

The Gay & Lesbian Review

WORLDWIDE

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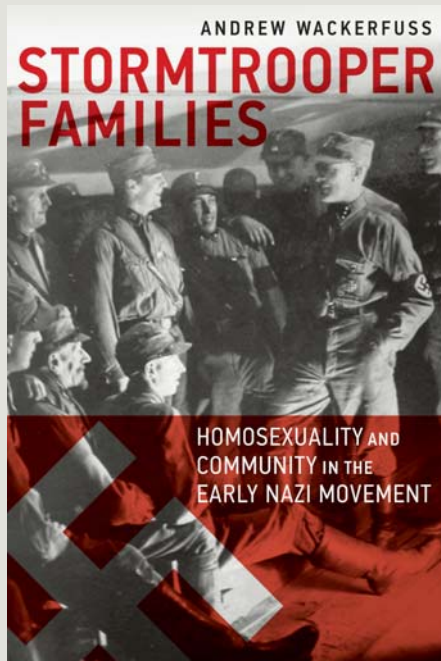


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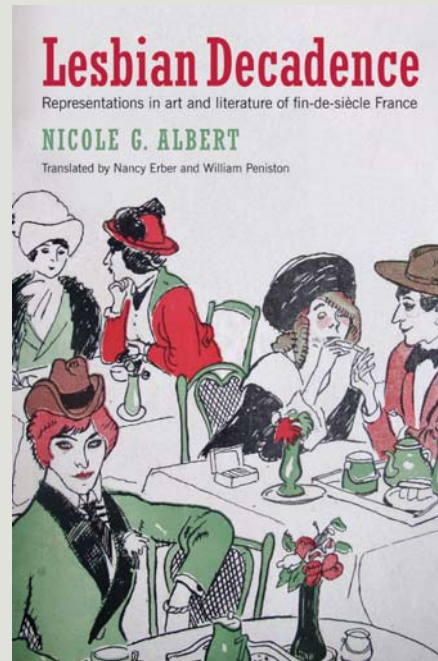
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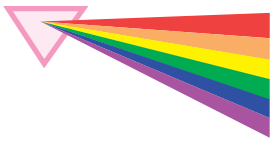
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CONTENTS

FEATURES

- “I just want them to take the journey.” 10 LARRY KRAMER
Matthew Hays talks with the author of *The American People*
- Make Me Over, or Ripley at Midnight 13 J. KEN STUCKEY
Two classic films challenge the myth of the “self-made man”
- Notes on Porn 17 ANDREW HOLLERAN
Random riffs on the industry, its consumers, and what makes it hot
- The Philadelphia Phenomenon 20 MARK ZELINSKY
Did the 1993 movie make a difference at the height of the plague?
- What’s New Is *How We View* 24 B. RUBY RICH
Mark James talks with the author of *New Queer Cinema*
- Contemplating the Navel 26 STEVEN F. DANSKY
A classic photo by Minor White evoked an anatomical archetype

REVIEWS

- Dominic Janes — *Visions of Queer Martyrdom* 30 ANDREW HOLLERAN
- Colm Tóibín — *On Elizabeth Bishop* 32 ROSEMARY BOOTH
- Barney Frank — *Frank: A Life in Politics...* 34 YOAV SIVAN
- Arthur Vanderbilt — *The Best-Kept Boy in the World* 35 ALLEN ELLENZWEIG
- Leo Bersani — *Thoughts and Things* 37 DANIEL A. BURR
- Langdon Hammer — *James Merrill: Life and Art* 38 RICHARD CANNING
- Jordan Schildcrout — *Murder Most Queer* 40 JAMES POLCHIN
- Connor Franta — *A Work in Progress* 41 DAVID BERGMAN
- BRIEFS** 42
- Pierre Briant — *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander* 43 GEORGETTE GOUVEIA
- Ann-Marie MacDonald — *Adult Onset* 44 HEATHER SEGCEL
- Mark Doty — *Deep Lane* 44 DALE BOYER
- Emily Bingham — *Irrepressible: The Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham* 45 IRENE JAVORS
- Robert Beachy — *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* 47 CHRISTOPHER CAPOZZOLA
- Michelangelo Signorile — *It’s Not Over* 47 STEPHEN HEMRICK
- Sofka Zinovieff — *The Mad Boy, Lord Berners, My Grandmother and Me* 50 MARTHA E. STONE

POEMS & DEPARTMENTS

- Guest Opinion — *Obergfell* Goes Beyond Gay Marriage 5 DON GORTON
- CORRESPONDENCE** 6
- In Memoriam — Ronnie Gilbert, A Woman of Courage, Dies at 88 6 IRENE JAVORS
- BTW** 8 RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.
- Artist’s Profile — Lillian Faderman Tells the Gay Story to Date 23 MARY MERIAM
- Poem — “Blood and Sand” 43 JOHN HARRIS
- CULTURAL CALENDAR** 46
- Artist’s Profile — Michelle Tea Comes Out As a Grown-up 48 JIM FARLEY

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Summer into Fall: “The Movies”

THE media mega-story as I write concerns the transformation of Bruce Jenner into Caitlyn, whereby an aging man metamorphosed into a beautiful young woman, leading me to wonder (see “BTW”) whether technology is now making it possible for anyone with the means to choose a new identity and transition into it. Shifting shapes, however, is an ancient archetype, one that often involves gender or sexuality.

Examples of this trope are brought to mind here in J. Ken Stuckey’s piece, which describes how two widely separated movies, *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, present cases of borrowing or stealing a new identity for opportunistic reasons—in Joe Buck’s case by adopting a cowboy persona to attract johns; in Ripley’s, by murdering and assuming the identity of a rich (straight) friend. So often in literature and in the movies, whenever identities are in confusion or in flux there’s a strong possibility of “inversion” in gender or sexual orientation.

Doubtless this tendency is related to the fact that GLBT people have often had to hide their true identity, or even create a false one, to cope with social strictures. Vito Russo showed in *The Celluloid Closet* that gay characters in the movies have worn a variety of masks that were deeply coded but clearly recognizable to the cognoscenti. The whole idea of Camp is that a studied theatricality—excessively good manners, for example—is itself a tipoff that we’re entering homo territory.

The credo of “coming out” after 1969 challenged the furtive

style of *The Closet*, but the latter persisted for some time, to say the least, in the realm of mainstream movies. A piece here (by Mark Zelinsky) revisits 1993’s *Philadelphia*—24 years after Stonewall—hailed as a breakthrough for its depiction of a sympathetic gay character with AIDS. Three years later, even *The Birdcage* was a breakthrough of sorts: a campy movie that finally let the cat out of the bag for straight audiences.

If gay viewers squirmed through both of these films, it’s because they were created for straight eyes, which were now trained on Hollywood’s version of our own private subculture. To be sure, a genre of gay cinema expressly for GLBT viewers has existed for decades, but these films rarely make it out of the art houses. Perhaps the first non-cregeworthy movie to hit the big time was *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which was only ten years ago, and a steady trickle of mainstream films, such as *Milk* (2008) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), has followed.

What marks these more recent works is the suspension of masks and Camp in favor of a search for authenticity that has been a parallel theme of GLBT culture since the age of liberation began. Caitlyn would argue that only by transitioning has she become her “real” self. Increasingly, the mainstream audience for movies (or reality TV shows, etc.) seems prepared to accept departures from the norm, whether in gender or sexual orientation, so long as it entails an arduous search for one’s true self.

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Obergefell Ruling Goes Beyond Gay Marriage

DON GORTON

THE RECENT DECISION of the United States Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, recognizing a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, stands as a milestone in GLBT history on a scale with the 1969 Stonewall Riots. The contrast between 1969 and 2015 demonstrates how epic the intervening 46 years have been. Over a short time in historical terms, we have progressed from explicit denial to definitive recognition of our equal dignity as human beings.

Beyond the strictly legal arguments about equal protection and due process, what the Court recognized once and for all is the essential humanity of people regardless of their sexual orientation. This came as a nail in the coffin of Justice Antonin Scalia's position going back to *Lawrence v. Texas*, where he acknowledged that the ultimate justification for anti-gay discrimination is not a legal one but only society's condemnation of homosexuality. This he deemed a sufficient basis for upholding anti-gay legislation such as pre-*Lawrence* anti-sodomy laws. In contrast, in *Obergefell* Justice Kennedy argued that under such laws "many persons did not deem homosexuals to have dignity in their own distinct identity."

