and his career was ruined, but then he had a nice lover who sobered him up and brought him back to Italy, thinking that maybe he could



launch his career again. I was excited to meet him because he was a childhood hero of mine—he had been in the Hitchcock movie *Strangers on a Train*—so I thought that I would write the script for him. My movie was about an American man who falls in love with an Italian girl, but they don't speak to each other very well, because they don't know each other's language. They have lots of sex, but not too much conversation. Then the man goes back to America on business, and he dies there. When he dies, there is a postal strike, a "*sciopero*," in Italy. When the *sciopero* is finally finished and the woman is almost over him, she starts receiving letters that he had written to her from America before he died, and they are all very romantic. So she goes to America trying to understand this strange man.

My 100-page script was very detailed and precise, with all the camera movements. Somebody I knew knew Italian film producer Carlo Ponti, so I thought that it would be a package deal, but nothing worked. An American writer, better known than me (I was not known at all at that point), whose name was Leonard Melfi, was living in Rome at the time. He wrote a three-page script for Carlo Ponti called *La Mortadella*, about an Italian woman who wants to get into America carrying a huge mortadella, and Sophia Loren made it into a movie. Carlo Ponti said to me: why can't you do something like the great Leonard Melfi? Just write a three-page script! Who wants a 100-page script?!

LL: Do you think that your stay in Rome would have lasted longer had your screenplay been produced?

EW: Yes, if I had had some money! I went to Rome with \$7,000, and I spent it all in six months. I would invite twenty people out to dinner, we would eat on Piazza Navona, and I would pay for everyone, because it seemed like everybody I knew was poor! Those were the days when Italian boys would walk through Piazza Navona swinging Maserati keys, but they had no car, only the keys.

LL: In *City Boy* you mention that you took Italian lessons in New York for a month before moving to Italy. Did you learn enough Italian to get by?

EW: It was pretty good, because one of my best friends in Italy, Diana, didn't speak very good English. Her mother had spoken English to her when she was a child, but she died when Diana

was six years old, so she knew a lot of nursery words, like "don't dawdle" and things like that, but not grown-up words.

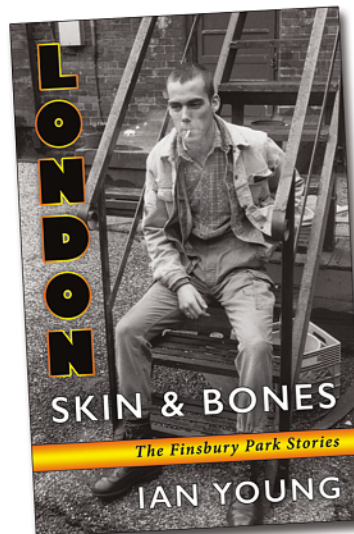
LL: Did your efforts to learn the language have a positive impact on your time in Rome?

EW: Yes, because I would pick boys up—usually they were soldiers, "bersaglieri," all these cute boys—and I could talk to them!

LL: Your description of gay life in Italy in 1970 is very negative and you report that you were even reduced to cruising women! What was so bad about gay life in Italy compared, say, to New York?

EW: It was very strange. We would all go to the Coliseum, which was open at night in those days. We would go in there and meet people, but usually they would be foreigners. For example, I had a boyfriend whom I met there who was from Romania. There was one movie theater, on the Corso, where you would go and there would be married men sitting with their raincoats. That was the other big sex scene. Unfortunately, there was no sauna. There were two gay bars: one was called the Pipistrello, while the other one was called the St. James and was located near the old walls. That was a bar where you would go wearing a velvet jacket and a tie. You would order one drink and it would cost ten dollars. And then you would just sit there with that one drink all evening, because it was so expensive. What else did people do? I remember once, the night that Italy beat Germany in the World Cup semifinals, my roommate, who was Austrian but spoke perfect Italian, said to me: this is a good time to pick up boys! So we went wandering around and we picked up this

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boy who had never been with a man before, but he was so excited about Italy's win that he came with us.

LL: I find it fascinating that you went to Italy more or less at the same time as Ferro and Picano, and yet the image of gay life in Italy that they portray is very different from yours. In Ferro's semi-autobiographical novel *The Family of Max Desir*, the main character Max has his first sexual experiences in Italy, and lots of them, before falling in love with a fellow American. And in Picano's autobiographical novel *Men Who Loved Me* he falls in love in Rome for the first time. What do you make of this difference in experience?

EW: Maybe they were just better looking than me, especially Ferro, who had long hair and was very glamorous. I had one friend who was a composer. He was beautiful: blond, with blue eyes, and he had enormous success in Italy, because he was what everybody wanted. Even men who were married and thought that they were straight were excited about him, because he was beautiful and very exotic. I was just average looking and older, so I didn't have so much luck.

LL: When you returned to New York, the city had changed profoundly as a consequence of the Stonewall Riots and gay liberation. In *The Farewell Symphony*, you write that "where before there had been a few gay boys hanging out on a stoop along Christopher Street, now there were armies of men marching in every direction off Sheridan Square." Could gay liberation be the reason for your dismissal of gay life in Rome?

EW: Partly, because I think that people in Rome were mostly

ashamed of being homosexual and you never met a couple who were together. Men would live with their mothers until they got married. There was a lot of "vergogna" (shame), and not too much activity that was visible. Maybe there were cousins having sex with each other, but you didn't see it. And then I came back to New York and it was all a big festival!

Americans have a myth about Italians. They think that they are very free, very liberated, and sort of pagan. There are many movies that show Italians being abandoned and sexually free, whereas I think they are not that way. In fact, they are almost the opposite! I remember once I went to a male bordello in Barcelona and I said to the guy, who are your customers? And he said mainly Italians, because we look like Italians, but they are too neurotic to have sex with each other, so they come here and they meet us.

LL: Indeed in *The Farewell Symphony* you call Rome "repressed" and "provincial." Why didn't you leave sooner?

EW: I don't know. I kept thinking that there was something I didn't understand. But it was also kind of fascinating to be there, because it was a different language, a different culture, everything was different. For instance, I would go with my roommate to a restaurant and we would celebrate his birthday. And then we would get the bill and it was correct, they had added everything up, but my roommate, who was very Italian, very assimilated (even though he was from Austria), would say to the restaurant owner: we are your regular customers, we always come here, how can you charge us so much? And then the guy would cut the bill in half. To an American that seemed so crazy! Oh, and here's another funny story: One time they turned off the electricity in our apartment, because my roommate had not paid the bills. And so I was going to pay, but my roommate said: no, no, we will go there and tell them that our father is sick. And so he made up this whole story about how we lived with our father and he was very sick. And it worked! That's the way Italy used to be. It's rationalized now, like the rest of Europe, but you used to tell your story, and everything would come out all right.

LL: In *My Lives* and in *The Farewell Symphony* you also write about your first summer in Venice in the early 1970s, when you visited a friend who spent the summer there. You seemed to have a much better time in Venice than in Rome. What did Venice have that Rome did not?

EW: The friend I would go visit, David Kalstone, was my best friend. He knew hundreds of people, like Peggy Guggenheim, and so we had a real social life. It was fun to be in Venice. I also love the city itself, because once you leave San Marco, the tourists are all behind you and it's really Venetian.

LL: Do you think that you made a mistake moving to Rome in 1970 instead of Venice?

EW: No, because Venice in the winter is very sinister. And even though I complained about Rome being a village, I met a lot of people I liked there, and it is a beautiful city.

LL: Traveling abroad played an important role for most members of the Violet Quill. Was it a common topic of conversation during the Violet Quill gatherings?

EW: We all pretended to be very sophisticated. We were only



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thirty or forty years old, and we were all quite poor. Like a lot of artists, we made believe that we were really an elite, intellectually and culturally, to make up for the fact that we were so poor. It was sort of understood that we were sophisticated and had traveled at a time when not so many Americans traveled. And we had a myth that Europeans would be more tolerant of homosexuality.

LL: It seems Italy was by far the most popular travel destination—but why?

EW: Maybe they knew a little Italian, and even though I say bad things about Rome, really it was very glamorous. For example, I had a friend who lived in a “palazzo” [apartment building] that was carved out of an ancient Roman *anfiteatro*. In the Renaissance these people had taken the walls of the amphitheater to build their palace; it was incredible!

Also, one of the nice things about being a foreigner is that sometimes people think that you’re more important than you really are. In your own country you are a “*Pinco Pallino*,” an average Joe, but when you go to Rome suddenly they think that you are an intellectual or a famous writer. And so you go up the ladder a little bit.

LL: Do you feel like you, Ferro, Picano, and Grumley shared a special camaraderie based upon your ties to Italy and Rome?

EW: There were other ties among us. Ferro, Holleran, and Grumley had gone to the University of Iowa, so that was a real bond. And I had been lovers with George Whitmore and Chris Cox. We all liked each other, but those were the strongest ties.

LL: Over 45 years have passed since your time in Rome. In *My Lives* you mention that over the years you have traveled to Italy several other times. How have you seen Rome change? Do you still enjoy it?

EW: It’s changed quite a bit, and I do still enjoy it. About six years ago, [my lover] Michael [Carroll] and I swapped apartments with a Roman couple, a man and a woman. They came to New York and we went there for a month. It was in June, and a lot of gay bars had taken over the area near the pyramid where Keats is buried, and they had a gay summer festival. There were hundreds of gay people there and they seemed extremely friendly to us. That was very different!

LL: Clearly your life has been affected by your many years in Paris. Still, Rome was your first experience living abroad, albeit for only a year. Looking back, do you feel like your “Roman holiday” left any mark on your life?

EW: Yes, I do. I think that it’s always good to get outside of your language and to meet people with different customs. And the customs were so much more different in those days than they are now. Now everybody is globalized. It was such a different world! For example, gay men lived with their mothers until they got married, and straight people couldn’t get divorced, so many of my friends who were writers lived with their mistresses like husband and wife, because they had left the old wife behind but couldn’t get married to the new one. All that was interesting—not to mention the beautiful architecture and art that you remembered learning about in school, and then you could visit them in person.



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The Philippines: Make Way for the Baklas

ROBERT TURNER

MEET my new neighbor Janet. She's of average height, has long, shapely legs, and sports a wavy mass of black hair that stops just short of her pert derrière—definitely head-turning material. She's one in a procession of similar beauties who pass by in a steady stream. She and I exchange recipes: it turns out she is also a fantastic cook. We have become firm friends, and I wait to see if I will receive an invitation next door, but it never comes.

Baklas are effeminate men who dress in women's garb and consider themselves in every way to be female. You may occasionally see them in other Asian countries, but their sheer numbers here, and their widespread acceptance, is what sets the Philippines apart.

"It's more fun in the Philippines." That's what the billboards tell you when you arrive in Manila. What they don't mention is that you are entering the gay capital of Asia and, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center, the continent's most gay-friendly nation. In the Philippines, the entire LGBT spectrum is covered by the term "gay," but the baklas predominate in public settings, where you can't help but notice an unusually large number of men either dressed as women or in full makeup, with long, coiffured hair and immaculately manicured hands. They work everywhere in the shopping areas, behind every counter, in every store.

Where else in the world can the gay community claim to have their own private language? The Baklas do. Developed over many years, their "gayspeak" has entered mainstream culture, and its phrases and expressions are now commonplace. "Marissa," pronounced by dragging the last syllable out for as long as possible, is the gay Filipino version of "seriously."

Same-sex marriage is not yet recognized in the Philippines, and LGBT people are not legally protected from discrimination. It just isn't much of an issue here. A recent survey shows public acceptance of the LGBT community at 73 percent, and there's little or no anti-gay discrimination.

You need to leave the city for rural Philippines to discover the origins of the

bakla. A visit to a small, isolated village in Binalonan serves as a case in point. An extended family of twenty lives in three adjoining homes in a compound of sorts, typical of rural farming communities. This family counts among their numbers a gay son, a lesbian daughter, a bakla, and a bisexual son. Three out of four of the neighbor's sons are bisexual.

The question of origins is difficult to answer, but there are a few tantalizing clues woven into the culture of the Filipinos and their casual approach to biological sex and gender. Parents in the Philippines, it seems, prefer a balance of progeny between boys

and girls. A visit to a small, isolated village in Binalonan serves as a case in point. An extended family of twenty lives in three adjoining homes in a compound of sorts, typical of rural farming communities. This family counts among their numbers a gay son, a lesbian daughter, a bakla, and a bisexual son. Three out of four of the neighbor's sons are bisexual.

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Of course, not every bakla is the product of family engineering; but many are. Janet was conditioned from the age of two to see herself as female. This family engineering appears to be unique to the Philippines and is not affected by a family's religious views (most Filipinos are Catholic) or other cultural commitments. The practice offers a major opportunity for research into the efficacy of conditioning on sexual development and orientation, notwithstanding the ethical implications of this practice. One has to assume that some would-be baklas resist the transformation from an early age, but there is little documentation of this.

When it comes to sexual relations, baklas will date other baklas or bisexual men. A gay Filipino man might befriend a bakla, but the relationship rarely progresses to a sexual one. It is within their own homes that they face the most strife, as families often treat them as less worthy than other siblings. Many families feel that they were groomed to serve the household as menial servants. To the world at large, they tend to present a fun-loving and carefree face, a persona that undoubtedly contributes to the general acceptance of them.

There are no reliable surveys to indicate whether the number of baklas is on the rise, but the consensus on the street is that it is. With public acceptance of the baklas now well established, many may simply be emerging from the shadows to claim their moment in the spotlight, like Cinderella abandoning her chores to attend the costume ball.

Robert Turner, a writer and blogger who lives and works in the Philippines, is the founder of the Masaya Project, which assists rural charities.



Janet

and girls. A boy who's born into a large, poor Filipino family with a lot of sons is likely to be raised in a way that restores the gender balance. Consider again my neighbor Janet, née John, who was raised by his parents to be a bakla. In a household of four sons and a mother who worked abroad, a girl was needed in the home. Ignoring his physical sex, his parents raised him as a girl. Across the Philippines,

If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Huehuetenango

S EVEN YEARS AGO, when he was 34, a man whose dream since childhood had been to work for *National Geographic* pitched an idea to the editor of their travel magazine at its headquarters in Washington, DC: to take a trip from Washington to the South Pole, by bus, while blogging for an on-line audience along the way. To his great surprise, the editor agreed. And so, we have a book that will remind you of the very reason you began reading books in the first place—the thrills and chills of vicarious life: specifically, a kind of travel that most of us are capable of only when we're in our twenties and find hard to believe we ever did when we look back.