Justice Kennedy's opinion for the *Obergefell* majority recognized constitutional liberty and equal protection interests trammled by the denial of equal marriage. The Court noted that

the First Amendment protects individuals' disapproval of homosexuality for religious or other reasons, but stressed that this disapproval does not minimize the humanity of those so disparaged. Consequently, denying marriage equality "works a grave and continuing harm. The imposition of this disability on gays and lesbians serves to disrespect and subordinate them. ... It would disparage their choices and diminish their personhood to deny them this right."

Adopting a zero-sum perspective, dissenting Justice Alito worried that the stigma the Court majority lifted from GLBT people would now fall on opponents of gay equality. He warned that *Obergefell* "will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy." Underscoring his fear, he "assume[s] that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots."

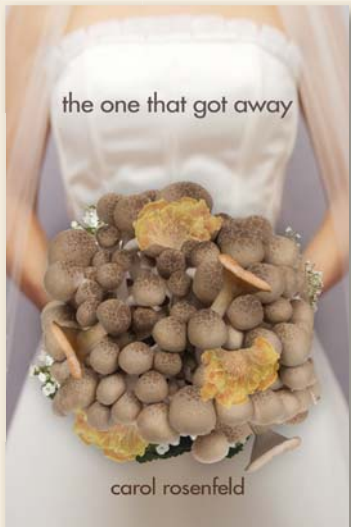
For judges like Scalia and Alito, *Obergefell* represents the world turned upside down. They are horrified that disparagement of homosexuality, for so long accepted as the norm both culturally and legally, could be the minority position, while homophobia will be frowned upon. They have nothing to fear. Only when hatred is considered the natural order of things does equality seem like a loss of freedom for anyone.

Don Gorton is an attorney and activist based in Boston.

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Books Today Are a Fungible Affair

To the Editor:

In "The Price of Going Mainstream" [May-June 2015], Dolores Klaich mourns the fate of gay and lesbian bookstores, which are rapidly going out of business, along with many other independent small bookstores. While this is undoubtedly true, she fails to mention that there now exists a virtual explosion of GLBT e-books online. Unlike the gay and lesbian bookstores, all of this can be accessed not just in big cities but from anywhere in the country, and even the rest of the world.

Now that traditional book publishers can no longer pick and choose the relatively few books that will be available to the public, there's a much more open market for all sorts of writing. Even a rank amateur can place his or her writing before the general public at little or no cost. The downside of this open market is that it's much harder to distinguish

between well-written and poorly-written material, but this is no worse than trying to sort out truth from falsehood when seeking any sort of information on-line.

Of course, there are still some limits on what may legally appear even in e-books, but those limits are a lot looser than they used to be. Erotica is available to anyone who has his own computer, whether it be a desktop or a smartphone. Just this category alone has a myriad of GLBT-positive e-books, and they're easy to find. I know. I both read them and write them myself.

Karl Five, New Bern, NC

There's Something Gay About the Circus

To the Editor:

I was struck by your BTW item (July-Aug. 2015) about the Italian acrobats proposing marriage on national TV. I wonder how many dancers and athletes are still waiting for their same-sex matrimonial desires to come to fruition. It is inspiring to

know that the physical attraction still is valid and that athletes from around the world are coming together to reclaim their gay identity.

I found when I was growing up that the circus was a sensuous experience filled with many reflections that somehow got buried in the closet. Women acrobats are also part of this sensuous affair and very often influence youthful men to cross-dress and take up dance. I was never any good at team sports, but I am waiting for the opportunity to stretch my legs out and limber for the greatest show on earth that is not really a show but a fantasy that touches on gay life in general.

Robben Wainer, New York City

Correction

In the May-June 2015 issue, a review of *Truman Capote: A Literary Life at the Movies*, by Tison Pugh, listed the publisher and page count incorrectly. The 287-page book was published by the Univ. of Georgia Press.

IN MEMORIAM

Ronnie Gilbert, A Woman of Courage, Dies at 88

IRENE JAVORS

RONNIE GILBERT, the bold and provocative female voice in the Weavers folk quartet (which also included Pete Seeger, Lee Hays, and Fred Hellerman) died on Saturday, June 6, 2015.

Ruth Alice Gilbert was born in Brooklyn on September 7, 1926. Her parents were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, and her mother was a card-carrying Communist. She grew up believing in the need for all of us to strive to make this world a better and more just place for all people.

For Ronnie Gilbert, music was the language of liberation, and her participation in the Weavers provided her with the context in which she could give voice to her politic causes. Formed in 1948, the Weavers gained widespread popularity with Lead Belly's "Goodnight Irene," which made it to number one on the charts for thirteen weeks in 1950. Then came "Tzena, Tzena" and Woody Guthrie's "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You." They also made Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" popular.

Unfortunately, success was short-lived. Their songs of protest and leftist politics made them targets for McCarthy-era anti-Communist red baiting. In 1952, they were blacklisted, their record contract with Decca was voided, and they were prevented from performing. In 1955, as the frenzy of Joe McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee witch hunt began to abate, the Weavers returned to Carnegie Hall for a triumphant comeback concert. They continued performing until 1964.

Once the quartet broke up, Ronnie Gilbert began a solo career as a singer, actress, and psychotherapist. She became an inspiration to many younger singers, especially to the feminist Holly Near, who dedicated an album to her in 1974. Gilbert and

Near started performing together with a concert in 1983, which produced the album *Lifeline Extended*; and in 1996 they came out with the album *This Train Still Runs*. In 1985, they toured with folksingers Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger and recorded under the name HARP (for Holly, Arlo, Ronnie, and Pete).

As time progressed, Ronnie Gilbert continued to use her magnificent alto voice to sing about the outstanding social issues of the day: AIDS, anti-gay prejudice, feminism, homelessness, war, unemployment, racism, and all forms of social justice. She performed a one-woman play about the trade union organizer Mary Harris Jones titled *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America*. And she developed a performance piece, *Ronnie Gilbert: A Radical Life With Songs*.

Although heterosexual during most of her life, in the mid-1980s she met the person she termed "the love of her life," Donna Korones. Her activism now included lesbian feminism. Her songs "When I'm Not Near The Girl I Love" (a takeoff on the song from *Finian's Rainbow*) and "Marie (a love poem)" are testaments to her newfound sexuality. In 2004, Ronnie and Donna were married in San Francisco at the time when Mayor Gavin Newsom had officiated at same-sex weddings despite the fact that this was in defiance of state law.

Gilbert was a lifelong agitator for all the right reasons. She inspired countless singers, including Mary Travers (of Peter, Paul and Mary) and Holly Near, who heard that irrepressible contralto voice and realized that she too had the right to sing with power and courage. She is survived by her partner, Donna Korones, her daughter Lisa, and a granddaughter. She lived in Mill Valley, California. Her memoir, *Ronnie Gilbert: A Radical Life in Song*, is forthcoming from the University of California Press this fall.

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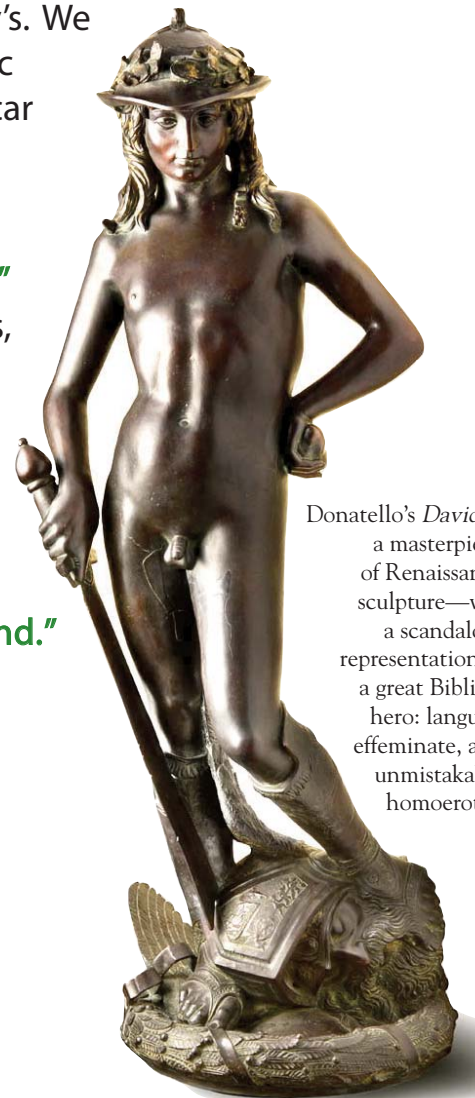
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BTW

Not a Good Match At London's Pride parade this year, CNN reported spotting a banner representing the terrorist organization ISIS. The implied message seemed to be: ISIS is everywhere, even in a gay pride parade! Only later did someone point out that the flag was adorned not with Arabic letters, as is the jihadist flag used by ISIS, but instead with what appeared to be sex toys or possibly sex organs in silhouette. CNN was roundly ridiculed in the media, including in a sketch by Conan O'Brien. In the network's defense, the flag was clearly intended to resemble the jihadist banner of which it was a parody. Still, it was a pretty crude knock-off; and then there's the fact that ISIS throws suspected gay people off tall buildings, which should have been a red flag for CNN right there—and the fact that images on the banner were foot-long naughty bits.






Dress Envy A 57-year-old woman name Annette Kielhurn was arrested in St. Petersburg, Florida, after allegedly striking her girlfriend, Gamze Capaner-Ridley, 47, in the face with a dildo (as reported by *Metroweekly.com*). A police officer witnessed the altercation while monitoring the removal of the couple's belongings from their erstwhile residence. The women reportedly started arguing over ownership of a specific dress. Given the choice of weapons that presumably lay at hand—vases, ashtrays, lamps—the victim might consider herself lucky that Ms. Kielhurn reached for that firm yet supple hunk of rubber, which did not, in fact, inflict any real injury. Just why the perp grabbed this object—out of sheer habit?—is not entirely clear. For that matter, why *was* there a dildo lying around when they were supposed to be sorting their stuff in the presence of a police escort? Anyhow, Kielhurn was arrested for domestic battery and released on \$500 bail. No word on who got the dress—or the sex toys.

Metamorphosis It was the media event of the summer: the transformation of Olympic triathlete Bruce Jenner into “Call me Caitlyn.” For years the butt of late-night jokes due to his extensive plastic surgery, Bruce *qua* Caitlyn was suddenly an object of curiosity, awe, possibly even respect. Anticipation turned into va'voom when Caitlyn appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* looking like a total babe. Sure, a few feminists complained that all the ogling was just another case of reducing women to their physical looks. But the mainstream media settled on a narrative that this was an act of great courage for which Caitlyn was to be lauded. And so she was, with accolades that included a special ESPY Courage award, complete with an international telecast at which she gave a thirty-minute speech. When the latter turned



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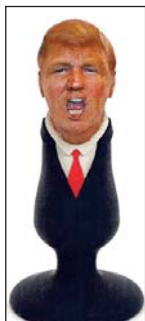




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into something of an infomercial for her upcoming projects with the Kardashians, a few eyebrows were raised. Reports surfaced that the ESPY award was a quid pro quo with ABC in exchange for her exclusive “coming out” interview. Meanwhile, real people who are transitioning observed that few have the resources that allowed Bruce Jenner, age 65, to become the ravishing Caitlyn. Which suggests an untold story in this metamorphosis, in which Jenner went not just from male to female but from an old man to a young woman (and BTW what is her sexual orientation now?): we seem to have reached a point where one’s “identity” can be whatever one says it is—and then transitions into.

Unorthodox Tactics To demonstrate their disapproval of the recent Supreme Court ruling on marriage, a small group of Orthodox Jewish men stood on the sidelines of New York’s Pride parade holding signs citing Leviticus and offering rabbinical arguments against gay marriage. A reporter for the *Times* couldn’t help but notice that not all of the men bearing these signs were dressed in high Orthodox garb; a larger contingent was clad in workmen’s clothes. Turns out they were Mexican laborers who’d been paid by the Orthodox protesters to hold up the signs. A spokesman for the organizers explained that “the rabbis said that the yeshiva boys shouldn’t come out for this because of what they would see at the parade,” prompting *Gothamist.com* to gibe that “the action was apparently 2 Hott for the littlest of God’s messengers.” It could certainly have given them ideas; more likely, the boys just couldn’t be persuaded to inflict Leviticus upon a summer celebration.



Up Yours! In the spirit of American flag toilet paper and Richard Nixon candles, Donald Trump has been made into a butt plug! The sex toy was created in reaction to Trump’s comments about Mexican immigrants, which included gems like: “They’re sending us not the right people. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” The tool itself, one suspects, will be more often displayed than used for its intended purpose, which would be just a little weird.

Follow-up on the News We reported some time ago on a New Jersey lawsuit involving an “ex-gay” conversion outfit called Jews Offering New Alternatives to Healing (JONAH), which was being sued by two plaintiffs who charged that they were subjected to abusive and humiliating “treatments” that did nothing to change their sexual orientation. These included, but were not limited to, having to undress and touch their genitals while reliving painful childhood moments. In the end, JONAH was ordered to reimburse thousands of dollars to the plaintiffs. At the trial, JONAH co-founder Arthur Abba Goldberg was exposed as a convicted felon who went to prison for fraud when he worked on Wall Street. Expert witnesses for the defense were barred from testifying on JONAH’s behalf if they couldn’t present at least a modicum of scientific evidence for their claims. What won the day was the prosecution’s brilliant stroke of suing for consumer fraud rather than malpractice, which is always hard to prove. It places conversion therapy right down there with selling bottles of Dr. Good or phantom real estate.

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Matthew Hays talks with the author of *The American People*

‘I just want them to take the journey.’

LARRY KRAMER

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to imagine the early AIDS years without Larry Kramer, who became the *de facto* conscience of the plague in the 1980s. His 1978 novel *Faggots* almost seemed to anticipate AIDS, with its parody of gay men caught up in hedonism and unrestrained sex. His anger at an inept healthcare system, evil politicians, and closeted gays crystallized in *The Normal Heart*, the landmark play about the early battles against AIDS in New York City. He cofounded the Gay Men's Health Crisis in 1982 and led the establishment of ACT UP in 1987.

Kramer has always had his detractors, notably those who felt he came down too harshly on many of his gay brothers. But it now seems we're in a Larry Kramer moment. *The Normal Heart* finally came to the screen last year on HBO, winning the Emmy for Outstanding TV Movie. He is the subject of a feature-length documentary, *Larry Kramer in Love and Anger*, directed by Jean Carlomusto, which aired on HBO in June.

And then there's the new book. *The American People* is a 775-page, swaggering historical epic, a novel that seethes with Kramer's anger at a country he believes has a great deal to answer for. Volume 1: *Search for My Heart* is already dividing critics with its unusual journey through time, ranging from Kirkus' starred verdict that the book is "breathhtakingly well written" to the Times' Dwight Garner's crack that, due to its vast cast of characters, "like an old toilet, it is easily clogged."

Kramer fielded questions via e-mail relay in early May.

Matthew Hays: Since this is for the "movie issue," let me start by asking you about that intensely erotic male wrestling scene in *Women in Love*, for which you wrote the screenplay. Was there a lot of difficulty getting it filmed? It's racy even by today's standards. I'd be surprised if the studio hadn't put up a bit of a fight about it.

Larry Kramer: The film was made in Britain for a very liberal American company, United Artists. Contractually I had to deliver a film that was release-able, which meant approval by the UK censor, Sir John Trevelyan. He'd been sent a copy of the script before we began shooting, and he pointed out the number of places where we might encounter difficulties—not only the wrestling scene but also the two straight sex scenes, one for each of the sisters. (By the way, I go into great detail on the making of this film in my book, *Women In Love and Other Dramatic Writings*, a Grove paperback.)

When we came to shoot all three of these scenes, we followed the text of D. H. Lawrence's novel faithfully. The dia-

logue is from the book, as are the sets, which were made as Lawrence described them, and he was great at describing in detail what places looked like and what the women were wearing. We paid particular attention to the room and fireplace for the wrestling scene. So when we came to John, we said, "Here, this is all verbatim in the book, now considered a classic that is studied in school and has been in print since 1920." He bought this, asking for a few little cuts so he could save face. It was the first [studio] movie that had "full frontal male nudity," as it came to be called. Since it was such a huge success in London, UA decided to release it in America as is, even though in both countries it was X-rated.

Shooting the male wrestling scene was a complicated matter. Oliver Reed didn't want to do it and actually brought in a letter from his doctor saying he had a bad shoulder, or some such, and to use a double instead. Ken Russell, our director, had worked with Oliver before on a number of TV docudramas and



Alan Bates and Oliver Reed, spent after wrestling in *Women in Love*.

knew him well enough to tell him to cut the crap; he was going to do it. Not only that, but they were falling on a stone floor under a thin rug, because at the last minute Ken yanked out the felt padding under the rug, since you could tell it was something soft. Alan Bates, always a gentleman, was gay, and Oliver, who was a pain in the ass, probably sensed this. He also noted that Alan's cock was bigger, so before every set-up, Oliver played with himself to make his dick bigger, which you can only dimly note. Both guys took healthy swallows of scotch to calm themselves down.