The Black Penguin is a thrilling book not only because Evans survives a bus trip to the bottom of South America but also because the Mormon Church disapproves of his homosexuality—a story that forms, in alternating chapters, a tale as harrowing as his journey to Antarctica. “Silence, solitude and nature—these are the only true luxuries left on Earth, and all three are elusive to most humans,” writes Evans, who then proceeds to give up all three when he gets on his first bus in Washington at 16th and M Streets. It's tempting to recap the moments along the way that make this book hard to put down, but most of them would be spoilers. Evans survives a stalker in Quito, a collision with a cow—a cow that is butchered beside the road before the trip can resume—a mud slide in which he saves the bus by packing stuff beneath the tires for two hours till traction is obtained, a man he lifts off the ground by the nape of his neck and nearly strangles, not to mention all the people along the way who tell him there is no bus, that you cannot get there.

Throughout the book, people pose the same question: “Why don't you just fly?”

Ostensibly this bus ride is merely a wacky idea that will get *National Geographic Traveler* to support his journey. But there is something truly weird about it all. At the very end of the book, Evans supplies a list of every segment of his trip, every taxi, milk truck, private car, chicken bus, and *colectivo* he takes, with date, destination, and cost—which reminds one of another itemized list of expenses incurred while carrying out a peculiar project: Thoreau's at Walden Pond. There is some strange link between the two projects: a determination to go it alone.

Evans is aware of the artificiality of the challenge he has created in reaching his goal. “I'm going to Antarctica,” he repeats to the incredulous bus driver in Richmond, Virginia. “I worried that if I did not keep saying it out loud, my lofty dream might evaporate, and I would be left there, aimless, just another bombed-out character riding Greyhound.” But therein lies a mystery: just what does separate him from the others?

People need themes for their trips, but one begins to think

ANDREW HOLLERAN

The Black Penguin

by Andrew Evans

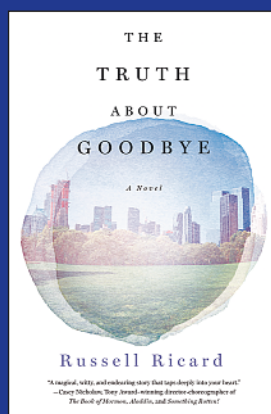
Wisconsin. 288 pages, \$24.95

Evans is acting out something both defiant and self-punishing with this ordeal—because his book is not about the places he passes through. It's about the bus trip itself, the going without sleep or showers for 36 hours at a stretch while Bolivians laugh at midgets playing basketball on the bus television. It's about the mud slide, the altitude

sickness, the perilous roads through the Andes. Everything he encounters on his trip—the squalor, poverty, hungry dogs, idiot bureaucrats, litter, and stinking toilets—will be familiar to anyone who's traveled in South America, and that includes the incredible kindness of individuals met along the way. “Have fun in Antarctica!” says a woman who helps him in Bolivia. “And be careful—don't trust any strangers!” “But I had trusted her from the bus,” Evans writes, “and she had helped me hugely, offering me the warmth of a family's love in a strange city. Trusting strangers is the only way to travel, I thought.”

The only time he's bored is when he's driving down the coast of Peru, mile after mile of dunes littered with trash in which he nevertheless spots people, hundreds of miles from anywhere, watering a houseplant, struggling with a clothesline. But then he gets to Bolivia, where he finds the salt flats a literal embodiment of the Mormon idea of heaven: “a globe like a sea of glass and fire. Bolivia ... was closer to heaven than most countries on Earth and closer to the sun and the stars. If the real heaven looks like Uyuni, I want to be there. The most beautiful places on Earth have no phone reception—I had stopped checking Twitter.”

The mystery is not that this young gay man wanted to see Antarctica—or even to get there by taking the bus. Taking the bus is often the best way to experience a country. The question is why he wanted to do this in such a constrained time period. At a certain point we learn that he must make two connections: one with a *National Geographic* tour going from Costa Rica to Panama, the other with the Lindblad ship that will take him to the South Pole from Ushuaia, Argentina. These crucial deadlines give rise to some of the tensest moments, the greatest chal-



"Ricard offers a thoughtful debut... The narrative is endearing and impressively assured, and it will be an entertaining treat for fans of LGBT romantic fiction ... a warm, fun, character-driven tale about moving on and embracing life."

— Kirkus Reviews



www.russellricard.com

Andrew Holleran's novels include *Dancer from the Dance*, *Grief*, and *The Beauty of Men*.

lenges of his trip—when he cannot accept people’s insistence that there is no bus to get him to his next stop. He has to find one—and he does, more than once.

There is, of course, something admirable in Evans’ refusal to fly (a vow he breaks only once). The jet has in some way destroyed travel: it shows you nothing on your journey but the cloudscape (which to my constant astonishment so few people even look at), and there is very little solidarity with the other passengers, and yet it is encounters with other people on the way that we generally remember more than museums and scenery. Because Evan is on a bus, we register every place he passes through, even if quickly at three in the morning. We experience the difference between the USA and Mexico, Mexico and Guatemala, Guatemala and Honduras. (Honduras is so dangerous the bus makes no stops till it reaches Nicaragua; bus passengers are filmed before departure for security purposes.) He likes Bogotá, gets rested in Lima, but he cannot linger long. He’s on to the Atacama desert, and then the trip down to Patagonia. In a sense, it’s just a stunt. In another, taking the bus is a way to make travel heroic again. Despite the absence of a good night’s sleep or shower for days on end, these buses—which run the gamut from local to international deluxe conveyances with TV, snacks, and attendants—give us an experience we could never have on a plane.

On the other hand, one could argue that what Evans did was merely a way to make travel difficult again. The 16th-century Europeans who sailed to South America—and left astonishing accounts of their voyages—had no idea what was waiting for them when they sailed up a fjord or inlet, where they were, or what they were looking at. It was all unmapped, uncharted, and completely new—enough to satisfy that “capacity for wonder” that F. Scott Fitzgerald said the New World could still inspire in the famous closing paragraph of *The Great Gatsby*. But how can travel be a challenge now? Here, for example, is what Evans thinks in Puno, Bolivia:

I disliked the way the city was overrun with European and North American backpackers, part-time hippies who ... haggled with impoverished Indian women over the price of lousy trinkets. Seeing so many white faces upset me, in fact. They were a tribe of their own, sporting abundant bangles, braided bracelets, or manufactured dread-locks and twee knitted hats. These were the travelers who played dress-up for a time—until their bank accounts ran dry, or until their new jobs began—the kind of travelers who dined at establishments with names like Machu Pizza and then flew back home to write anonymous

and damning Yelp reviews in which they complained that the service was too slow.

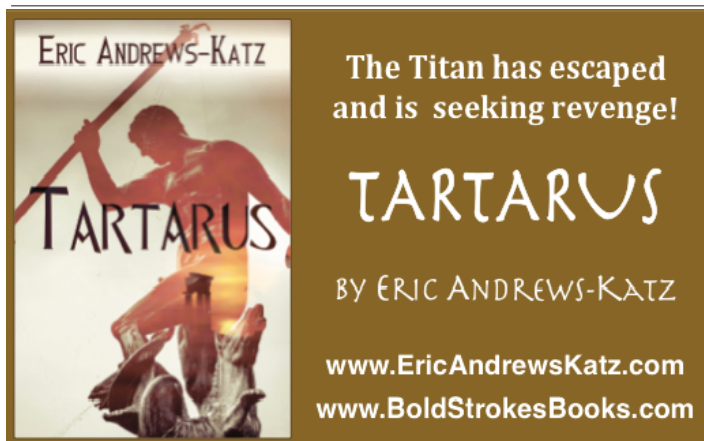
Noël Coward wrote a song called “Why Do the Wrong People Travel?” Yet the question is really “Why Do People Travel, period?”

Throughout this book there is a subtle undercurrent of anger—and not only at the backpackers in Puno. His book about the stress of getting to Ushuaia on time has another, perhaps more important, source of energy: his past struggles as a gay Mormon with his church and family. The two stories create a duet in alternating chapters. “Mormons are the nicest people in the world,” he writes before one of several interrogations he undergoes by elders of the church, “especially when they don’t like you very much.” There are innumerable painful moments, from these auto-da-fés to his father telling him not to come home again to the disappearance of his roommate at Brigham Young University who, after learning Andrew was gay, moved out one day, leaving a note behind saying Andrew could never be happy this way. Eventually, both church and family expel him.

The Black Penguin is neither pure memoir nor classic travelogue in the tradition of D. H. Lawrence, Bruce Chatwin, or Evelyn Waugh; it’s written in the style you find in *National Geographic Traveler*: reader-friendly prose that puts you into the scene. (“Day 3: Hot water fell on my neck and the shampoo foam slid down my naked back.”) But the story of Evans’ coming out makes it much more than a bus trip down a spectacular continent. Indeed, despite his extremely resilient and uncomplaining nature, the writing comes most alive when Evans loses it—especially in the scene where the two strands of his book come unexpectedly together, when he has a meltdown after realizing that an employee of the Argentine bus line has cheated him by selling him two first-class round-trip tickets he doesn’t need, and is not about to refund his money:

My heart beat wildly, my brain flooded with blood, and it all came back—all the mean and horrible people in my life...that guy who threw a brick at my head when I was a missionary in Ukraine, the self-righteous bullies at BYU, the street gang in England who bashed my face and sent me to the hospital, the church leaders who made me cry, the bishops who made me feel worthless, the family who picked me like a scab from their lives, the African dictators, American warmongers, child abusers and gun nuts, the idiots who torture dogs, the wife beaters and hypocrite preachers and bike thieves, and that asshole Karl Rove!

It’s faintly anti-climactic when he finally reaches Ushuaia and finds himself among affluent older people on a *National Geographic*/Lindblad cruise to Antarctica. Antarctica doesn’t feel as fully described as what’s come before. But Evans does discover, on a beach, the title for his book. The black penguin obviously works as a metaphor for anyone who’s an outsider, though one could argue the analogy is to race more than to sexual orientation. For one thing, this penguin is not discriminated against by the other birds. But let’s not quibble. As a gay Mormon, Evans has felt like an outsider for most of his life, and when he sees the melanistic penguin he grasps its significance immediately, and so will any gay reader of this terrific book.



The Other France

FOR THOSE who cling to an image of France as a country steeped in the tradition of “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*,” the latest presidential election revealed a more insidious truth: a deeply divided country in which the extremist right-wing National Front managed to obtain almost eleven million votes (about 35 percent of the total). In his debut novel, *The End of Eddy*, Édouard Louis delves into this other France, plagued as it is by all types of phobias—homo-, Islamo-, and xenophobia in general.

A coming-of-age story, *The End of Eddy* describes in graphic detail the tribulations of a gay teenager growing up in the depressed northern region of France during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Eddy is subjected to all kinds of abuse. His neighbors find him strange, asking: “Why does he talk like a girl, why would he want to act like a girl when he’s a boy? Your son is a strange one, Brigitte (my mother), the way he’s behaving.” His parents disapprove of his mannerisms; they “would ask themselves Why does Eddy always act like such a girl? They’d tell me insistently: Calm down, can’t you lose the queeny gestures?” He is bullied at school: “Two boys appeared in the hallway, the first tall with red hair, and the second short with a hunchback. The tall redhead spat in my face. How do you like that, punk?” It’s just as he stated in the first sentence of the novel: “From my childhood I have no happy memories.”

Given these grim circumstances, the young Eddy tries everything to change his identity, to adopt the masculine code so as to overcome his otherness: “It seemed necessary that I stop behaving the way I had always behaved. I would have to watch the gestures I made while talking, I’d have to make my voice sound deeper, to devote myself to exclusively masculine activities. More soccer, different television programs, different CDs to listen to.” Try as he might, however, the body rebelled, as his desire for men could not be suppressed for long: “It hadn’t occurred to

EDUARDO FEBLES

The End of Eddy

by Édouard Louis

Translated by Michael Lucey
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 208 pages, \$23.

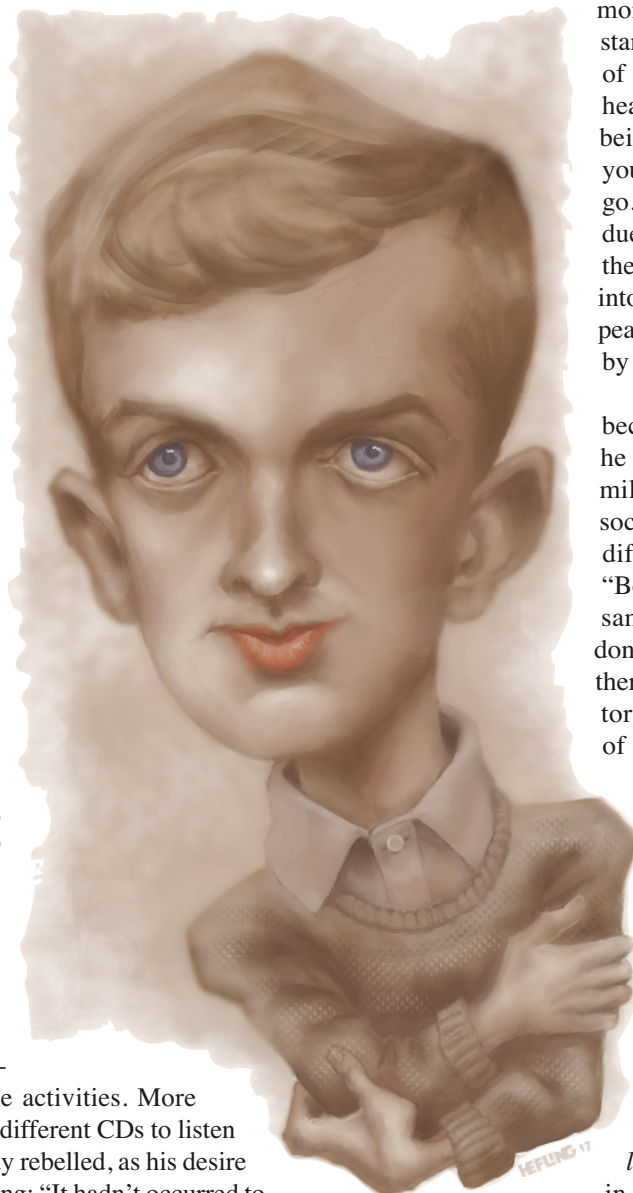
me that wanting to change, or telling lies to yourself, wouldn’t suffice to make the lies come true.” His only choice was thus to flee his milieu: “Running away was my only chance, it was all I had left.”

Louis places gay identity at the core of his character, suggesting at times that his social status is incompatible with it: “Being attracted to boys transformed my

whole relationship to the world, encouraging me to identify with values that were different from my family’s.” He demonstrates, however, the intersectionality of various prejudices, finding that anti-gay and racist sentiments spring from a common source. Eddy’s father, for instance, affirms that “Amiens is full of black people, Ay-rabs, towel-heads, you go there and it’s like being in Africa. Best to stay away, you’re just gonna get robbed if you go.” Le Pen’s success, in part, was due to her ability to capitalize on these feelings, transforming them into a nationalist discourse that appealed to those who feel left behind by globalization.

For the young Eddy, education becomes the portal through which he eventually hopes to escape his milieu and gain access to another social class in which acceptance of difference might be a possibility: “Bourgeois people don’t exhibit the same kind of bodily habits. They don’t define virility the way my father did, the way the men at the factory did.” His merciless depiction of the lower class in France does little to counteract the negative stereotypes about social distinctions there and elsewhere. Yet, as he soon finds out, all social classes are plagued by prejudices, and ascending the social hierarchy doesn’t necessarily mean reaching a space of tolerance.

The End of Eddy was published in France in 2014 under the title *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule*—*gueule* is a slang word in French meaning “mug” for face—when Édouard Louis was only 22 years old. The writing is raw, angry, authentic, realistic. The traumatic scenarios from his earlier life, rendered in vivid detail, become at times



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quite disturbing and painful for the reader. Louis has recently published a second novel, *Histoire de la violence*, which received positive critical acclaim in France. We are thus witnessing the blossoming of a strong new voice who has a long career ahead of him. Michael Lucey, professor of French at Berkeley, has done a praiseworthy translation, not an easy task given the amount of slang and regional words used in the original text.

Emmanuel Macron's victory signals at least a temporary triumph against the mounting popularity of the far Right. Unlike the troubling results of other recent elections, the French at least decided to stand by the values of their Republic. That said, Louis' novel reminds us to remain vigilant and keep fighting for the rights of all those who are marginalized in our society and for those who have not managed to escape their circumstances and find their own voice.



Two Forces of Nature on a Collision Course

BEGINNING the biography of a late-20th-century rock star in the year 1908 may seem unexpected, but that date bears upon the life of Queen founder and lead singer Freddie Mercury. For it was in or around this year, the authors say in their dark opening paragraphs, that scientists—using clinical records and DNA analysis and a bit of guesswork—have pegged the origins of HIV in humans, which ultimately gave rise to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, which in turn resulted in the untimely death of Freddie Mercury in 1991.

The coauthors of the 2016 book *83 Minutes: The Doctor, the Damage, and the Shocking Death of Michael Jackson*, Matt Richards and Mark Langthorne seem to be carving a niche at the intersection of medicine and celebrity misfortune. In the case of *Somebody to Love*, the story begins with the initial animal-

TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

Somebody to Love: The Life, Death and Legacy of Freddie Mercury

by Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne
Weldon Owen. 440 pages, \$24.95

the time that Farrokh Bulsara (known later as Freddie Mercury) was born, his father had emigrated from India to Zanzibar, where he overcame financial hardships and became well-heeled enough to send his eldest son to private school. Despite a family crisis when he was in his late teens, Mercury was a confident and popular lad who loved the limelight and knew how to put on a show, though he seemed to want to hide

his Indian heritage and always referred to himself as Persian because he thought it was more “exotic.” Even so, despite his confidence, he was mostly a hanger-on in his adolescence. He passively waited to be invited to join a band, but once he did, performing with a band called Smile, he “sounded like a very powerful sheep.”

As in most rock bands, members came and went; but once things had sorted themselves out and settled on a name, Queen

became the “guinea pig” for an up-and-coming studio that let them record in exchange for a demo tape—their first chance at stardom. It would take a few months before they had their first hit single, “Keep Yourself Alive” (1974), which would be followed by many more written by Mercury, who became obsessed with writing the next hit song. By 1975, he was eager to move on to something more ambitious, a song that incorporated both rock music and classical opera, and the result was “Bohemian Rhapsody,” a six-minute piece in three “movements,” something that had never been done before. Many more albums would follow over the ensuing fifteen years, featuring numerous songs that are now standards by Freddie Mercury, notably “Somebody to Love” (1976, the source of this book's title), “We Are the Champions” (1977), and “Crazy Little Thing Called Love” (1979).

For all his success, Mercury struggled with his sexual identity both before and during his time as a celebrity. He had his share of friends and girlfriends as a young man, but he seems to have had sexual feelings toward men that he was unable to name or unwilling to own up to. Richards and Langthorne suggest that Mercury may have had sex with men starting in early adulthood, but that later he fell deeply in love with at least two women, regarding one to be on a par with a “common-law wife.” On the other hand, his same-sex feelings lingered on, and



Freddie Mercury as “King Mercury,” God Save The Queen tour, 1986. Photo: Queen.

to-human transmission of HIV (or its ancestor) when an infected monkey is hypothesized to have bitten a Congo warrior, who later slept with a prostitute. Ultimately, in a long, roundabout narrative, this event is linked tenuously to Mercury through his father, a Parsi and follower of Zoroaster who was born in the same year (1908).

Nearly four decades after those concurrent events, at around

Terri Schlichenmeyer is a freelance writer based in Wisconsin.


Mercury vowed that at some point he would come out publicly as gay. But he never did, at least not officially. While many people had figured out that Mercury was partly gay—his band was called “Queen,” after all—many others were surprised when it was announced, hours before he passed away, that Mercury was dying of AIDS.

Readers should know that this book is as much a history of the AIDS epidemic as it is a biography of Mercury. Indeed, the disease almost becomes a separate character, the villain in a struggle that keeps us on the edge of our seats. As a literary device, this struggle can be overdone, and eventually the dire warnings of the heartache to come start to lose their impact. But between the frequent glimpses into this dark malevolence are Mercury’s life and career, including his gay love affairs, some of which were closer to tricks or casual flings.

Still, the authors can’t resist going back into the HIV drama, and they even get into some detailed speculation into who may have infected Mercury with HIV. In the end they shrug, “That’s anybody’s guess,” though they devote many paragraphs to attempting to link Gaetan Dugas—the alleged “patient zero”—to one of Dugas’ putative lovers, John Murphy, who in turn may have had sex with Freddie Mercury.

They even include a hypothetical timeline for the transmissions to have occurred, notwithstanding the author’s frequent use of words like “hedonistic” and “promiscuous” to describe Mercury’s lifestyle.

Among the most compelling pages are those near the end of the book, which recount Mercury’s battle with the illness and the final, sad days and nights. While he admitted being HIV-positive to a small handful of people, and while he appeared to get sicker and sicker, he continued to work, purchased a new home, and signed with a new record label in the U.S. Because of his eagerness to maintain normalcy, few knew for sure that Mercury was dying until he released the news to the press just hours before he died in 1991 at age 45.

Buried beneath a cherry tree in London, his career and early demise put another face on the AIDS crisis and spurred the organization of a benefit concert featuring Roger Daltrey, the late George Michael, Elton John, the late David Bowie, and Annie Lennox, which raised twelve million pounds for AIDS research and awareness. His legacy is intimately bound with that of Queen, which had around two dozen top ten hits in the UK alone. Thirteen years after Mercury’s death, “Bohemian Rhapsody” was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. 

Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves

OUR BODIES, OURSELVES (1971) provided my first real lesson in sexuality—certainly more than the *I Am Johnny’s* Body sex education video in seventh grade or my father’s awkward “the birds and the bees” talk before I left for boarding school: “Ummm... Just avoid girls. They can be trouble.” The book epitomized the perils, pleasures, and politics of the 1970s. A small group of women calling themselves the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective pooled their knowledge and energies to destigmatize women’s bodies and sexuality. They initially produced a booklet (sold for less than a dollar) that would have been considered illegal and obscene at the time (because of the Comstock Laws). Simply depicting women’s sexual anatomy, explaining birth control, extolling female orgasm, or encouraging masturbation were all revolutionary acts of women’s self-empowerment, emancipation, and equality.

It was in this thrilling atmosphere that the feminist sex-toy business sprang up, as documented with great fondness by Lynn Comella in *Vibrator Nation*. Comella is an associate professor of gender and sexuality at the University of Nevada, and this book represents a two-decade project that became her dissertation in communications. Using archival materials and extensive interviews, the monograph weaves together her own experiences having worked at a sex-toy store in Manhattan with a thought-

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VERNON ROSARIO

**Vibrator Nation:
How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores
Changed the Business of Pleasure**

by Lynn Comella
Duke. 266 pages, \$25.95

ful contextualization of the history and politics of feminism. The work is theoretically savvy without being burdened with queer theory jargon. It has a definite queer angle, not only because many of these stores’ owners and workers were lesbians but also because the heady feminist politics of the 1960s would, by the end of the century, have a profound impact on heterosexuality.

“First-wave feminism” of the 19th century relied on an image of female sanctity, sobriety, and maternal instinct to argue for the equality, if not superiority, of women in battles for suffrage and prohibition. “Second-wave feminism” of the ’60s had to undo that puritanical image when claiming the legitimacy and autonomy of female erotic pleasure. Comella rightly highlights Betty Dodson as a pioneer of feminist consciousness-raising thanks to her championing of the beauty and erotic potential of women’s bodies. Trained as an artist, Dodson daringly promoted the aesthetics of female genitalia in her early paintings in 1968—around the time of better known feminist artists like Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneeman, who made the female body their cause. After a sexually unfulfilling first marriage, she and her new lover explored masturbation with an electric vibrator. By the early 1970s she was running “Bodysex Workshops” in her Manhattan apartment. Small groups of women got naked, explored their sexual experiences and attitudes, and then used vibrators to masturbate to orgasm. Her talks at feminist conferences and her publications—most notably *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self-Love* (1974)—made her the evangelist for feminist autoeroticism.

Dodson’s work to destigmatize masturbation also entailed

debunking the notion of the “vaginal orgasm,” which psychoanalysts claimed was the hallmark of a mature woman’s engagement to (if not enslavement by) a marital penis. For Dodson’s followers, female auto-eroticism became the epitome of the personal as the political: a way not just to destigmatize the female body and orgasm but to achieve women’s autonomy more broadly. Dell Williams attended one of Dodson’s workshops in 1973 and was blown away. After an embarrassing experience at Macy’s purchasing a Hitachi “body massager,” Williams started a mail-order vibrator business. This would become Eve’s Garden in 1975, which sold vibrators and sex-positive feminist books for the “sexually-liberated woman.” Williams was also inspired by Wilhelm Reich’s unorthodox psychoanalytic philosophy extolling the socially liberating power of sex and orgasm. Comella argues that Williams was always committed to feminist ideology more than to sales; this would continue to be a central tension of Eve’s Garden and the feminist sex toy stores it spawned around the country.

Good Vibrations would be the first, and probably the most successful, of these stores. It now includes nine stores in addition to on-line sales. Opened by Joani Blank in 1977 in San Francisco’s Mission District, it was as much a sex therapy resource center as a sex toy store. Blank had a master’s in public health and experience working in family planning. The store became a clearinghouse for advice on women’s sexuality and erotica. Thanks to its sex-positive staff, Good Vibrations became a locus for feminist sexuality debates around issues like pornography, BDSM (bondage and discipline, sadomasochism), lesbian butch/fem roles, and dildos.

In 1976, Bay Area feminists founded Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media to condemn the sexism and violence of pornography. They also condemned BDSM as the eroticization of patriarchal power, even if engaged in consensually by lesbians. The response to these “anti-pornography feminists” was provided by sex-positive feminists who argued that pornography was not intrinsically sexist or a tool of the patriarchy. Susie Bright started working at Good Vibrations in 1980 and would be inspired to dive into these sexuality debates. In 1984, she and a group of Bay Area lesbians launched *On Our Backs*, a pro-sex magazine for “adventurous lesbians.” She would soon go on to become a nationally syndicated “sexpert” (and now blogger) appealing not just to a fringe of adventurous lesbians but a broad readership.

Many other lesbians and bisexual women would become leaders in sex-toy production and marketing, like Marilyn Bishara

of dildo manufacturer Vixen Creations, and Toys in Babeland founders Rachel Venning and Claire Cavanah. Young, sexually uninhibited lesbians like “Susie Sexpert” (Bright) also coaxed the 60s generation of white, middle-class store owners to move beyond vibrators and to also sell dildos, strap-ons, BDSM paraphernalia, and porn aimed at women. Erotica entrepreneurs like former porn actress Candida Royalle (née Candice Vadala) started by marketing high-quality dildos, then went on to develop lesbian-oriented and women-oriented video erotica. (Royalle died in 2015, and her archives were acquired by the Schlesinger Library at Harvard.) Politics as much as profit coaxed the stores to reach out to women of color as well as to men.

Comella forthrightly examines many of the political and financial challenges the feminist-inspired stores tackled over the decades. The second-wave feminist store founders had to grapple with “third-wave” challenges: the place of women of color and lesbians in a predominantly white, heterosexual, bourgeois-dominated feminist movement; the role for men in the movement and as customers or employees; the inclusion of transsexual women and genderqueer people. Perhaps the greatest financial challenge these stores faced was that their mission prioritized sexual politics and education over commercial goals. Like other leftist business people (e.g., owners of food co-ops or feminist bookstores), sex store founders were ambivalent about, if not overtly hostile, to capitalism. Depending on the store, this attitude eventually led to financial ruin, adoption of a professional business model, or selling out to larger, non-feminist corporations.

Comella makes a good argument for how these feminist stores changed the business of sex shops. Their mission of sex-positivity, education, and safety for women broadly led to improvement in the quality of sex toys and the de-sleazing of sex shops in general. For example, the sex stores near the Los Angeles airport in the 1970s seem stuck in a 1970s time warp: located in seedy strip malls, packed with dusty, sticky merchandise, featuring a “peep show” in the back. Comella points out that the merchandise in these stores (like “pocket pussies” and “novelty” items) were cheap and degrading because they were meant for traveling businessmen who would soon discard them. Feminist stores had to be cleaner and more inviting. They also introduced high-quality, toxin-free silicone toys that were more durable and eco-friendly for a more discriminating and loyal female clientele. New sex stores appealing to all audiences have had to step up their game. That is evident in the Hustler Hollywood stores, which look like Gucci boutiques. Their marketing byline indeed seems cribbed from feminist stores: “an upscale, modern erotic boutique dedicated to providing a sophisticated shopping experience for the sexually curious.” It is ironic that the brand notorious for sexist, sleazy porn would have been influenced by lesbian feminists!

Equally striking is Comella’s analysis of the queering of heterosexual sexuality: that lesbian-run sex stores (and magazines) enlightened straight men to the delights of anal sex procured by their girlfriend’s strap-on. Comella doesn’t have any specific numbers by which to quantify the financial and erotic impact of feminist sex-toy stores on the “business of pleasure” in America. Nevertheless, her wide-ranging analysis is a fascinating survey of the evolving culture of sexuality in America and of a small band of pro-sex feminists who were on the front lines of the sexual revolution.