MH: You've been so controversial for so long. But now, with *The Normal Heart* getting the HBO treatment, the documentary on you, and the book, I feel like we're in the middle of a Larry Kramer moment. Some are saying you were right about everything all along. Do you feel vindicated?

LK: I never pat myself on the back. There are still too many

Matthew Hays teaches film studies at Marianopolis College and Concordia University in Montreal.

fighters to be fought. There will always be people who support me and people I make angry. Controversy is good if it makes people think. Some of the reviews coming in on *The American People* are downright nasty.

MH: The *New York Times* review of *The American People* was decidedly mixed. What was your reaction to this review?

LK: I have never had a good review from *The New York Times* for anything I have written. There is still the *Sunday Times* book review to come. It bothers me because it affects the sales of the book. The daily reviewer obviously didn't get it as Lewis Gannett did for you [in the Jan.-Feb. 2015 issue]. I see a pattern emerging: gay critics are much more in tune with what I'm trying to do and the straight critics think I'm nuts.

MH: Was there a particular review where you felt the critic just didn't get the book at all?

LK: *The Times* reviewer [Dwight Garner] really was unkind. I can tell when a critic has read the book he's reviewing. This guy hadn't. It's as if he copied some blurbs from somewhere. And in so doing he really hurts book sales.

MH: I know you started this many years ago. When did you first return to this book?

LK: I started writing it after *Faggots* came out in 1978. I've worked on it ever since, except for two long periods of hospitalization.

MH: The book is incredible. It's such an intriguing fusion of fiction and fact. How did you arrive at the style?

LK: The same way any writer arrives at anything. You write and you discover. If you're lucky, somewhere along the way the style reveals itself.

MH: Because you are taking these speculative flights, do you worry that some of the things you intend to be read as historical fact might be read as fiction?

LK: Let them believe anything they want to. I just want them to take the journey.

MH: Some critics are suggesting you are taking too many liberties with history. Historian Ron Chernow told *The New York Times* that "we have to be careful not to ransack history in service of a political agenda." Your response?

LK: Bullshit. His writing is in service to a political agenda. As a straight white man he doesn't see that, but as a gay man I can see it all over the place.

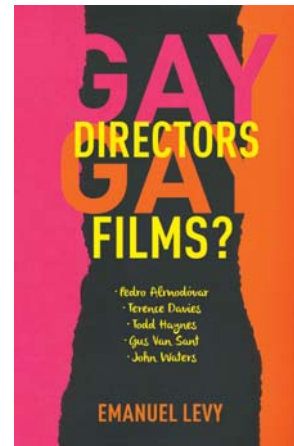
MH: You disdain straight historians repeatedly. Is there a straight historian that you feel has stood out in terms of getting some of our history correct?

LK: No, because there are none.

MH: You've said Reagan was the worst president the U.S. ever had. Yet he's the poster president for the contemporary GOP.

LK: And he allowed AIDS to happen.

MH: You are closely associated with New York. How crucial do you think the city has been to the GLBT rights movement?



Gay Directors, Gay Films?

Pedro Almodóvar, Terence Davies, Todd Haynes,
Gus Van Sant, John Waters

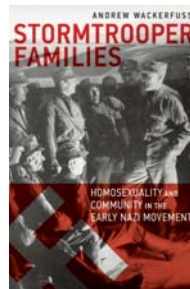
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LK: The gay rights movement is more a dream than the powerful force it should be. Gays are not very good fighters, in New York or anywhere else.

MH: Really? New York has incubated a lot of powerful queer artists and writers. What about their influence on American culture?

LK: Don't use the word queer. I loathe it. I am not talking about the power of art, which of course is necessary, and we have a lot of that. By fighters, I am talking about the general gay community everywhere. They may be out of the closet, but they are not really out of the closet, certainly not enough to be fighting activists out in the world, not just out at Fire Island.

MH: Why do you loathe the word "queer"?

LK: Because I am not queer. I am gay.

MH: Some see "queer" as an inclusive word that embodies gay, lesbian, bi, trans, and so on. You think it's that offensive?

LK: I do. It's like calling blacks "niggers."

MH: Like the late Vito Russo, you've been driven by anger about complacency during the AIDS crisis. What makes you most angry today?

LK: That this is the 35th year of a plague, and we should know more and have more by now. Research for a cure is almost nonexistent. That's the next fight that I'm trying to rev up anger about. Everything that should be done isn't being done, and the world is being sold a bill of goods that are lies.

MH: I know you were married last year. Do you think same-sex marriage should be such a priority for queer activists today? Some have argued it has taken up way too much energy and money, at the expense of other issues.

LK: It took what it took, time-wise. Time to move on. Much of the gay marriage fight was done by straight people, lawyers working *pro bono*. But yes, I think we concentrated too much on getting gay marriage. But it shouldn't have been either/or. It's possible to fight for more than one thing. But, to repeat myself, gays are not very good at fighting.

MH: There is one moment that will always stand out to me with respect to the AIDS crisis. A friend was dying, and we held hands, and we looked at each other. And he knew it was over and so did I. No words were uttered, but it was just so incredibly, profoundly sad and helpless. Is there one moment in this entire war with the epidemic that stands out for you?

LK: Plague. Please call it a plague. There are many such moments as the one you describe. Perhaps the first one for me was in 1980 when a friend named Enno Poersch was walking desperately all around Fire Island Pines carrying his very sick lover, Nick Rock, in his arms, asking if anyone knew what was happening to Nick. He'd seen every doctor imaginable in the city, and they had no idea. Enno carried Nick to my house because he knew I was someone well-known, to ask if I had any ideas. The way he held Nick up to me, like an offering, a cry for help—I can still see that image. Both Nick and then Enno died.

MH: When I interviewed Ed Koch a couple of years before he died, he still seemed puzzled that you had taken such aim at

him. Did you ever forgive him for his lack of engagement during the early years of the AIDS crisis?

LK: Why would or could I ever forgive a closeted man with all his power who wouldn't use it to help his dying brothers? By the time you interviewed him, he was playing a different game, telling us how much he'd done.

MH: Barbra Streisand was originally supposed to direct *The Normal Heart*. Have you heard if she saw the HBO production and if she had any reaction?

LK: I wonder about that too, but I've never heard.

MH: What do you think of Obama as a president? Some on the Left call him Obummer; there's a lot of disappointment in many of his policies.

LK: There has never been a president—or a Congress—that has done what a president or public servant should do to help save a dying population.

MH: The arrival of the Internet has made it harder for someone to live as a writer. Publishing has been hit hard, as have newspapers and magazines. What advice would you have for young, aspiring, impassioned writers today?

LK: It's always been hard to make a living as a writer. But if you want it badly enough, you'll find a way to write. There are many more outlets where stuff can be posted on the Internet, and it's occasionally seen by editors and other outlets that can help push your visibility up a notch or two. But you're right: there's precious little money in publishing unless you write a commercial TV series or a hit Broadway musical.

MH: Did you find it strange to watch a documentary about you? How did it feel?

LK: Complicated, painful, thankful—many things. I didn't want to do it, but Jean Carlomusto, the director, is an old friend and said she was going to make it whether I approved or not!

MH: I guess you've patched things up with Tony Kushner. What was his reason for not acknowledging that Lincoln may well have been gay?

LK: I have no idea. He didn't think Lincoln was gay, and he was faithful to what his research made him believe. I offered to introduce him to academics who now have come around. I don't know if he talked to them or not. I told him I thought it was his responsibility as a gay writer to broach this somehow. We are still distant with each other. I have apologized to him for harming what had been a very close friendship. He has said he wants to come and visit me, but he hasn't. I miss him. Oh, the dramas of trying to write the truth.

MH: How does it feel to be eighty?

LK: Totally weird! One day you're young and then, suddenly, one day you're not. I am grateful I'm still alive, but I hate my loss of certain things, like mobility and energy. Some days when I have the shakes and can hardly type, I go nuts.

MH: Where do you think the gay community would be today if AIDS had never happened?

LK: Dancing ourselves to exhaustion.