Princeton University Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts Postdoctoral Fellowships in Humanities and Social Sciences 2018-2021

Princeton Society of Fellows invites applications for three-year postdoctoral fellowships 2018-2021 for recent PhDs (from Jan.1, 2016) in humanities and affiliated social sciences. **FOUR appointments** to pursue research and teach half-time in the following areas: Open discipline (three fellowships); Humanistic Studies (one fellowship). Annual salary: approx. \$86,600. For eligibility, fellowship details and online application. see www.princeton.edu/sf

Application deadline: September 15, 2017

What Liberation Looked Like

MIGRATION is about survival. For centuries in America, LGBT people migrated northward, westward, and eastward from small towns to urban centers, forming “out” communities, constructing intellectually creative and meaningful work, and advocating for political and social rights. Heterogeneous LGBT subcultures emerged in urban neighborhoods—in Greenwich Village, West Hollywood, Boston’s South End, Chicago’s Northside, Philadelphia’s Center City, and San Francisco’s Castro Street. This migration has not been quantifiable, because census data did not include questions about sexual orientation or gender identity. Due to the striking deficiency of research and demographic statistics about LGBT migration, a discourse termed queer diaspora scholarship has developed within academia to examine this problem.

During the half century before World War II, New York and San Francisco developed concurrently as destinations for LGBT people, as places both to live and visit. In the 1950s, San Francisco was an emerging LGBT hub, with growing “homophile” organizations such as the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. In the 1970s, many New Yorkers, including Harvey Milk, migrated to San Francisco, which had a long history of sex and gender-nonconformity, cross-gender performance, and a bohemian subculture. A cadre of Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) members, many of whom changed

STEVEN F. DANSKY

**LGBT San Francisco:
The Daniel Nicoletta Photographs**
by Daniel Nicoletta
Reel Art Press. 304 pages, \$60.

their names and constructed more fluid identities in “Sodom by the Sea,” were enticed by San Francisco’s countercultural allure. Attractions included the hypermasculine subculture exemplified by *Drummer* magazine and the bars on Folsom Street; theatricality and the gender-bending antics of the Cockettes or the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence; the tribalism of the Radical Faeries; and, later, the AIDS activism of the 1980s.

LGBT San Francisco: The Daniel Nicoletta Photographs may be seen as a photojournalistic companion to Gus Van Sant’s *Milk* and Dustin Lance Black’s *When We Rise*. Its images portray a milieu of turbulence and exuberance and powerful waves of grassroots political activism. It was against that backdrop that Daniel “Danny” Nicoletta moved to San Francisco’s Castro in 1974. Photography is thematic in *Milk* as much as it is at the core of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* or Antonioni’s *Blow-Up*. The titles alone give a good idea of the eclectic content of this book: *Larry Piet’s Valentine Art Installation, Castro Camera*, February 1977; *Self-Portrait in Ashbury Street Darkroom*, 1977; *Castro Street Fair*, August 1976, which is paired with *Harvey in Front of His Castro Street Camera Store*, circa 1977; *Milk: Lukas Grabeel as Dan Nicoletta*, February 1, 2008; and *The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus Sings at the Dedication of the Harvey Milk US Postage Stamp at SF City Hall*, May 28, 2014.

In the forward to *LGBT San Francisco*, Van Sant acknowledges Nicoletta’s contribution to the visual accuracy of *Milk*: “Danny’s photographs were a vital resource to the formation of *Milk*.” His photos of the filming of *Milk* are an official record of the shoot that take on a “meta” quality given Nicoletta’s contribution to the movie’s look and atmosphere. Art historian Graham Clark once wrote: “Rather than the notion of looking, which suggests a passive act of recognition, we need to insist that we *read* a photograph, not as an image, but as a *text*.” Nicoletta’s images in *LGBT San Francisco* can be read as an epic narrative: not a static moment but an unfolding drama. There are images of Sean Penn and Harvey Milk placed side-by-side, and there are juxtaposed reenactments such as: *Supervisor Harvey Milk’s Inaugural Walk from Castro Street to City Hall, with His Lover Jack Lira and Supporters*, January 9, 1978; *Milk: Inaugural Walk re-enactment*, March 22, 2008; *Ron and Sandy Severini from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown School Prepare Harvey for an Editorial in California Living Magazine about the Circus*; and *Milk: Sean Penn as Harvey Getting Made Up by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clowns*, March 14, 2008.

Nicoletta’s work underscores the social function of photographs, drawing the reader to the image through codes, gestures, clothing, hair, and mingled artifacts of the LGBT subculture. Through the diversity of his subjects, Nicoletta asserts that the components of “LGBT” are holding together in various iterations and permutations across a wide range of identities and orientations.



Cover photo, *LGBT San Francisco*. Daniel Nicoletta, *Castro Street Fair*, 1975

Steven F. Dansky, an activist, photographer, and writer for over fifty years, is the director of *Outspoken: Oral History from LGBTQ Pioneers*.

An Activist on Three Fronts

PAULI MURRAY was a civil rights activist in mid-century America, a lawyer who fought Jim Crow laws, among other injustices, and the first African-American woman to be ordained as an Episcopal priest. In *Jane Crow*, Rosalind Rosenberg delineates Murray's education, career, and personal life in the context of American history. We see Murray as a young woman struggling against Jim Crow laws in the South, becoming a member of the Communist Party Opposition, and working for the Negro People's Committee to Aid Spanish Refugees (NPC). While picketing in Rhode Island in 1940, she was arrested by the police and taken to Bellevue Hospital for psychiatric treatment. A month later, she was arrested for creating a disturbance on a Greyhound bus in Virginia and served a short jail term. Her efforts to stay the execution of Odell Waller, a black sharecropper who'd shot his employer for refusing to give Waller his share of their wheat crop, while unsuccessful, earned her an invitation to the White House for tea with Eleanor Roosevelt.

Anna Pauline Murray was born in Baltimore in 1910, the fifth of seven children. Mixed race from both her mother's and father's sides, her ancestors included both slaves and slave owners. Her family was intelligent and well-educated but subject to nervous breakdowns. Murray was orphaned at age three when her mother died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage during a seventh pregnancy. Soon after that, her father Will, always a violent man, now left with seven children, stopped going to work, paying the mortgage, and buying groceries, relying instead on hunting. Eventually, relatives intervened and had him committed to a mental hospital. The children were scattered among several relatives. Pauli went to Durham, North Carolina, to live with her mother's sisters, Sally and Pauline, both teachers, who were stabilizing forces in her life.

Before entering Hunter College, New York City's public college for women, she had to take another year of high school as a result of being educated in a segregated school system that didn't offer the classes required for college. Later on, she was rejected by North Carolina's law school due to her race and by Harvard Law School because she was a woman, regardless of how many references she produced. She eventually earned her law degree at Howard University and the University of California.

Even in childhood, Pauli experienced gender identity issues, believing herself to be a male in a female body. As an adult, she sought hormone treatments several times to no avail. She insisted she wasn't a lesbian, claiming she wanted a woman the way a man wants a woman. Through most of

MARTHA MILLER

**Jane Crow:
The Life of Pauli Murray**
by Rosalind Rosenberg
Oxford. 512 pages, \$29.95

her adult life she had close female companions, but she moved around so much for education and work that it was difficult to sustain a relationship. She often suffered from depression and checked into mental hospitals periodically. Her longest relationship was with Irene Barlow, whom she met at the Paul, Weiss law firm. They remained close thereafter, and when Irene died of cancer in 1973, Murray's grief was inconsolable.

In 1963, she became one of the first to criticize the sexism in the civil rights movement. Murray recognized that discrimination based on race and on gender were closely related, and African-American women carried a double burden. She coined the term "Jane Crow" to characterize the status of women in general and black women in particular. Murray worked with both women's groups and civil rights organizations, advancing



Martha Miller is a Midwestern writer of plays, short fiction, reviews, articles, and novels.

the use of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Equal Protection clause, and litigation in general to end both racial and gender discrimination. Among her legal victories was *White v. Crook*, which she argued (with Dorothy Kenyon) before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, receiving a decision that guaranteed women the right to serve on juries.

Murray compiled a book, *State's Laws on Race and Color*, that Thurgood Marshal called the "Bible" of civil rights litigation; and he ordered a copy for everyone on his staff. She

brushed shoulders with the major civil rights leaders of her time. After teaching law for a few years at Brandeis, she switched gears again (in 1973) to attend the General Theological Seminary and was among the first women to be ordained as an Episcopal priest (in 1977). While not as well known as some other feminists and civil rights leaders, Pauli Murray was an actor in two of the great social movements of the last century. This book provides, in intricate detail and at considerable length, a fresh perspective on this crucial slice of history.



'A Realistic Story of Everyday Lives'

THE NATION magazine once hailed Jonathan Strong as "a writer who can speak for the sixties as Salinger did for the fifties."

Over a five-decade career, Strong has published more than a dozen novels and other works of fiction. If his early work focused on "the rapture and despair of youth," as James Morrison stated in his 1993 entry in *Contemporary Gay American Novelists* (1993), Strong's new novel, *Quit the Race*, deals with the challenges of old age. A persistent theme of his writing, the difficulty of knowing another person or even of knowing one's own heart, permeates this latest addition to his impressive oeuvre.

In the novel, 65-year-old Sean Tyson and Joel Greenwood are "a funny enough pair." After more than three decades together, they live fairly contentedly in a too tidy, almost paid-off apartment in Chicago. Each is still happily employed, Sean as a socialist-leaning agent in a housing collective, Joel as a composer and prep school music teacher. On the surface, their lives are good. "If you counted the entire population of the earth," Joel tells Sean, "we ourselves would be in the top 1 percent." But just below the surface, their relationship is freighted with many of the encumbrances of long-time couples: they've heard all of each other's stories many times; they are disinclined to exercise, and their bodies—stiff joints, a slight unsteadiness of step—are showing the signs of time and change. In bed at night, they have "increasingly rare bouts of intimacy."

Joel thinks that Sean, who has been at the same job for over forty years, is a stick-in-the-mud. "You've done enough good for the world," he tells his partner. For his part, Sean, despite occasional dalliances with Internet porn and mooning over younger guys, is confident in his devotion to Joel. But he worries that Joel's life—richer, fuller, more adventurous—is drifting away from his own. Sean is beset with anxiety that the life he has known for so many years—"that one and only home, that ever-present man beside him"—is coming to an end. The future scares him, and there's so much less of it to count on.

Sure enough, Joel starts getting itchy to move out of the city and resettle in the Wisconsin countryside of his youth, where he thinks he'll be able to write better music, "like Mahler hear-

PHILIP GAMBONE

Quit the Race

by Jonathan Strong

Pressed Wafer Press. 335 pages, \$15.

ing the alpine cowbells." He rhapsodizes to his partner: "We can be two old goats together up there and quit the race." This plan does not reassure Sean, who becomes haunted by the notion that they will drift toward separate ends. It doesn't help that their friend Sheila tells him: "I like watching things break down." Joel's frustration

with Sean's unwillingness to consider a move erupts every now and then in angry accusations or barbed teasing. When Sean receives an unexpected inheritance of \$100,000, the possibility of owning country property suddenly becomes more real, and the stakes escalate.

In the second part of the novel, Sean and Joel drive up to Wisconsin to look at property. "This is really more Joel's thing," Sean tells the real estate agent. "I'm open to looking, but I'm pretty attached to Chicago." She tells them warily: "If you don't see eye to eye, buying a vacation home or, even worse, one for retirement, could be the first step toward divorce." Gradually, though, Sean begins to come around to the idea. If they're lucky, he thinks, they can still be happy together, at least until one of them dies. As the novel unfolds, further challenges, roadblocks, and anxieties keep the pair from achieving a simple or neat resolution.

At one point we learn that Sean likes "realistic stories of everyday lives." This is exactly the kind of novel that Strong has written. As such, there is much to admire. The fact that its protagonists are two aging gay men is enough to distinguish it from the pack of modern gay novels. Strong's familiarity with classical music, and his use of it as a metaphor for Sean and Joel's contest of wills, is impressive. Running through the novel is Joel's struggle to compose a piece based on a poem by Longfellow, a poem Sean has chosen for him, about "growing old and everybody drifting apart and never being one again." Moreover, the premise of the novel—that even after so many years together, an unrecognized but crucial difference between the two members of a couple may suddenly burst forth—is very credible.

Curiously, there are a few slips that one wouldn't expect from a veteran writer. For my taste, Strong is too fond of dialogue that conveniently supplies backstory information. And he has a penchant for superfluous details that don't contribute much to the novel's scheme. Why, for example, do we need to know that the LaSalle Bank is now called the Bank of America? (Other details—like the fact that Sean and Joel have cornflakes

Philip Gambone is the author of four books, including the novel Beijing (Wisconsin).

and pomegranate juice for breakfast—are perfect.) Some of the novel’s subplots—one in which Sean picks up a street kid for sex; another (in flashback) about his discovery that his father was gay—are not fully developed. Strong seems to be wrestling with the place of sex in a long-term relationship, but he shies away from fully exploring it.

Despite these quibbles, this is an impressive piece of work.

I came away from it realizing that I’d read an *adult* novel written for serious readers of fiction. It explores a question we seldom encounter in gay literature: how can two men grow old together? And its answer is nuanced, mature, and quietly sad. Kudos, too, to Pressed Wafer Press for putting out such a handsome volume, reminding us that a physical book is still a pleasure to read.



B R I E F S

Prince Harry: Boy to Man

by William Kuhn

Montgomery St. Press. 310 pages, \$14.99

This novel reads like an Enid Blyton adventure story crossed with Elizabethan comedy, the cast braving dire odds en route to love. Lieutenant Harry Wales, antic prince with a somber core, deploys to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban, or at least to make a show of it for crown and country. His fellow officer and good friend Mustafa Khan, whose parents had emigrated from Afghanistan to England after making a fortune in the opium trade, is secretly gay. In Kabul they meet Reed, a handsome young CNN reporter embedded with a U.S. combat unit. His full name is Cindy Reed; he’s actually a woman masquerading as male to qualify for the hazardous posting. All three characters have things to hide, and so does Frances de Mornay, a church-group aid volunteer whose mysterious past includes a private Olympic-size swimming pool. She drinks, but she’s formidable. Her accent alone can bring affairs of state to a grinding halt.

William Kuhn’s debut novel, *Mrs Queen Takes the Train*, a tale of the monarch on the lam in mufti, delighted anglophiles. His new offering will do the same with slyly fond pokes at the niceties of Spode china, sitting-room décor “on the Surrey-Sussex border,” and tiffin. (What is tiffin? I have no idea.) Prince Harry fans will get a kick out of Kuhn’s deft descriptions. For example: “His rusty hair looked electric and hot to the touch.” And there’s this: “His underwear clung to him like the skin of an aquatic mammal.” Oi!

LEWIS GANNETT

“The Man Who Thought Himself a Woman” and Other Queer Nineteenth Century Short Stories

Edited by Christopher Looby

Pennsylvania. 311 pages, \$24.95

Christopher Looby, professor of English at UCLA, has put together an interesting collection of 19th- and early 20th-century short stories written by well-known, semi-known, and obscure writers, including Willa Cather, Henry James, Walt Whitman, Louisa May Alcott, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Octave Thanet, not to mention the “Anonymous” author who wrote this book’s title story. In

his excellent introduction, Looby introduces his notion of “queerness” and his thesis that the short story is the embodiment of this concept in relation to the novel. The stories explore and celebrate the variety and diversity of gender identities, erotic expressions, friendships, and other attachments that can make for complicated relationships. The narratives are free of the categorization and medicalization prevalent in 20th- and 21st-century depictions of gender and sexuality, presenting different ways of describing gender, desire, and sexual orientation. What’s most refreshing about these stories is their oddness, their quality as outliers—in short, their queerness. The narratives do not conform to any rules of what is permissible to write about. They are remarkably free from contemporary repression and angst. Some of them read like science fiction, or fantasy, or gothic tales. This fine collection offers a window into a variety of imaginative worlds: queer worlds filled with plenty of outliers.

IRENE JAVORS

Guide to Manly Health & Training

by Walt Whitman

Ten Speed Press. 123 pages, \$14.99

There is certainly nothing explicitly homosexual about Walt Whitman’s *Guide*; but somehow the book is “gay” through and through. The fact that Whitman has written this book at all, exclusively about men, and the delight he takes in describing the characteristics of a manly man, is a good place to start. Indeed, the total absence of women in a complete primer about masculine pursuits—which delves into everything from a man’s toilet to exercise, diet, dress, and sports, including baseball (thumbs way up!)—is surely an omission that no straight male writer would make. For him, the guide would be all about how to become a fit gentleman so as to attract the finest ladies (this is 19th-century America).

One can assume that the author of “Song of Myself” is essentially touting the habits and virtues of one Walt Whitman most of the time. Still, at other times he seems to be describing his “type,” declaring himself “a student of the body” and “realizing that a broad chest, a muscular pair of arms, and two sinewy legs, will be just as much credit to

you” as various professional achievements. The book is presented as a series of aphorisms with era-appropriate drawings by Matthew Allen. Here’s a gem: “One ambition ... is the desire and determination to put your body in a healthy and sweet-blooded condition—to be a man, hearty, active, muscular, handsome—yes, handsome—for it is not for nothing that throughout the human race there is the universal desire that the body should not only be well but look well.” It is part of Whitman’s charm that he relentlessly universalizes his own private sentiments, assuming here that his own fascination with beautiful men is shared by everyone. But who is to say that he’s not right?

RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.

Queer Dance: Meanings and Makings

Edited by Clare Croft

Oxford. 315 pages, \$35.

This book is an amalgam of academic analysis, artists’ manifestos, and personal essays seeking to upend the heteronormative and Euro-centric paradigms prevailing in dance and performance scholarship. The collection grew out of a dance festival curated by the editor, Clare Croft, in 2015, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Complementing the book is a website featuring videos of performances and interviews with contributing writers. Transgressive improvisers, a country western cowboy, hip-hop, street and erotic dancers, clubbers, drag kings, and performance artists are among the outlaws tackling artificial binary notions of gender, sexuality, and desire in performance. Transcultural perspectives are added by a Bollywood drag queen, a kathak dancer, a taiko musician, and an Irish step-dancer. Balletic and modern classics from the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s are examined through a revisionist queer lens for their innuendo and latent coded references. While the anthology promises an expanded discourse for dance and queer studies, ultimately it is too insular for that, with artists, scholars, and theorists speaking primarily to each other. Academic arguments obfuscate and hyperbolic jargon loses the reader. Unfortunately, promising theses don’t always translate into compelling narrative.

JOHN R. KILLACKY

Person and Persona

CLAUDE CAHUN may not be particularly well known outside the art world, but this highly readable biography of the 20th-century French writer, artist, and photographer ought to help change this situation. Jennifer L. Shaw has written a fascinating book about a gender-bending lesbian intellectual who challenged ideas of gender and sexuality in both her life and art.

Claude Cahun (1894-1954) led a highly unconventional life. Lucy Schwob, her original name, was born into a prominent, well-off publishing family in Nantes. She was relentlessly bullied in school for her bookishness and her family's



Claude Cahun, 1928. Courtesy of Jersey Heritage Collections

Jewish heritage, so much so that she temporarily transferred to England. Her mother suffered from mental illness and was frequently institutionalized. As a teenager, she met and befriended Suzanne Malherbe, who would become her lover, stepsister, and artistic collaborator under the name Marcel Moore. Schwob later adopted the pen name Claude Cahun,

CHARLES GREEN

**Exist Otherwise:
The Life and Works of Claude Cahun**
by Jennifer L. Shaw
Reaktion. 256 pages, \$45.

moved with Moore to Paris, and became deeply involved in the cultural and intellectual life of the city, delving into theater, the Surrealist movement, and politics. The two women met people like Sylvia Beach, André Breton, and Salvador Dalí. Shortly before World War II, they moved to Jersey (the island), and during the German occupation of the island, they engaged in an

artistic resistance that led to their imprisonment and nearly to their execution.

From Shaw's viewpoint, Cahun's artistic output emerged from her sense of being different—as a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew. Her first serious attempt at a book-length literary work, the unpublished “Les Jeux Uraniens” (“Uranian Games”), was about a number of Victorian poets who wrote about homosexuality, among them Oscar Wilde and his lover Alfred Douglas. The book includes a dialogue between personifications of sexual love and spiritual love. A collection of essays, *Heroines* (1925), rewrites the classic tales of women like Eve, Sappho, Cinderella, and Belle (of *Beauty and the Beast*) to reshape them into “self-possessed, shrewd and knowing characters.” For instance, Belle “feels cheated” when the monster becomes a prince, since she has spent time and energy learning to love his monstrous qualities. She asks him for “the address of ‘an authentic monster,’ one who might be able to fulfill her desire.” Another work, *Disavowals*, has as its epigraph: “Surely you are not claiming to be more pederast than I?”

Her photography takes this critique of femininity and heterosexuality to another level. Her persona in many of her photos is what today might be called “genderqueer,” with shaved head and gender-neutral clothing. In some, she poses as the Buddha wearing traditional garb. The cover photograph for this book displays her disembodied head in a jar; it is one of a series of similar photographs. Later images are photomontages that, as Shaw writes, enable viewers “to think critically about ... conventions of gender, sexuality, creativity and love.” They seem very much in line with Surrealism, and can still surprise us even today.

Cahun was also involved with the French Communist Party, although it was a complicated relationship, for her and many other artists. While she was uncomfortable with the Communist insistence on social realism, preferring to take “her own individual position on art,” she always remained interested in Marxist thought. Her activities in Jersey during the war, creating subversive photomontages to be found by the German forces, can be said to combine her artistic and political interests. This section of the book is incredibly suspenseful, as she and Moore truly risked their lives for their art.

Filled with reproductions of photographs and detailed descriptions and analyses of her writings, *Exist Otherwise* is a comprehensive introduction to Claude Cahun's art and writing. With any luck it will bring readers back to her unique body of work.

Charles Green is a writer based in Annapolis, Maryland.

Latin Cinema Grows Up

JOSEPH M. ORTIZ

New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film

by Vinodh Venkatesh

University of Texas Press. 252 pages, \$29.95

I STILL REMEMBER the first time I saw Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También*, in a small independent theater in Princeton, New Jersey in 2001. The film, about two teenage boys (played by Diego Luna and Gael García Bernal, then relative unknowns) and Luisa, a somewhat mysterious older woman (Maribel Verdú), had already garnered much buzz for its fresh and sexy edginess. Even so, the audience let out a collective gasp during the penultimate scene, when Tenoch and Julio—who up to that point appear as typical heterosexual adolescents with raging hormones—start making out with each other, while being fucked by Luisa. The post-film conversation with my partner (now husband) centered on the obvious questions: were the boys really gay? bisexual? Or were they just really drunk? There seemed to be no satisfactory answer.

As Vinodh Venkatesh explains in *New Maricón Cinema: Outing Latin American Film*, such sexual ambiguity in Cuarón's film is quite deliberate. Moreover, this ambiguity is not merely a matter of narrative—Diego and Tenoch never talk about the kiss—but an effect of Cuarón's cinematographic techniques. The audience never actually sees what Luisa is doing, since the camera focuses only on the facial expressions of the two boys. The viewer, “disoriented by the sucking and licking mouth of Luisa off camera and the naked, drunken heat of the two friends,” is moved from a position of spectatorship to one that is more participatory and sensuous. Put simply, we don't see the event so much as we experience it: “we share saliva and caress the tongues and lips of Julio and Tenoch ... as (homo)erotically involved and complicit subjects.” From this perspective, questions about who is and isn't gay quickly become complicated.

For Venkatesh, *Y Tu Mamá También* is not significant primarily because it helped put Mexican filmmaking on the global map or because it launched the careers of Cuarón, Luna, and García Bernal (though it did do these things), but because it anticipated a wave of films that Venkatesh categorizes as “New Maricón.” (“Maricón” is a Spanish slang term that's roughly equivalent to “queer” or “fag.”) These are gay- or queer-themed films that Venkatesh distinguishes from earlier Maricón films, which, even when representing gay characters sympathetically, tend to reinforce ideas about homosexuality as different or deviant. New Maricón films, by contrast, collapse the “safe” distance between their audiences and their queer characters, and in the process they unsettle conventional ideas about sexual types or identities.

At times Venkatesh's categorization of Maricón and New Maricón cinema comes across as a distinction between “gay” and “queer” films. To an extent this analogy holds true. Yet Venkatesh is tracing something beyond questions of sexual or gender identities. New Maricón films, as he describes them, fundamentally

alter the conventional relationship between a film's viewers and its characters. Part of this change happens through a relocation of queer space, or “deterritorialization.” For example, many New Maricón films take place outside of the urban centers where gayness is legible and safely contained. More profoundly, these films make possible a greater empathetic relationship between viewer and subject by enabling the viewer to share the subject's aural and tactile experiences rather than merely look from a distance—what Venkatesh identifies as the “traditional scopophilic nature” of gay-themed cinema.

Readers who are not immersed in critical theory may wonder what exactly Venkatesh means by this. How can a viewer “feel” a film? Fortunately, Venkatesh's close and detailed analyses of particular scenes help to convey the kind of cinematic experience he is postulating. For example, in a chapter on Javier Fuentes-León's *Contracorriente* (*Undertow*), a film that dominated the LGBT film festival circuit in 2010, he deconstructs a lovemaking scene between Santiago and Miguel, the film's main characters, pointing out how the viewer never sees either body as a “complete whole.” This cinematic technique of showing the body only in “bits and pieces” prompts the viewer to inhabit imaginatively the sensory experience of the film's characters. For Venkatesh, it is this “affective” cinematic experience that defines New Maricón cinema more than anything else.

As with the Cuarón and Fuentes-León films, *New Maricón Cinema* is most enjoyable as a companion to the films themselves, and as a goad to see these films in the first place. (Many are available on DVD or from streaming sites, with English subtitles.) The one drawback is likely to be the book's language, which is often jargon-heavy (even for a film study) and unnecessarily arcane. This is a pity, since Venkatesh's subject and argument should appeal to a much wider audience than film scholars. Still, those looking to expand their repertoire of Latin American gay-themed films, or deepen their appreciation of these films, would do well to consult this book.

Joseph M. Ortiz is associate professor of English at U-Texas, El Paso.

The Summer of '60

DANIEL A. BURR

After the Blue Hour: A True Fiction

by John Rechy

Grove Press. 212 pages, \$25.

ALTHOUGH IT'S HARD to imagine John Rechy as a male ingénue, this is the role he assigns himself in his latest novel. Set in 1960—three years before the publication of *City of Night* made him famous—Rechy's new novel is described on the title page as “A True Fiction.” This could describe many of his first-person narratives, which take readers into the mid-20th-century world of sexual outlaws: hustlers, drag queens, men seeking sex in city parks and rented rooms. Rechy not only wrote about but inhabited this world as a man compul-

sively pursuing impersonal sexual encounters. An unnamed version of John Rechy describing these intimate experiences is the narrator of many of his novels.

In *After the Blue Hour*, the narrator bears the name of the author himself. A preface informs us that the 24-year-old John Rechy has received a letter, forwarded by his publisher, from a man who admires two short stories recently published in magazines, and extends an invitation to spend the summer with him on his private island. Once a plane ticket arrives, he accepts the invitation, wondering if this man, who would have seen a picture of the ruggedly handsome author that appeared in one of the magazines, is interested in more than his writing.

When John meets his host, Paul, in a crowded airport, he sizes him up to determine which of them has the physical, and possibly the sexual, upper hand. John guesses Paul is in his late thirties, a tall, handsome, deeply tanned man with a slender, well-toned body. John is more muscular and confident that he can catch up with the tan. Paul wears the casual clothes of a wealthy man; John is dressed in Levi's, a tight shirt, and short boots. John relaxes. Their bodies and styles of dress are sufficiently different to mean they're not competing in these areas. As the plot of *After the Blue Hour* unfolds, Rechy recounts the gradual erosion of John's self-confidence and his belief that he and Paul are equally matched.

This is a good point to state that the character "John Rechy" is just that, a character, and that the author is shaping this narrative as a work of the imagination, no matter how much it may have been inspired by some incident in his early life. In fact, Rechy relies on one of the most literary of all genres to tell his story, the gothic novel.

Anyhow, Paul takes John to a lush, green island with a large house on a lake. On the way, John notices another island, gray and shadowy, that "looked neglected, left to die." When asked about this island, Paul makes a passing reference to the "flames of evil" but declines to tell John what happened there. When they arrive at the house, they are met by Sonya, Paul's beautiful young companion, and Stanty, his fourteen-year-old son. The four of them will spend the summer together, attended by two mysterious servants, a man and a woman who remain in the background and never speak. The two men spend most of their time together talking: about Paul's life with his two former wives, about books, and about influences on John's writing. In his persona as a street hustler, John emphasized a "strained masculinity" and hid his intelligence and education, so at first he enjoys displaying his knowledge of writing, film, music, and art.