Make Me Over, or Ripley at Midnight

J. KEN STUCKEY

*"I wanna go places, I wanna do some things
I wanna be a star, I wanna have a big name."
— Ike and Tina Turner, "Make Me Over"*

ON JUNE 16, 2015, the newly resigned president of the Spokane, Washington, chapter of the NAACP came out on national television. But what she came out as remains unclear. She told *The Today Show's* Matt Lauer, "I identify as black." Given that both of her parents identify as white, many viewed Rachel Dolezal's story as a delusion. Others cited the example of Bruce Jenner, who had announced to the world only weeks before that he identified as a woman. They argued (at times sarcastically) that if "Caitlyn" Jenner could change her gender, why couldn't Dolezal change her race? At the heart of this jab lay a suspicion that neither woman's claim was authentic. Coincidentally or not, a slight young man named Dylann Roof entered a historic black church in South Carolina the very next night and killed nine people in an effort to begin a race war. As disparate as these stories are, they all critique—or even preserve, depending on one's reading of them—the fundamental principle that there is such a thing as a "true self," and that race and gender are irrevocable, defining components of that self.

Early American literature is an intriguing study in conflicting views on this matter. The Transcendentalist writers tended to endorse a view of the physical world as being at once sacred and distracting. The purpose of literature and other spiritual practices was to quiet the din of one's environment and allow the "eternal" self to emerge. Thoreau's Walden experience, Emerson's view of poetry, and Whitman's "song" of the self are all variations on this idea: the self is an already made expression of Divine or "original energy."

Frederick Douglass, while relying on similar conventions in his own narratives and speeches, was more specific on the link between class ascension and personhood. It comes as no surprise that a man who was property in the eyes of the state would speak with greater clarity on how the myth of authentic self-making was tied to the politics of race, class, and even masculinity. In his classroom lectures, the late Cornell professor Joel Porte often cited an anecdote in Douglass' 1845 narrative in which Douglass taught himself to read by working in a shipyard. The writer somewhat tediously recounts learning the letters F, A, L, and S from

pieces of timber marked for "starboard" or "larboard" placement, "fore" or "aft." Porte perceived in that painstaking passage the anagram FALS SLF, or "false self." Slavery was a false self that Douglass could shrug off through personal struggle and triumph over external definitions and social restrictions, an autobiographical topos that persists in African-American literature to this day.

Two acclaimed American films critique this myth of self-making specifically through the lens of gayness: John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1997). Both films focus on itinerant men who use migration as an occasion to reinvent themselves entirely. The pinnacle of their transformation occurs through erotic but chaste relationships with other men. The films remain at best ambivalent about the notion of self-invention, implying instead that male-male desire is a core element of identity that cannot be suppressed or reformed. These films also link expressions of desire to issues of class, suggesting that while gayness may be ubiquitous in society, it exists in a social context that exerts varying levels of cultural repression and state control. While the upper classes may not be totally immune to the effects of such repression, wealth tends to provide individuals with the capacity to create social enclaves that shield them from its worst consequences.

Midnight Cowboy was released one month before the Stonewall Riots, receiving an X rating from the Motion Picture Association of America. In a 2001 article (*Journal of Science and Society*), "Closing the Heterosexual Frontiers: *Midnight Cowboy* as National Allegory," Kevin Floyd observed:



Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight in *Midnight Cowboy*

J. Ken Stuckey is a senior lecturer in English and media studies at Bentley University.

What was viewed in 1969 as the strong sexual content of *Midnight Cowboy*—its homosexual content in particular—is generally understood as the main reason for its X rating. ... But the Academy’s response to *Midnight Cowboy* was symptomatic not only of national concerns about “permissiveness”—national phobias about male homosexuality in particular—but also of profound ambivalence about the status of the Western genre during the Vietnam era.

What sent tremors through American masculinity in Floyd’s account was the dual shock of homosexuality and the failed war hero. But the Motion Picture Academy clearly responded positively to the film’s daring subject when it garnered the Oscar for Best Picture. And it remains to this day the only movie with a gay or even a sexually ambivalent protagonist to have won that award, though *Philadelphia*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and *The Imitation Game* were nominated.

Midnight Cowboy opens with a kind of conceptual establishing shot, the parking lot at the Big Tex Drive-In Theater. This locale establishes the site of the naive hero’s imagination: the theater is implied to be where Joe Buck (Jon Voight) derived the fantasy of becoming a cowboy. In the shots that follow, we see Joe putting on his cowboy suit and packing to leave. Everything in Joe’s life apparently fits into a single suitcase, including a poster of Paul Newman, also dressed as a cowboy. Beyond telegraphing Joe’s cinematically-derived cowboy fantasy, this poster also speaks to Joe’s sexuality. In the documentary *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), screenwriter Stewart Stern comments on his film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) that “we know the Sal Mineo character is gay largely because he has a picture of Alan Ladd in his locker.” So Joe’s poster begs the transitive question: does Joe want to be Paul Newman or to be with him? Either choice requires that Joe strive to be someone in New York that he cannot be in Texas.

Before Joe boards the bus, he says goodbye to just one person, a diminutive man who washes dishes in the diner where Joe is a busboy. Having little else to stick around for, Joe becomes a “bus” boy of a different sort, boarding the Greyhound to New York with nothing and no one awaiting him there except the imagined women he believes he can conquer and grow fat on financially. Like so many before and after him, Joe’s pilgrimage to New York enacts a Bildungsroman quest for wealth, acclaim, and above all a clean break with an inferior birthright.

David Carter’s *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay*

Revolution (2004) and Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (2010) are just two of many nonfiction accounts of how minority populations in particular have fled to New York for just such a chance at a new life. What they were fleeing from included poverty, Southern violence, family disownership, sexual persecution, and much more. Before leaving Texas, Joe confides to the man in the diner that the men in New York are “mostly tutti fruities,” as if life in the city were inherently softer than the rugged terrain of rural Texas. But the idea that he himself might be a “fruit” appears not to have occurred to him. The irony that Joe must leave Texas to become a cowboy is compounded by the irony that New York is far more Darwinian than Texas, and Joe is not up to its challenges. He spends roughly the first quarter of the film getting taken advantage of, spending money rather than earning it, even after he reluctantly turns from female tricks to male ones. His fortunes do not change until he forms a bond with one of the people who conned him, a homeless, decrepit man named Enrico Rizzo (Dustin Hoffman). Rico, or “Ratso,” as he is derisively called, has all the street cunning that Joe lacks. With Rico’s aid, Joe gradually does find his way toward a viable clientele, the bored women of the Upper East Side who apparently are as lacking in virile companionship as Joe imagined.

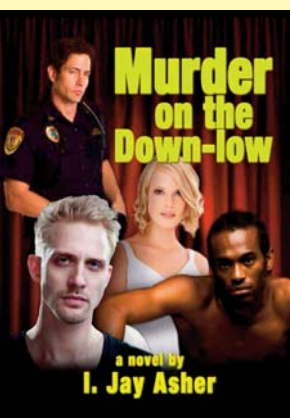
On his way to that success, almost imperceptibly, Joe and Rico grow closer. When the condemned building in which they’re squatting is invaded by the city, they roam the streets aimlessly, just trying to survive. Gradually, as is often the case in buddy

Two acclaimed films critique the American myth of self-making through a lens of gayness: *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.

films, one buddy is growing and changing while the other, stuck in his old ways, is destined not to make it. Joe absorbs Rico’s cunning and gains independence while Rico, dying apparently of tuberculosis, can no longer even walk. In one of the most startling moments in the film amid Rico’s last foray into the city streets, the two men are standing

outside a loft before entering a party to which Joe is invited and which Rico is crashing. Joe examines Rico and recognizes his decay: “You’re sweating all over the damn place.” As he lifts the bottom of his shirt to mop Rico’s brow, Rico leans into Joe’s bare torso and wraps his arms around him. This hungry embrace is as close to consummation as their relationship will ever get. But Joe ultimately abandons his “midnight cowboy” lifestyle just as he is finally making a success of it because Rico’s condition has grown desperate. Joe gives up the fantasy cowboy role to be the man that Rico needs him to be.