John forms a more personal connection with Sonya, finding her attractive and, like himself, vulnerable to being possessed by men with money and power. Stanty, on the other hand, has an uncanny ability to expose John's weaknesses, especially those connected with his Chicano heritage and his impoverished childhood. John quickly comes to dislike the boy. In Stanty, Rechy creates a memorable portrait of a beautiful but evil child. The nature of evil, how people can take part in horrendous events and then ignore them, is the major theme of *After the Blue Hour*. John recognizes the evil in Stanty almost from the beginning. His illusions about Paul and Sonya last longer because the three become engaged in an extended erotic flirtation that culminates in a startling scene of sexual degradation near the end of the novel.

John's flirtation with Sonya is more about friendship than

sex. He tells her his "love affairs" with women have never included sex but have resulted in his most lasting relationships. John is less in control of his flirtation with Paul. The older man dominates their conversations, which usually take place as the two lie side-by-side sunbathing in swim trunks. John is overwhelmingly aware of Paul's body, especially his large "endowment," which is in evidence whenever he violently kisses Sonya or describes his sexual conquests of women. Although Paul's mistreatment of women shocks John, he's unable to stop listening to this man who hustled his way to wealth. John had always believed his own hustling had the essential integrity of two men being honest about what they were seeking. Under the demonic influence of Paul, who wants to seduce John in both body and mind, he begins to question this ethos.

The gothic elements of the novel—the unrelenting heat, the mysterious servants, rumors about the nearby island—are a bit forced at times. Still, this genre serves Rechy well as he explores the question of evil in *After the Blue Hour*. Although he abandoned the Catholicism of his childhood, at heart he has always been a very moral writer. He knows the world is not innocent, and he knows the lure of the erotic. But he also knows that facing the consequences of their behavior gives people an integrity that keeps the forces of true evil in check. Fifty-four years after Rechy wrestled with these same matters in *City of Night*, it's splendid to have another of his masterful novels.

Daniel Burr, who lives in Covington, Kentucky, is a frequent contributor to this magazine.

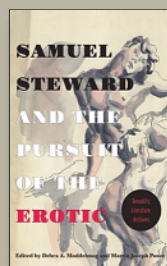


My Father's Closet

KAREN A. MCCLINTOCK

2017 256 pp.
\$29.95
15 b&w illustrations
Trillium Books

"Karen McClintock reconstructs the details of her father's double life with novelistic flair, keen psychological insight, and graceful compassion." —**Alison Bechdel**



Samuel Steward and the Pursuit of the Erotic

Sexuality, Literature, Archives

EDITED BY DEBRA A. MODELMOG AND
MARTIN JOSEPH PONCE

2017 248 pp.
\$87.95
20 b&w illustrations

"*Samuel Steward and the Pursuit of the Erotic* offers a truly innovative and impressively far-reaching assemblage of criticism and commentary that engages some of the most pressing theoretical problems of our time, including the increasingly apparent inadequacy of the concept of 'sexual identity' itself." —**Colin Johnson**

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Cultural Calendar

Readers are invited to submit items at no charge. Must have relevance to a North American readership. E-mail to: HGLR@aol.com. Be sure to allow at least a month's lead time for any listing.

Festivals and Events

FILM FESTIVALS

Austin, TX aGLIFF Film Festival. Sept. 7–10.
Long Beach, CA QFilms Long Beach. Sept. 7–10.
Memphis OutFlix. Sept. 8–14.
Fresno, CA Reel Pride. Sept. 20–24.
Palm Springs Cinema Diverse. Sept. 21–24.
Chicago Reeling Film Festival. Sept. 21–28.
Atlanta Out on Film. Sept. 28–Oct. 8.
Portland, OR Queer Film Fest. Sept. 29–Oct. 5.
Rochester, NY Image OUT. Oct. 5–15.
Tampa Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Oct. 6–14.
Ft. Lauderdale OUTshine. Oct. 6–15.
Seattle Twist. Oct. 12–22.
Albuquerque Southwest Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Oct. 13–22.
Sacramento Int'l. Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Oct. 13–15.
New York City LGBT Film Fest. Oct. 19–24.

EVENTS

NLGJA Convention (National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Assn.) will be held this year in Philadelphia, Sept. 7–10.
Gay & Lesbian Medical Assoc. Annual Conf. will be held in Philadelphia, Sept. 13–16. For more info, visit: www.glma.org.
Workplace Summit in Philadelphia, Oct. 9–12. Share strategies to create more inclusive workplaces. Visit: www.outandequal.org.
Fantasia Fair A celebration of gender diversity, annual conf. will take place in Provincetown, MA, Oct. 16–23.
Creating Change The annual conf. of the National LGBTQ Task Force will be in Washington, DC, Jan. 24–28, 2018.

Feature Films

After Louie (directed by Vincent Gagliostro) Alan Cumming stars as a spent artist and AIDS survivor whose routine is rocked by—what else?—a younger man who enters his life. *Reviewed on page 47.*
Behind the Curtain: Todrick Hall (Katherine Fairfax Wright) Documentary focuses on two weeks in the life of the YouTube wunderkind as he shoots 16 videos for his album *Straight Outta Oz*.
Center of My World (Jakob M. Erwa) German coming-of-age story about Phil, a high school student whose world is turned upside down when a strapping track star arrives.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS – THE G&LR

The Gay & Lesbian Review accepts unsolicited manuscripts and proposals on all GLBT-related topics. Especially sought are proposals on the following themes for issues in development:

- **Social Problems:** Homelessness, addiction, poverty, etc.
- **Long Before Stonewall:** GLBT culture from BC to the 19th c.
- **The Family:** The ones we came from and the ones we create

Please e-mail your proposal to the Editor at HGLR@aol.com.

A Date for Mad Mary (Darren Thornton) Dramedy about a woman who comes home after a stint in prison to find that her best friend is getting married, and she needs to find a date for the wedding.

The Fabulous Allan Carr (Jeffrey Schwarz) Documentary about the Broadway and Hollywood producer, promoter, and celebrity host. With Goldie Hawn, Michelle Pfeiffer, Raquel Welch, et al.

Freak Show (Trudie Styler) Comedy about a boy in a conservative town who—despite warnings from his mother (played by Bette Midler)—decides to run for prom queen.

Hello Again (Tom Gustafson) Musical drama tells of ten lust-filled gay love affairs spanning a century in New York City.

Prom King, 2010 (Christopher Schaap) Comedy about a romantic college guy who's looking for true love only to find a world of Grindr, hookups, and rule-free dating.

Something Like Summer (David Berry) Drama traces the relationship between Ben and Tim, high school sweethearts whose lives intertwine in complex ways over the years.

Tom of Finland (Dome Karukoski) Biopic covers the porn artist's life and career from service in the Finnish Army in WWII to celebrity status in Southern California. *Reviewed on page 47.*

Theater / Dance

Afterglow Off-Broadway drama explores what happens when a married gay couple lets a third man into their lives (and bed). Playing now at the Davenport Theatre, NYC. *Reviewed at right.*

Skintight Off-Broadway play about a woman jilted by her husband who seeks solace with her famous father, only to find he's involved with a man of twenty. At the Roundabout Theatre Co.

This Bitter Earth Drama about a mixed-race couple united by political activism, struggling to redefine their relationship when the activism wanes. At San Francisco's NCTC, Sept. 22–Oct. 22.

Homos, Or Everyone In America Play jumps in time to tell the story of a Brooklyn couple navigating the complexities of modern gay life. Diversions Theatre, San Diego, Sept. 14–Oct. 15.

Men on Boats Comedy retells the 1869 saga of an actual expedition up the Colorado River as a meditation on gender and historical memory. At Boston's Calderwood Pavilion, Sept. 8–Oct. 7.

The Rocky Horror Show Classic camp musical is at the OutFront Theatre Company in Atlanta, Oct. 19–Nov. 5.

Art Exhibitions

Florine Stetthamer: Painting Poetry Works by a campy artist of the Modernist era. At the Jewish Museum on Manhattan's Museum Mile thru Sept. 24. *Reviewed on page 46.*

Expanded Visions: Fifty Years of Collecting Historic show spotlights 250 works collected by Charles Leslie and Fritz Lohman. At the Leslie-Lohman Pinto Gallery in NYC thru Oct. 29.

Barbara Hammer: Evidentiary Bodies Assembles pieces of film, installations, works on paper, and other material from her archive. At the Leslie-Lohman Gallery in NYC, Oct. 7–Jan. 28, 2018.

AIDS at Home: Art and Everyday Activism looks at artists' response to the plague from the 1980s to the present. At the Museum of the City of New York thru Oct. 22.

Desire Love Identity: Exploring LGBTQ Histories The British Museum in London shines a light on same-sex relationships using objects dating from antiquity to the present. Thru Oct. 15.

The Perils of Polyamory

OKAY, *AFTERGLOW* is a very sexy show, but I don't think most people go to the theater to see three good-looking young men lounging naked on a bed in the aftermath of a passionate threesome (whose moans and groans we've heard from behind curtains), then watch them shower together in various pairs—all this in the first fifteen minutes. With intermission, *Afterglow* runs more than two hours. That's a lot of time to fill, and playwright-director S. Asher Gelman has his work cut out for him in this three-character play dealing with a settled gay couple, Josh and Alex, who are in the habit of bringing home a third just to mix it up. Sleepovers not allowed. But on this night, the fun gets serious as Josh finds the younger Darius, the evening's party boy, to be of more than passing interest.

The setup proceeds at a tolerable pace, although the prospect of sitting through two hours about the injustices implicit in any threesome—especially the likelihood that the interloper will ultimately be left out in the cold—invited serious reservations. Fortunately, the superficial pleasures of watching randy eye candy evolved into a sobering exploration of the pitted emotional terrain of a gay marriage between a self-involved theater professional, Josh, whose sexual neediness leaves Alex, a graduate student in chemistry, increasingly feeling like a third wheel. It soon becomes clear to Alex that aside from the demands of Josh's new theatrical production, his husband is spending a good deal of time with this new twink in their armor. Darius is a boyish masseur whose freelance profession affords him the time to hang with Josh and intensify their sexual and emotional connection.

A key element that's underdeveloped is the impending birth of a child that Josh and Alex have fathered through surrogacy. We would imagine that factor to be of more than passing interest in any calculations the couple would make when negotiating the dilemma of incorporating a third partner into their life. Of course, the third person was always intended to be a one-nighter, or at best, a fuckbuddy for either or both to dispose of at will. Darius proves to be something more than a cute naïf; indeed, early on he expresses his own doubts to Josh about what might be in store. Never having been in a relationship at age 25, Dar-

ALLEN ELLENZWEIG

Afterglow

Written & directed by S. Asher Gelman
Produced by Midnight Theatricals
The Loft at the Davenport Theatre, NYC


ius is eager to test those waters, but Josh would hardly seem to be relationship material.

These quandaries, alongside issues of jealousy and betrayal, commitment and sacrifice, full communication and truths withheld, are given increasing expression as the play deepens. The acting is at a high level, especially notable given that the three

characters are not always fully fleshed out. As the sexual satyr among the three, Josh defends his appetites in the face of his husband's reserve, telling Alex: "we're young, we're hot, we're practically exploding with testosterone. We should be fucking all of the time!" Alex, on the other hand, grounded in the facts of chemistry, is the stalwart of the pair who sees Josh as having broken the rules of their open marriage. Neither of them should fall in love with an outsider.

Afterglow is Gelman's first play, although he has a solid theater background as a director, choreographer, actor, and dancer. The play, based in part on his own experience with an extra-marital relationship, shows that he can write strong individual scenes for his actors that have the ring of truth. However, unexamined elements of real life, as opposed to theatrical life, risk leaving the play less than the sum of its engaging parts. The couple's impending parenthood should count for more in the emotional arc of these lives; and it seems odd in the unforgiving economics of today's New York City that the play is missing any sense of the couple's financial status. It would surely be a

factor in how they come to some resolution or understanding.

Gelman writes scenes of conflict and tenderness that his actors can attack with suitable vigor or understatement. In a small theater with a production on a tight budget, Gelman has skillfully directed his actors to take on stagehand duties inside a minimalist set whose modular elements lock into place in a measured choreography of movements. Kudos to scenic designer Ann Beyersdorfer. This is a worthy first effort that gives three actors the chance to display their chops, and their—ahem—natural gifts. Gelman is a playwright to watch and a director of established skills. As for the three actors—Brandon Haagenson, Robbie Simpson, and Patrick Reilly—their success is in getting us past the initial eye-catching scenes to achieve moments of painful conflict, confusion, and pain. The play ends with one character walking away and closing a door—shades of Nora walking out on Torvald in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, a playwright that Gelman would perhaps like to emulate. 



Brandon Haagenson & Patrick Reilly in *Afterglow*. Mati Gelman photo.

Allen Ellenzweig is writing a biography of celebrity portrait and male nude photographer George Platt Lynes (1907-1955).

The Great Work Continues!

FROM THE MOMENT Nathan Lane stepped onto the stage as the malign yet also tragic Roy Cohn, owning not only the part, but the huge Lyttelton stage and indeed the entire auditorium, the audience knew that it was witnessing something very special: dazzling theatricality, inspired casting, wit, prescience, wisdom, and a sense of the historic. When the National Theatre first staged *Angels in America* a quarter of a century ago, it announced the arrival of a major new force in American theater, certainly. But it equally marked a shift in how cultural responses to AIDS generally would come to position themselves, argue politically and engage, seduce yet also confront and make demands of their audiences or readers.

Where first-wave AIDS drama in America—notably Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* and William Hoffman’s *As Is*—did much to articulate the fear, anger, and bewilderment among early gay victims and their peers, Kushner responded to the continuing crisis by shining a spotlight onto mainstream American society. The experience of watching *Angels in America* in 2017

RICHARD CANNING

**Angels in America:
A Gay Fantasia on National Themes
Part One: Millennium Approaches
Part Two: Perestroika**

by Tony Kushner
Directed by Marianne Elliott
Lyttelton Theatre, London
4 May—19 August 2017

ceives the news of his “anointment” by the Angel at the close of *Millennium Approaches* reminds us that Kushner’s dramaturgy embraces both the naturalistic and the absurd. Garfield juts, stares, and jabs his fingers at his predicament, paradoxically becoming more palpably alive when bedbound while his character is being psychically stretched through the hurt, confusion, and shock of his predicament.

Lane’s performance in this production is simply jaw-dropping. Kushner’s pleasure in writing such a dark character is evident: he gave Cohn a lot of the best lines. And the more Lane camps it up, the more the audience is compelled to accept that, in the stage-play world, immorality may thrive. The devil entertains—and is applauded for it. Lane understands that Cohn is simply doing what is natural to narcissists; with the wipe of a cuff, he reinterprets his own dependency, sexual marginality, and isolation as positions of strength. History can be a strange and unlikely thing, and naturally Cohn’s role in mentoring the young Donald Trump offers Lane a golden opportunity to pitch for the prescience and relevance of Kushner’s play. While never adopting Trump’s own odd manners or style of self-presentation, Lane convincingly offers us someone who could, and would, have shaped the U.S. presidency in his own diabolical direction.

One element of *Angels* that has worn less well is its apocalyptic theme, a very tangible fear in our culture in the 1990s but something that we can scarcely feel today. When Ethel Rosenberg warns Roy Cohn that “History is about to crack wide open,” the contemporary audience may knowingly dissent. The 21st century’s march of globalization and digital culture has not so much broken historical narratives as seen them simply stretched further and repeated more widely than before. AIDS, of course, has continued to be perpetuated as a changing medical crisis: as medical responses improve, so much the greater are the health-care challenges facing the West with an ever larger volume of



Denise Gough and Andrew Garfield in *Angels in America*. Photo: Helen Maybanks

can never be the same as in 1992, most obviously because of the changes in biomedicine that have rendered HIV infection a survivable condition today. So, when Kushner’s sick protagonist Prior Walter determines to choose life and hope over victimization and despair, this could strike the audience in 1992 as poignant and brave, but also as ironic and foolhardy. Now it may seem a natural response to the news of HIV infection, devastating as it still can be, coupled with a determination to take one’s

Richard Canning is the editor of Vital Signs: Essential AIDS Fiction (2007).

HIV+ survivors to support, some experiencing a range of related medical conditions or side effects. In the developing world, the epidemic's contours remain quite different, but the sense of unfinished business applies just as strongly.

These things are not the subject of Kushner's plays, obviously, but they mediate how we respond today. A vital consideration here is the way in which the intervention of combination therapy treatments from around 1996 transformed the epidemic, rendering it less taboo socially and less visible politically. Felice Picano's AIDS-related novel *Like People in History* may have suggested the ways in which American gay men in the midst of gay liberation and then the AIDS crisis wished to be considered, but in that account—and many others in fiction, drama, and film—the rendering of social context and political import was uneven. By contrast, Kushner showed the world to be fully relative, with the sustained impact of one action upon others entirely absent and distant from it somehow suggesting a staged version of chaos theory. He also critiqued himself, showing how the dramatist can shuffle and invent and fix things to make this seem so, reanimating the dead, allowing fantastical figures to coexist alongside the real. Kudos to Susan Brown for a truly mesmerizing performance as Rosenberg, the hard-left adversary whom Cohn was instrumental in having executed, who returns as her ghost to sing the Kaddish to the abandoned, dying Cohn.

The staging of the two plays in Marianne Elliott's production is occasionally a mixed blessing. Ian MacNeil's set for *Millennium Approaches* is unhelpfully like a set of discarded boxes,

littering the wide stage and oppressively overshadowed by an unexplained spaceship-like carapace above. The result is that each scene suggests, quite wrongly, the separateness of the lives of Kushner's characters, whereas Kushner's script insists on interrelatedness and mutual relevance. It may be that Elliott and MacNeil wanted simply to make a clear differentiation between their production and Declan Donnellan's 1994 staging of the two-part play here. However, my strongest memories of Donnellan's staging remain the scenes in which paired conversations overlapped on an open stage, mutually commenting and counter-stating individual assumptions and perspectives.

More successful, however, is the reconceiving of the Angel as a bedraggled, improvised, and markedly sinister outsize bird. Where earlier versions of *Angels* have interpreted the Angel as Kushner's warning against or reproach toward simple solutions, marketers' promises, or religious or nationalistic pieties, Elliott furnishes the Angel with a cohort of puppet-like human dancers to propel her into the air. Her Angel is a reflection, surely, of a very contemporary mood, one in which those who promise deliverance and redemption from on high strike a distinctly unpersuasive note: leaders whose appearance undermines the confident claims they spout. By contrast, Prior is given the speech that affirms the poignancy of Kushner's play and the timeliness of its revival: "This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living, and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward. We will be citizens. The time has come."



Tara bleeds ashes

branded **Thomas Anthony**
Rampersant

resurrected as Tara

Diva.

born of the old south
i could not rise
from the shackles and sermons
that cursed me

my body was carved
long
lean
and luxurious
working the shrimp boats
in the harbor
from age 9

while friends and brothers
suckled on beer and football
from sunrise until dying day

i watched Ginger and Fred
in grandma's trailer
a 13 inch world

set on her kitchenette table
but Tara burned
emancipated in the north
through lessons at Ailey's

yet I was never good enough
for the company

but I had to eat, so

I danced for women
I danced for men
both wanted the same thing
but men paid better

and promised even more

though many hid in the same lie
I once did

they were your

brothers
fathers
husbands
lovers
and for three minutes in

a darkened corner
their throbbing indignation
was set free against me
within me
within him

Im no longer a PYT
just another old bitch
who needs his ART

But I still dance
as Tara
Drag Queen supreme

Some nights I'm Diana
Other nights Patti

But I cherish my volunteer work
at the senior center most

where grandma spent her best last days

In full drag
I waltz with those old men
who remember Ginger and Fred too

C. Z. HEYWARD

Camp Art in the Age of Modernism

MAKE NO MISTAKE: in the first major U.S. exhibition in over twenty years devoted to this artist, we are treated to just how radical Florine Stettheimer's paintings were. Her best work splits open the frenetic, exhilarating world she lived in with her frank, beautiful, and bewitching paintings, which are among the most eloquent and powerful social critiques of her time. Connoisseurs of camp will relish her originality.

In the past, Stettheimer has often been characterized, in the words of one interpreter, as a "lightweight feminine artist with a whimsical bent." Stephen Brown, one of the organizers of this thought-provoking exhibit at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan, asserts that "This view is belied by her powerful thinking of portraiture and her astute adaptation of European vanguard ideas, most notably Symbolism, to uniquely American imagery." However, when Brown positions Stettheimer as the "last" Symbolist, he does her a disservice, if only because assigning end points to artistic movements is an exercise in futility. More to the point, Stettheimer's art has nothing to do with Symbolism; rather, her work is a devastating critique of modern life informed by a camp sensibility. Brown is uncomfortable with the open-endedness of Stettheimer's urbane art, which resists categorization. I understand the drive that art historians have had to manufacture order, but these categories often reveal more about the interpreter than about a given artist's work.

Stettheimer and her sisters were in Paris in 1910, attending the premier of the Ballets Russes' production of *L'après-midi d'un faune*, featuring Vaslav Nijinsky's notorious performance as the faun. Taking a contrarian point of view, Stettheimer saw the sexually explicit representations of the Russian dancer, which critics of the day called "lecherous" and "bestial," as something beautiful and marvelous. She found his play-acting as engaging, as did her lesbian cousin Natalie Barney, whose Friday afternoon salon at 20 rue Jacob the Stettheimers certainly visited while abroad.

Florine Stettheimer was born in 1871 into a wealthy Jewish family in Rochester, New York. She was artistically gifted from an early age and studied at the Art Students League in New York City and then in Europe, where she was inspired by the Ballets Russes. She returned to New York in 1914. Her work must be

CASSANDRA LANGER

**Florine Stettheimer:
Painting Poetry**

The Jewish Museum, New York City
May 5–September 24, 2017

seen in the context of the social and intellectual environment of early 20th-century Modernism and New York's avant-garde. Her paintings trace the mass culture of her times from the Gilded Age to the Jazz Age, linking the cosmopolitan sensibilities of Europe and Manhattan. When Stettheimer made her New York debut in 1916 with a solo show at the prestigious Knoedler

Gallery, it was a bust, garnering lukewarm reviews and no sales.

Ever resourceful, Florine, her two sisters, and their mother determined to showcase Florine's talents by creating an elite salon that would, and did, attract many of the leading lights of the artistic vanguard: Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Carl Van Vechten, and Virgil Thomson (all gay); Cecil Beaton, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Baron Adolph de Meyer and his wife Olga, a lesbian who was the god-daughter of Edward VII; writer Natalie Barney and artist Romaine Brooks, both lesbians; and Alfred Stieglitz, Marcel Duchamp, Gaston Lachaise, Marie Sterner, and Leo Stein (heterosexuals).



Florine Stettheimer, *Asbury Park South*, 1920

A thoroughly modern heterosexual woman and feminist, among her earliest and most scandalous pieces was Florine's nude self-portrait with red hair (1915). In an astonishing rebuke to European painting, she challenged art historical tradition, spoofing Manet's *Olympia* by painting her own aging body in a defiant demonstration of feminist autonomy: as the subject of her own gaze. In *Family Portrait II* (1933), she shows herself in

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her signature black pantsuit, which her definitive biographer, Barbara Bloemink, called “her artist’s uniform” to express her independence. In her utopian dystopias, none of the women depicted depend on men for their survival. Instead, she portrays women as the midwives of creativity.

Her larger paintings are orchestral in scope and bristle with biting commentary, revealing a wholly cosmopolitan attitude toward gender and sexuality that is thoroughly modern. Take,

for example, the transgendered rendering of Nijinsky in *Music* (1920). His adornments include a prominent Adam’s apple, hairy underarms, and feminine dress with tantalizing cleavage, neatly nipped in the waist à la Scarlett O’Hara.

Stettheimer’s portrayals (all in 1923) of photographer Baron Adolph de Meyer, artist Louis Bouché, and Marcel Duchamp—and his female persona, Rose Sélavy—are decidedly camp and fey. Taking a leaf from cousin Natalie’s gatherings, Florine’s

F I L M B R I E F S

I THINK I saw nine feature films at this year’s Provincetown International Film Festival in June—and an excellent crop of flicks it was. This is not a gay-themed festival, but—it being P’town—a healthy proportion (a third?) of the films on offer had an LGBT theme. Here are four that I’d like to bring to your attention. (Note: There are so many production companies involved in each, I’ve given up trying to list them all.)

RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.

God’s Own Country

Directed by Francis Lee

The Yorkshire dialect is so thick that I understood about half of the dialogue (subtitles would have helped); but it didn’t matter. There wasn’t much of it anyway, as this is a film about two taciturn young men who have a job to do, birthing ewes, mending stone walls, making camp together at night. Inevitably, *God’s Own Country* has been compared to *Brokeback Mountain*, another film about two manly men engaged in physical labor far from the madding crowd. In the English version, Johnny and George are sheep farmers, the former the farm owner’s son, the latter a Romanian man who’s come to help during birthing season while escaping a homeland that’s “dead.” (The film appears to be set in the recent past—no computers or cell phones, but this is rural England, so it’s hard to say.)

The two men show no outward signs of “gayness” and seem to have few reference points for connecting it to themselves; they call each other “faggot” once their shared secret is out. We would call this “internalized homophobia,” but for them it seems to be the only word they have for themselves, uttered with an embarrassed grin. As in *Brokeback Mountain*, the men fall in love in spite of themselves, resisting their feelings for as long as they can, so their love is of that authentic, primal kind that makes its own rules when it finally breaks free.

Tom of Finland

Directed by Dome Karukoski

From a formal standpoint, this movie follows the formula of your basic biopic—but,

hey, it’s a biopic about Tom of Finland (1920–1991), so it’s bound to be offbeat. Most readers of this magazine scarcely need reminding that Tom of Finland was the artist who created those exaggerated drawings of big happy boys doing the nasty in every conceivable position, wearing leather accouterments or nothing at all. The film spans the artist’s entire adult life, with actor Pekka Strang aging convincingly from the young Touko Laaksonen serving as a Finnish officer in World War II to his final years, when he was celebrated at conventions of “Tom’s Men” in the U.S. We learn that his interest in drawing men in leather began early on, fueled by wartime sightings of soldiers on or off motorcycles, though he survived as a successful commercial artist after the war.

The film presents Laaksonen—“Tom” came much later, an American PR invention—as a cool customer who narrowly escapes detention in Germany when his passport is stolen by a trick. He keeps drawing those naughty pictures even when the risks heat up, eventually sending a few to a gay magazine in L.A., and the rest is history. His mild-mannered demeanor—interrupted by outbursts of guilt or anger over crimes witnessed or committed during the war—contrasts sharply with the wide-eyed, uncomplicated boys who appear in his work. It would be easy to assume that they provided a fantasy world into which a troubled artist could escape, but Laaksonen is depicted as a shrewd businessman who found a winning formula for success.

After Louie

Directed by Vincent Gagliostro

Alan Cumming stars as a New York artist named Sam Cooper who once had a successful career but stopped painting at some point and today is working on a video project about the life and death, by AIDS, of a close friend back in the ’90s. The plot becomes a contest between two generations when Sam meets Braeden, a man in his late twenties who comes on to Sam, who in turn assumes that Braeden must be a hustler. As fascinated as Sam is by his handsome new friend, his bitterness about the past is only

sharpened by Braeden’s blasé attitude toward being gay and his ignorance of past struggles. Sam later denounces a couple of gay friends for getting married, i.e. succumbing to bourgeois respectability. The generational clash is underscored via a device whereby grainy scenes of Sam from the ’80s appear intermittently, amateur footage presumably filmed by friends. The direction has a makeshift feel, as if the director would set up a scene and say, “Now get out there and act!” This lends itself to a natural flow of dialog in a movie that drifts along, pleasantly enough, to no particular conclusion.

Beach Rats

Directed by Eliza Hittman

Billed as a coming-of-age story—though one might question this claim—*Beach Rats* is about a working-class kid in Brooklyn who hangs out with a trio of thuggish friends and does drugs while struggling with being gay (he spends a lot of time on a Manhunt-like website). Frankie is super-easy on the eyes, and he’s almost never out of our sight. The only time we’re not looking at Frankie is when we’re seeing the world from his point of view, as when he’s high on uppers and pot at a loud outdoor dance party trying to impress both his posse and his girlfriend, and the world is spinning out of control. Did I mention that he has a girlfriend? Like many closeted young men in his situation, he goes out of his way to be seen in public with a female companion, even while desperately trying to avoid a private encounter with her that might end in failure.

The boys drift through summer, hanging out at the beach and at penny arcades until they start to run low on money and drugs—a predictable prelude to the end of innocence. Frankie’s penchant for hooking up with guys he meets on-line converges with his need for weed in a particularly sinister way. (Annoyingly, the film implies that marijuana is the kind of drug that people steal and kill for.) As Frankie descends deeper into survival mode, a question arises: will he perform a single decent act that could prove he’s a human being, or reveal himself to be a monster at root? The answer, alas—spoiler alert—is sure to disappoint.

open studio offered a natural mixture of friends with different sexual preferences that continued throughout Stettheimer's life, until her death in 1944.