The men experience a certain amount of intimacy, physical and otherwise, but it has its limits. The omniscient point of view of the film allows us to see in their dreams what they never disclose to each other. Rico dreams of frolicking on sunny beaches next to a shirtless Joe who, despite his athleticism, struggles to keep up. Joe, meanwhile, has recurring nightmares about a woman in his past, “Crazy Annie,” a sexual foil through whom Joe seems desperate to prove his own virility. His flashback nightmares tell inconsistent stories, suggesting that Texas held some trauma that he cannot admit even to himself. In one version of the dreams, Annie is gang raped and points an accusing finger at Joe. In another, Joe himself is raped by the same group of men. Far from being a *tabula rasa* like the drive-in screen, Joe is presented as a palimpsest bearing ineffable traces of a queer



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Matt Damon, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

sensibility to which he surrenders fully when (we must imagine) he carries an invalid Rico in his arms onto a bus bound for Miami. When Rico dies before they reach Miami, a distraught Joe bravely wraps his arms around Rico and stares back defiantly when others on the bus turn to gawk at them. That is all we know of the man Joe has become, and all we need to know.

Midnight Cowboy constantly invites us to consider the relationship between the actual and the aspirational self. Very little of what Joe once aspired to be isn't traceable to someone he is emulating. Fear of mimicry is surely why American culture guards so ferociously, on and off the screen, its perimeters around what we can imagine. *The Celluloid Closet* has shown how homosexual characters in film reluctantly progressed from the role of antagonist to the role of antagonized. Often giving in to sentimentality and even fatalism, the film industry eventually let go of gay sex as a lethal perversion and moved toward depicting it as the victim of a culture that refused to let authentic gay selfhood survive. In short, gay characters "progressed" from killing those around them to killing themselves.

ALTHOUGH *The Talented Mr. Ripley* revives that well-worn trope of the homicidal gay man, it seeks to undermine our suppositions about how (or whether) identities, sexual and otherwise, are constructed, evaluated, and authenticated. Life seems to ricochet Tom Ripley (Matt Damon) through a series of mistaken identities, all of which he tries on for size, simply because they're better than his current reality of poverty and loneliness. His identity changes occur primarily through encounters with a wealthy, jaded social class that deludes itself as much as it's deluded by Tom. The core injustice of the film is that, even as a poseur, Tom is truer to himself than the rich hypocrites whose world he infiltrates.

Tom's story begins at a cocktail party, where a shipping magnate mistakes him for the Princeton classmate of his son, Dickie Greenleaf (Jude Law). The patriarch wants to pay Tom to go to Europe to retrieve the prodigal son. The filmmaker crosscuts the genteel cocktail party with scenes from Tom's real life, his squalid apartment and his demeaning job as an attendant in the toilet at the symphony. The symphony montage underscores the

idea of Tom as someone who craves a better, artistically richer (not merely a financially richer) life. Though developing this dichotomy is a complex affair, writer-director Anthony Minghella seems interested throughout the film in portraying Tom as a thwarted artist who's interested in money only as an entrée to cultural experiences. The leeway for decadence here is still quite broad; yet Tom's intense passion for artistic indulgences seems to set him on a higher philosophical plane than many of his wealthy peers.

Tom's effort to persuade Dickie to heed his father's wishes plays out as an attempt to seduce him by pretending to have identical taste in art and music. Tom's performance of identity goes through three main stages. His first persona is constructed to incur the approval of Dickie. The second is the aesthetic self that flourishes only when sustained by the Greenleaf fortune. The third, the one he invents spontaneously in Naples, is the stage of pretending to be Dickie after having killed him,

a crime of passion that occurs when Dickie finally rejects Tom's romantic overtures. The only thing separating the second and third selves is that Tom-playing-Dickie must also play heterosexual. While Dickie courts the attention of several men, he never relinquishes the pretense of heterosexuality. Inheriting Dickie's life thus means inheriting his baggage.

In point of fact, in embracing Tom as the protagonist of the film rather than the villain, the audience is forced to reckon with the question of whether Tom is somehow entitled to Dickie's identity. For one thing, he's so good at it, so adept at playing

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Dickie, who was in many ways inept at playing himself. If the audience does decide that Tom deserves to retain the role of Dickie, it can only do so by accepting the moral compromises that Tom himself struggles to accept, including going unpunished for Dickie's murder.

Upon his first sighting of Dickie, Tom already seems to be imagining himself as this man. Practicing with an Italian vocabulary book and looking at Dickie through binoculars, he recites, "*Questo e la mia faccia*. ... This is my face." Here, the film echoes *Midnight Cowboy's* dual fantasy of Paul Newman as both role model and love object. In the next scene, as he schemes to convince Dickie of his fabricated Princeton life, he becomes painfully aware of his separation from Dickie's world. Tom looks nothing like anyone on this Riviera, which is covered with bodies bronzer than his own. Tom's whiteness ironically marks him as marginalized from a leisure class that can spend all day in the sun.

Tom nonetheless befriends Dickie on the transparently false premise that they met at Princeton. Their first conversation about the senior Greenleaf begins with Dickie's offhand comment that everyone should have one talent. When Dickie asks Tom what his talent is, Tom responds, "Forging signatures. Telling lies. Impersonating practically everybody." To demonstrate this, Tom delivers an impersonation of Mr. Greenleaf with menacing precision. Coupled with his other demonstrations of craftiness, the film is leading the audience to the ironic conclusion that perhaps Tom is never more himself than when he is attempting to represent someone else, but the film takes a threatening tone when this theme emerges.

This again raises the question: Who is Tom, exactly? Tom

Ripley, a work of fiction in the literary sense, often seems willing to regard himself as a work in progress in the metaphorical sense, such that all aspects of personality are simply waiting for the occasion to be invented. Cynthia Fuchs notes that the film "treats [Tom's] self-reinvention not solely as pathology (surely, this is clear enough) but as a desperate and understandable effort to achieve the class/sex/race mobilities that he sees all around him. Montages of his romantic club-hopping with Dickie make the point: White boys play black, straight boys play gay, the moneyed boys play whatever they want." So, which passions are authentically Tom's own, and which are crafted for the benefit of some audience? The film further teases the tension between real and assumed identities through a flirtatious conversation in which Dickie wears and then removes Tom's glasses as Tom compares him to Clark Kent. In this same conversation, Tom declares that nothing is more naked than a man's handwriting, and that Dickie's writing reveals a "secret pain." The comparison to the handsome comic book hero lays bare Tom's desire for Dickie while also likening Dickie to a character who lives in secrecy. The analogy outs Tom and closets Dickie in one stroke.

The film's core irony is that Tom's imposter role is emotionally authentic; not to adopt it would be to live a lie. Minghella doesn't fully sever ties to his source material, the Patricia Highsmith character whose external changes are linked to no such higher truth, making him into a soulless—and therefore boundless—predator. Contrary to the ideal of the self-made man with all his limitations, the social chameleon is seen as a menace for his ability to be "self-made" on too great a scale and with too much ease. Resembling the homicidal socialites Andrew Cunanan and Clark Rockefeller in this way, Tom's crimes in Highsmith's novel erupt from the lack of moral grounding that would have come from tethering the self to an essence that is not only economically confined but morally so.

Toni Morrison famously quipped that Bill Clinton was our "first black president," oddly foreshadowing Rachel Dolezal's claim as president of the Spokane NAACP. James Baldwin once wrote that "the value placed on the color of the skin is always and everywhere and forever a delusion." Perhaps Dolezal is no more delusional for wanting to be black than anyone else is for wanting to prove her wrong, for believing there is anything at stake in the question that our folly hasn't placed there. Robert Frost wrote, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," but walls are part of the architecture of the human psyche and an integral part of how we find our way through the social maze.

Tom Ripley and Joe Buck may be dramatically different on a superficial level. Joe is escaping to New York; Tom is escaping from it. Joe aspires to make himself over in the image of a rugged frontiersman who, even in Manhattan, is an aloof survivalist. Tom aspires to be part of a community of aesthetes who go to the opera, the symphony, the places where men conquer ideas rather than landscapes. But these men's stories suggest the same theme, that there actually is such a thing as human rebirth, that it is possible for people to transform their own lives in profound ways. But that transformation is bound by forces from without, chief among them class privilege, and forces from within, notably romantic love. Those forces work together to create the experiences that we are destined to have, and to shape human character in ways over which personal whim has almost no control. In such circumstances, fortune plays the greatest role.



The poster features a decorative gold border with floral motifs. At the top, it reads "James Aiello Productions, Inc". Below this are two movie posters for "Forbidden Child II". The left poster shows a woman singing into a microphone, with a man's face in the foreground. The right poster is similar but includes the text "Secrets Revealed" at the bottom. Below the posters, the text reads: "Hollywood at its Finest", "A Modern-Day Literary Masterpiece", and "www.ForbiddenChild.com". At the bottom, the name "James Aiello" is written in a stylized red font, flanked by two Oscar statues. The bottom-most text says "BarnesandNoble.com & Amazon.com".