Florine didn't storm the cathedrals of art; she painted them. Her landscapes are populated with family, friends, bohemians, and those who defy categorization. Her presence is vividly alive in her puns and jokes as she insightfully depicts her cast of characters with tongue-in-cheek affection. Her salon was remarkable among New York salons for its openness. It provided an environment where gays and bisexuals felt comfortable being themselves and mixing freely with her friends. Over the course of her lifetime, she met actors, dancers, artists, photographers, society types, and writers. Florine didn't suffer fools gladly and could be particularly satirical and mocking when it came to social pretensions, and she enjoyed showing the ridiculous side of human desires.

Stettheimer was devoted to her art, loved to work, and put a lot of energy into getting it seen. She had outsized intelligence and a keen awareness of culture and politics. Her running commentary on the mass culture of her times takes a hilarious turn in *Spring Sale at Bendel's* (1921), where she renders upper-class women far from the glittering pages of the society columns. Instead, she shows them trying on the latest fashions and fighting each other off as they snatch bargains out of each other's claws. Everything is about spending and one-upmanship—not much has changed.

As a Jew, a woman, and an artist, Stettheimer's progressive politics shone in *Asbury Park South* (1920). The painting is deceptive, with its brilliant yellow tones and trouble-free sense of movement as the black and white beachgoers intermingle on the New Jersey beach, and Florine is seen walking under a bright green parasol enjoying the festivities. This was at a time when Asbury Park was a segregated beach. Stettheimer has defiantly integrated the restricted area, desegregating it with members of her free-thinking inner circle, including Duchamp and writer Carl Van Vechten.

According to Barbara Bloemink, the sketches, drawings, and sculptures displayed in the exhibit demonstrate that Florine's greatest passion was the theater and Ballets Russes rather than painting. This claim is defensible when one considers her theatrical collaboration with Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson on *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934), one of the most audacious avant-garde experiments of the decade. Not to be missed in the show is a video clip of this production.

Stettheimer is remarkable as a woman and artist because, although a privileged white intellectual, she knew that she had both the freedom and responsibility to represent what she saw as the truth. Making art far from the safety and comfort of her family and home, she chose to engage with the most vexing social and political issues of her day: racism, sexism, class, and gender.


The Jewish Museum's exhibit includes over fifty of Stettheimer's smart, sexy, funny, campy commentaries on the foibles of human behavior to great advantage, and it proves what a radical artist she was. Her work never massages anyone's ego, and it cuts through human bullshit with a piercing honesty that reveals her unsentimental view of art and life, creating a morally conscious art that's as contemporary as anything being created today. 

Feud

Continued from page 50

ticular occurs in the episode titled "Mommie Dearest" when Davis and Crawford attempt to share a civil meal together and bond over their life's hardships, chain-smoking and martini-swilling all the while. Asked about her first sexual experience, Lange confesses, without an iota of shame, that she lost her virginity to her step-father, adding: "But he wasn't my Daddy, so it wasn't incest. ... I led him into it." Sarandon looks dumbfounded, and after she offers her own war story, she tells her costar: "I mean it, Lucille"—Davis would call Crawford by her given name to humble her—"I'm going to support this picture even if it means supporting you, too." It's a standout scene in which two battle-axes let down their guard, showing that even the fiercest of enemies had to band together if they wanted to make it in a man's world.

No title on my bookshelf elicits more jokes from friends than *How to Be Gay* by David M. Halperin, a classics scholar and a professor at the University of Michigan. The quips include "You mean you need an instruction manual?" and "Aren't you already an expert?" In the book, Halperin comes out as a Joan Crawford groupie and writes about *Baby Jane*, which he dubs a "gothic psycho-thriller," that it "elicits gales of laughter from gay male audiences, who delight in the melodramatic confrontations between Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, those ancient Hollywood rivals, both playing once-glamorous and now-fallen stars locked in a demented battle for supremacy: grotesque, extravagant images of a monstrous, abject femininity." Halperin also explores the complexities of "camp," but it's Murphy himself, in a cover story he contributed to *Out* magazine, who sums up the popularity of camp heroines among gay men: "I think it has a lot to do with a projection of the person one wants to be in the world. You're a survivor. ... I look at you as someone nobody could ever keep down, who has a huge reservoir of passion." This is not to say that Crawford, or Davis, saw their admirers in this way. In the final episode of *Feud*, a giddy gay fan gushes to Crawford at a book signing that Blanche and Baby Jane are "survivors," whereupon the irascible actress retorts: "What do you know about surviving?"

Though her birthdate is still uncertain, Crawford died at the age of 73-ish in 1977, one year prior to the publication of her daughter Christina's revenge memoir, *Mommie Dearest*. Yet in the final episode of *Feud*, in a voice-over, Crawford tells us her side of that even more notorious feud: "Every woman tries to be a good mother and wonders if, after all her efforts, her children will wind up on a headshrinker's couch, complaining about their treatment." Had she lived, Crawford would have received the shock of her life with the film version of *Mommie Dearest* in 1981. As Crawford, Faye Dunaway played the star as an unglued glamorpuss with caterpillar eyebrows and a Medusa stare. Drag queens have been recreating the role for decades. Meanwhile, in that same year, Kim Carnes released the gravely-throated hit single, "Bette Davis Eyes," and it's debatable which work would have outraged Davis' arch-nemesis more. Imagine an aged Crawford hearing the lyric, "All the boys think she's a spy, she's got Bette Davis eyes," turning off the radio and grumbling to herself: Where the hell is *my* song? Now at least, thanks to Ryan Murphy's series, she can share the airwaves with her rival on an equal footing. 

Why Is a Gay Man Hiding in *Little Caesar*?

DENISE NOE

EDWARD G. ROBINSON'S portrayal of Caesar Enrico Bandello in the 1931 film *Little Caesar* helped create the movie gangster archetype. Writer Jason Fraley describes *Little Caesar* as introducing the antihero chasing a lawless American Dream. Based on W. R. Burnett's 1929 novel of the same name, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, the movie tells the story of a hoodlum who leaves behind small-town gas station robberies to join a big city criminal organization. Ambitious, cunning, and ruthless, he displaces crime bosses to become the head of the entire city's underworld.

However—spoiler alert!—his reign as “Little Caesar” cannot last, because informers eventually provide the cops with the wherewithal to smash his mob. Left penniless and alone, Rico is cornered and shot by the police. As he dies, the destroyed gangster wails, “Mother of mercy, is this the end of Rico?”

That *Little Caesar* served as the model for the American gangster film is made all the more noteworthy by the way in which Rico is depicted, to the extent possible in this era, as ambiguously gay. Unlike his cohorts, he shows little interest in the opposite sex. When women are mentioned, he snarls contemptuously, “Women! Where do they get ya?”

Indeed, *Little Caesar* draws much of its tension from two overlapping love triangles, loosely defined. As a small-time hood, Rico's crime partner is Joe (Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.), who wants to leave crime behind for professional dancing. After finding a dancing job at the Bronze Peacock nightclub, Joe's dancing partner Olga (Glenda Farrell) soon becomes his romantic partner. Critics have observed that Rico is jealous of Olga (“that dame”) and acts almost like a spurned lover. Although the official reason for Rico's possessiveness is his fear that Joe will “squeal” on him if he leaves the syndicate, Rico's interest in Joe is far stronger and more obsessive than would be expected of a business friendship. At a

climactic moment of defeat and self-preservation, Rico threatens to shoot Joe, but he can't do it. Tears fill Rico's eyes as he aims the gun. After leaving Joe alive—knowing this might lead to his downfall—he bitterly comments: “That's what I get for liking a guy too much.”

While Joe is the apex of the triangle tearing him between Rico and Olga, Rico is the apex of a second triangle in which criminal underling Otero competes with Joe for Rico's affections. The feelings of Otero for Rico are even more explicitly romantic than those of Rico for Joe. In one scene, Rico reclines on a bed as an obsequious Otero climbs into bed with him, gazing deeply into his boss's eyes. Otero often fawns over Rico, repeatedly complimenting the latter's appearance. “You look great, boss,” he says,



George F. Stone (Otero) and Edward G. Robinson (Rico) in *Little Caesar*

staring at him longingly.

Rico's sexual ambiguity in the movie was not lost on novelist Burnett, who complained about it to the producers. This raises the question as to why director Mervyn LeRoy chose to portray Rico in this way. To be sure, Rico is anything but effeminate, a gangster through and through. Although he wears jewelry and takes care of his appearance, he is swaggeringly masculine to the core. After committing a murder, the brutal Rico warns his fellow hoodlums of dire consequences if anyone “turns yellow,” and growls: “My gun is going to speak its piece.”

The question remains why LeRoy would

have injected this element into the film. Perhaps it's because gay men were seen as “natural criminals.” After all, at the time the film was made (and for many years afterward), homosexual activity was a criminal offense in much of the U.S. Throwing in a whiff of homosexuality could only add to the overall aura of criminality: an extra dash of depravity. Alternatively, LeRoy might have believed that a homosexual would gravitate to crime as a way to strike out at a society that stigmatizes his sexuality.

Rico's isolation from women points to another interpretation. Women have traditionally been seen as a civilizing influence on men, in whose absence men revert to savagery. Joe is attracted to Olga, who represents law-abiding respectability and traditional marriage. This narrative is reinforced by the fact that it is Olga who persuades Joe to turn against Rico and provide the police with the information needed to crush the gang. In contrast, Rico's homosexuality cuts him off from women's values and their ability to tame the savage beast, reducing him to an outlaw in the full sense of this term.

While the reasons for creating Rico as a gay character were steeped in homophobia and outdated gender narratives, there are ways in which the film—perhaps inadvertently—undercuts its own homophobia. The most emotionally powerful

moment in *Little Caesar* may be the scene in which Rico points a gun at Joe but cannot shoot, that moment when we see the eyes of this brutal character fill with tears. Rico's gaze, and his tears, acknowledge the possibility that such a thing as love between men is possible, that a man can be in love with another man. Thus even if the underlying motivation for this subtext was anti-gay, *Little Caesar* offers a fascinating study in the contradictions between the masks we wear and the desires we harbor.

Denise Noe is a writer whose work has been published in The Humanist, The Literary Hatchet, and other periodicals.

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Whatever Possessed Them to Make *Baby Jane*?

THE TITLE of this eight-part series that aired on FX refers to the famous feud between those titans of Tinseltown who costarred in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. Following on the heels of Ryan Murphy's foray into true crime TV, 2016's *People v. O.J. Simpson*, the new series is a love letter to the making of the Davis-Crawford vehicle, which was released by Warner Brothers in 1962.

Directed by Robert Aldrich, *Baby Jane* centered around two sisters, Blanche (Crawford), a paraplegic shut-in who was a starlet of yesteryear, and her younger sister Jane Hudson (Davis), a child star of vaudeville turned drunken sadist. In the first episode, Aldrich's assistant pitches the plot as a "horror-thriller: two broads, former movie stars, a cripple and her crazy sister battling it out in their Hollywood home." Meanwhile, Crawford is busily hunting for a script in which she could see herself in the starring role, and to that end she dispatches her personal assistant, whom she lovingly calls "Mamacita," to bring her a stack of pulpy novels for her to sift through. "Nothing Sapphic," she adds.

Film critics have had little clear idea of what to do with Crawford's efforts to make a comeback in *Baby Jane*. Is this a good bad movie in the camp tradition (like *Showgirls* or *Who's That*

COLIN CARMAN

Feud: Bette and Joan
Directed by Ryan Murphy
FX Network

final scene, dropping her like a sack of potatoes in the sand so she can perform for strangers on the beach. The conflict carried over to off-screen, as well. Reportedly Davis used to joke that Crawford had slept with every movie star at MGM except Lassie. There was no love lost: Crawford alleged that, unlike herself, Davis had cult followers rather than real fans, adding, "There's a big difference."

Conceptually, what *Feud* gets right is that it mirrors the thesis of *Baby Jane* but with a more robustly ironic sensibility. After all, Aldrich and Murphy are after the same idea. The post-war patriarchy that ruled the Hollywood studio system was an absolute power that corrupted absolutely. Its victims are plain to see in *Baby Jane* and *Blanche*, child stars of the 1920s, but also in Davis and Crawford decades later—tireless workers, like so many of their generation, still being driven crazy by an exploitative system in which a fat guy chewing a cigar called all the shots. (At one point in *Feud* the bigwigs complain that Bette Davis has broken the hold of the studio system.)

Veteran scene-stealer Stanley Tucci as studio head Jack Warner is on hand to fill the cigar smoker's shoes. His opposition to casting Crawford, who had sued him earlier, comes across as cruel and childish. Even if Jane Hudson's egotism looks more grotesque onscreen than that of her long-suffering sister, both of

the Hudsons suffered from a kind of delusion unique to a work environment where rich white guys capitalized on women's talents and beauty only to kick them to the curb when newer makes and models came along. Can you imagine a film in which the Hemsworth or Bridges brothers cut themselves off from the outside world only to wage war against each other? This explains why, early in the series, Crawford arrives on set like Santa Claus, giving gifts to every guy in the crew. She may have simply wanted to upstage her costar or she may have shrewdly divined that time was running out for her as something rare in her era: a self-made woman in the



Susan Sarandon as Bette Davis and Jessica Lange as Joan Crawford in *Feud*

Girl?), or merely a bad movie? The confusion stems from the fact that Aldrich's oddball straddles two distinct genres, horror and black comedy, the amalgam of which had not yet been worked out in the 1960s when, prior to the Kennedy assassination, artists and audiences alike had yet to lose their innocence. (See Kevin Williamson's *Scream* from 1996 or this year's great meta-horror film *Get Out* to see how Aldrich's playful approach to torture comedy was still in its infancy.) Jane takes a perverse joy in victimizing her sister by serving her a dead rat and, in the

mold of her greatest role, as Mildred Pierce (1945), for which she was awarded the Oscar for Best Actress.

The tragicomic power of *Feud* owes everything to Murphy's casting. Both pitch perfect in their roles, Jessica Lange as Crawford and Susan Sarandon as Davis are two of the hardest-working actresses around. Lange snagged her Oscar for a forgettable film called *Blue Sky* back in 1996, while Sarandon won for *Dead Man Walking* the following year. We learn from *Feud* that the kabuki makeup and runny mascara used to construct the gothic visage of Jane Hudson was Davis' own design. The pilot is full of laugh-out-loud lines, but one jaw-dropper in par-

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