Notes on Porn

ANDREW HOLLERAN

1 ANDY WARHOL SAID that when he was in high school he wanted a friend, but then he got a television and he didn't need a friend anymore. Pornography is like that.

2 The size of the pornographic film industry is debated, with one authoritative source pegging the figure at fourteen billion dollars last year. Of course, the gay porn industry is a small segment of that. But there is so much gay porn on the Internet now that it has destroyed almost all other forms of porn.

3 There is nothing stranger than looking at the old issues of *Mandate*, *Inches*, *Honcho*, et cetera, that you kept in your closet—not just because of the time-capsule quality, or the imagery that was considered hot back in those days, but the fact that the men on the pages of the magazine cannot move.

4 When porn was in magazines, one had to go to a “dirty movie theater”—the Adonis or the Bijou, say, in New York—to see porn on film. But now you can watch porn films by yourself at home: another instance of the way in which the computer isolates us, since in the movie houses, one usually went there to have sex with real people while ignoring the images on screen.

5 Now one has sex with four men in a hotel room somewhere in New York in the middle of the afternoon. Through the window you can see the Empire State Building, but the rest of the skyline is so unfamiliar it's hard to figure out just where you are—in Long Island City, or the Lower East Side. Down below you can see trucks going by, and the normal traffic of the day; inside the room, however, three men, like doctors performing surgery, are stuffing a muscle bottom. Who are they? How did they meet? Where is the room? What day is it? This is the magic of movies, or at least the magic of sex, or perhaps of New York.

6 There are so many porn sites that one is always being told of another; but two we can discuss are [xtube.com](#) and [pornmd.com](#). The latter is like a library in which you look things up by typing in a topic. The first is an endless stream of porn films, constantly replenished, so that the scene you watch on Page 1 before you go to bed may be on Page 10 when you get up the next morning if you go looking for it, as you may well do. [Xtube.com](#) is like a river of film that is flowing even as you sleep, a vast conveyor belt moving images forward, so that you really must make a mental note of where the film was when you first saw it if you want to find it again.

7 Porn films invade our lives in a way “legitimate” movies do not; rarely do we want to watch “real” movies every day, in the morning and evening, or know that when we go home we can watch more; but with porn we can and do. Hav-

ing porn on your laptop is like having someone waiting for you when you get home. Pathetic, but true.

8 The line between “legitimate” film and pornographic movies is constantly being negotiated. For instance, the television show *Oz* found a big gay following a few years ago when it showed naked men in showers; but a brief scene in the new movie *Saint Laurent*—when the lead actor walks stark naked toward the camera with a schlong so immense that, if his career in “legitimate” film ever fades, he could always do porn—is jarring.

9 The porn film industry has stars just the way Hollywood does, though most porn actors are the equivalent of extras. And what extras! It is astonishing that so many attractive people are willing to perform sex with a camera flitting about them like a fly. But it is a supply that apparently never runs out. There will always be someone willing to perform on camera acts you would not want anyone to see you doing, not even your sex partner, if you have one. As Gore Vidal pointed out in his essay “On Pornography,” in real life we are often too embarrassed to ask our sex partners for what we really want.

10 Sometimes you find an actor who so embodies what you desire that you start searching for him on other porn sites, like Swann searching for Odette in the cafés of Paris, which can eat up a lot of time. (But what is time when you're watching porn?) These infatuations come and go, but they mimic almost exactly the way Desire crystallizes on a single person in real life. Eventually you form a pantheon of porn actors you consider the very best. As Emily Dickinson wrote, “The soul selects its own society.”

11 In porn, one is always searching for the real—the non-acted, non-contrived, non-professional, genuine exchange of feeling and desire between two human beings. Sometimes these are professional porn stars—it can happen—but mostly it's two “civilians” in a hotel room or someone's house.

12 Shows like *Str8BoyzSeduced*, for instance, are the porn equivalent of *cinéma vérité*. This site takes you into the apartment of a certain Vinnie, who somehow gets young working-class guys to agree to be felled. Vinnie is like a good barber who wraps a cloth around your neck and dusts you off when the haircut is over. A towel is always handed to the guy who has come, and the young man wipes his groin, and then he immediately gets dressed, putting the whole experience behind him. Vinnie spends almost as much time making sure the bedspread is covered with a towel as he does giving head; and often he interrupts the blow job to do something off screen (whose nature we never know). This

makes him a master at building suspense. Sometimes he exposes his own penis and, most thrilling, if rare, the man being blown reciprocates.

This last event is what happens in a film in which Vinnie's visitor is a young man so out of it as to seem either sleep-deprived or stoned, a film that led viewers to comment that Vinnie pays these guys to do this (another film does show a cash payment) or trades on their confusion about their sexual orientation. Whatever the explanation, the young man ends up blowing Vinnie in a way that makes all other blow jobs seem slick and heartless in comparison, leaving the viewer not so much with a hard-on as the realization that under the influence of whatever drug he is on, the young man has now revealed something about himself: that he can come only with Vinnie's cock in his mouth. At this moment the film leaves the realm of the pornographic and gives us the pathos of self-revelation. That's right—on *Str8BoyzSeduced!* When it's over, he sits on the edge of the bed, as if waking up, yawns before getting up and dressing, pulls on his pants, and goes into the bathroom—just the way sex ends in real life as it walks out of our lives.

13 In contrast with “legitimate” movies that involve scenery, sets, special effects, and gorgeous cinematography, you might say there are only two elements in gay porn: the anus and the phallus, although nothing is duller than a close-up of the one going into the other. Why directors waste time on this shot I don't know. Even worse are those moments when, after much sex, the actors are left to their own devices in order to ejaculate—a process that can produce anxiety in both the performers and the viewer. If the sex was so hot up until now, why are they alone at the end?

14 Despite porn's emphasis on the anus and the phallus, a good guide to watching porn is simply to follow people's hands. Nothing is more evocative than the way a hand lies on someone's body, or fingers are inserted into someone's mouth, or other non-phallic moments, like the way in which a person kisses so that it resembles someone spreading his legs.

15 Some directors start by conducting interviews with the young men about to perform, such as the ostensibly “straight” young men who are doing this because they're “broke.” Or the film is set in a prison, or an apartment house, or even ancient Rome. Rarely do these things lead to suspension of disbelief. Mostly one doesn't want plots, situations, introductions to the action. On the other hand, porn films that begin with no foreplay are terribly cold. Nothing, indeed, is so uninteresting as a penis going into an asshole in close-up; it lacks the human element, the individuals and their relationships, which brings us to one of Joe Gage's films that I happened upon by accident one night: *Ex-Military*.

16 Joe Gage (most famous for *Kansas City Trucking Co.*) is one of the auteurs of gay porn, known for concentrating on working-class, masculine men who do not fit into the top-bottom, butch-femme categories. Instead, his actors seem to regard each other standing apart, watching others have sex, or masturbating in the same room, which is what happens in the first, electrifying scene of *Ex-Military*. The tension arises from the men not touching, not embracing, not expressing affection. It's more of a grudging respect

given to one another's butch affect. So, after being so stand-offish, the moment when the two men do make contact is more powerful than all the anonymous piston-like fucking of ordinary porn films.

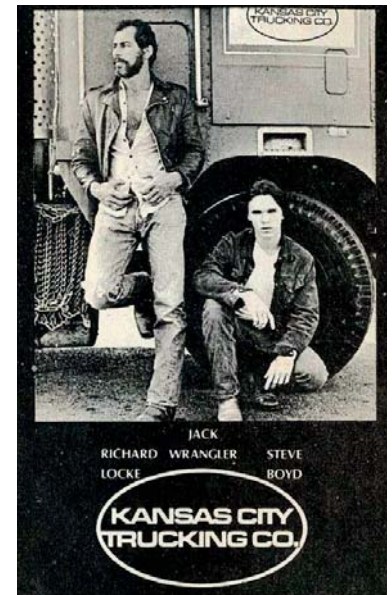
17 When asked in an interview for *Butt* magazine, “Do you enjoy watching porn?” Gage replied: “I do, I watch porn all the time, I love it and watch it and collect it, and have it. I live it, I live with porn, porn is my life.” And when asked, “Do you like the work of other directors?” he replied: “I like amateur porn the best, because it's real. It's real sex.”

18 The search for the “real” is the mark of the porn aficionado—though amateur films can be just as dull as any others. But in general amateur is best. Amateur threesomes, in particular, can be as suspenseful as a good thriller: not knowing how it's going to go—who desires whom, who is going to end up doing what. Plus there is the physical luxury of it all—the abundance of body parts. There's no more sincere sex on film than this category. Sometimes in a porn film the illusion is broken by the careless entrance of the camera into the frame, or an actor glancing at the lens; although in amateur threesomes, the players often keep looking at the camera throughout, they are so delighted with the fact that their obscene acts are being recorded.

19 Studies have been made of so-called addiction to porn; it's even been determined that a person must stop watching porn for a certain minimum number of weeks before he can return to “normal” sexual desire. If, as Vidal points out in his essay, a lot of people are thinking of someone other than their sex partner when they do it, porn supplies all too many alternative images to the person you are with, which may make the sex you're having in actuality pale by comparison, or your own attributes seem meager. So we are back to the age-old problem of the movies versus real life.

20 The need for porn seems to be related to other things in one's life—depression, elation, despair, hope, loneliness, a weariness with social life, horniness, or boredom. Porn can keep you up, or help you sleep. Porn can help you start the day, or end it. Porn is also, in a way, self-regulating: when you're watching too much, you'll know.

21 If, say, you are at a lecture on spectrographic analysis of Fragonard's *Young Girl Reading* at the National Gallery in Washington, listening to two conservators describe how they discerned the image of another head beneath the one we see on the canvas, and you feel a sudden urge to be back in your apartment watching a skinny young



man with a hairline so low he looks like a badger or muskrat getting blown on *Raw and Rough*, you might ask yourself whether you're addicted to porn or offended by excessive analysis of what is not in the end susceptible to analysis: great art.

22 Whether porn movies can ever be great art is debatable, but what is not is that occasionally you will see images of great beauty—often fleeting and accidental; though with a mere click you can freeze the image and contemplate it that way—as a painting, or a fine photograph.

23 Nevertheless, we still think of watching porn as something that denotes weakness, the way the 19th century used to think of masturbation. Of course, porn *is* masturbation. It is also safe sex.

24 One might think of watching porn as giving up—though there is one case in which the argument no longer applies, since the real thing is out of your reach anyway. The best argument for pornography may have to do with age. If pneumonia is considered “the old person’s friend” (because it carries you off), the same may be said of porn. It lets you, at an advanced age, have sex with people you would never be able to in real life. In fact, it lets you have sex with people you could not have had sex with when you were young.

25 But what does it mean “to have sex with someone” when the someone is a person in a pornographic film?

26 It means you can have sex with that person only as a voyeur, which means you can have sex without all the things that can go wrong during sex—smells, shit, disillusionment, erectile failure, a sudden wrong note that ruins things, the fact that the soufflé of Lust can collapse in a single unforeseen and irreversible instant.

27 At the same time, sex as a voyeur means you will never be touched, except by your own hand, nor experience the thrills, the catharsis, the rosy afterglow of sex in real life when it succeeds; and nothing will come of your sex with this person, who may live thousands of miles away, or several years away in time. In short, you are as alone after sex with someone in a porn film as you were when you began. Depending on your age or temperament or circumstances, this may be a good or a bad thing.

28 Of course, you could argue that porn is a total waste of time, time that you would use, if you were sane, looking for sex in real life. And time is all we have.

29 The more you watch porn, the more you may wonder: Why go to the grocery store? Why write your novel? Why not just stay home and watch Bareback Threesomes on pornmd.com?

30 Michel Houellebecq said sex is like capitalism: some people have too little, others too much. Porn lets everyone have equal access—which cuts down on the sexual inequality that real life seems to foster.

31 Group sex on film is almost always brutal and piggyish. The men are hot, the bodies great, and usually pierced, but what should be arousing just seems industrial and exhausting.

32 The Germans seem to make the most brutal porn. Eastern European porn can be quite cheesy. The French seem to have the best models; Keumgay supplies us with one stunner after another, though there is a curious distancing quality to filming handsome young Arabs being masturbated by a hand intruding from off screen, like a robotic arm in a car wash.

33 “Shortly after Osama bin Laden was killed four years ago,” according to a column in *The Washington Post* (June 11, 2015), “SEAL Team Six found a ‘stash of pornography’ in his library of ‘modern’ videos that was ‘fairly extensive.’ But the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which has released much of bin Laden’s library files and books ... nixed putting out the porn.” The reason given was that the CIA is “prohibited by federal law” from “mailing obscene matter.” The *Post* suggested a group of reporters drive out to Langley and view it that way. I suspect something like this will happen. Don’t we all want to know what kind of porn bin Laden watched while waging “holy war”?

34 It’s at moments like this that one misses Boyd McDonald, RIP. (Boyd McDonald, who used to write for *Christopher Street* magazine, viewed mainstream movies as porn.)

35 Never answer the telephone while you’re watching a porn film; you will only resent whoever called for interrupting something much more important than whatever it is they are calling about. 🏳️

Have you met James?

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The *Philadelphia* Phenomenon

MARK ZELINSKY

WHEN *PHILADELPHIA* passed the twentieth anniversary of its release in December 2013, it was surprising to realize that the film is still Hollywood's most successful gay-themed movie to date in terms of box office receipts. The movie's worldwide earnings still eclipse those of *Brokeback Mountain* or *The Dallas Buyers Club* or any other GLBT film made since that time, making a re-evaluation of *Philadelphia* worthwhile.

By 1993, theater and television had produced many offerings on gay themes and the AIDS crisis, but *Philadelphia* was the first big-budget, major studio movie to center on these themes.* As such, it was overburdened with demands. At the time, it was regarded as a "bellwether project" for future AIDS films and was eagerly anticipated both by Hollywood and by the gay community. But if the former waited anxiously for word on the film's box office potential, the latter worried about how the movie would depict gay people for mass audience consumption. Not surprisingly, many gays were disappointed, but *Philadelphia* remains a landmark in terms of proving that gay-related films could be profitable and popular in the American mainstream. But how did this movie, so radical for its time, come to be made; and how was it marketed to a mainstream mass audience? Furthermore, how did it manage to attract the latter without alienating the "gay gaze" of its GLBT viewers?

The film's straight director, Jonathan Demme, began to develop the project in 1988 with gay screenwriter Ron Nyswaner, and they selected the story that would become *Philadelphia* in 1990. Demme's Academy Award as best director for *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) helped get *Philadelphia* in production. He never intended to make the film for a gay audience but saw himself as the ideal viewer. Recalling a 1984 train ride when he overheard a fellow passenger reveal that he had AIDS, Demme admitted he was "terrified" and wanted to escape the confines of the compartment in flight from the infected individual. *Philadelphia* was meant to tap into this kind of response in other ill-informed people and offer a much more complex perspective on the medical, legal, and personal aspects of the disease.

Although hoping to educate the film's audiences, Demme was concerned about alienating its straight viewers by frankly depicting the sex lives of gay men, and so he tread lightly here. Indeed, one might not realize that Tom Hanks' character, Andy Beckett, is gay until his longtime lover appears in his hospital

* Theatrical works that preceded *Philadelphia*'s release were *As Is* (1985), *The Normal Heart* (1985), *Falsettos* (1992), *Jeffrey* (1993), and *Angels in America* (1993). The most successful TV offerings were *An Early Frost* (1985), *Our Sons* (1991), and *And the Band Played On* (1993).

Mark Zelinsky, PhD, is an associate professor of English at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut.

room fifteen minutes into the film. Admitted Demme: "I didn't want to risk knocking our audience back [twenty] feet with images they're not prepared to see."

The straight press gave *Philadelphia* mixed reviews, objecting to the easy answers and two-dimensional characters. Frank Rich remarked that "the gay characters are uniformly saintly," while, with the important exception of Denzel Washington, "the straight characters are either deified (the hero's uniformly supportive family) or demonized (the hero's monstrously bigoted former legal colleagues)." Despite reservations about the film's artistic merits and its portrait of reality, many reviewers praised Hanks' courage in playing the lead and, on this basis alone, encouraged readers to see the film. Less cynically, many mainstream critics regarded *Philadelphia* as long overdue and hoped that it would help the public to understand the AIDS crisis more realistically and humanely.

Regardless of straight America's reaction, Demme trusted that he could count on the gay audience. Declaring that ten percent of the population is gay, the director believed that "at least half of them" would come to *Philadelphia*. A critic in *Out* magazine observed that "for the gay community ... *Philadelphia* was the most eagerly anticipated movie in the history of the medium." While the gay press remained generally supportive of



Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington in *Philadelphia*

the film, there was also a widespread sense of regret, of a lost opportunity, for what could have been a powerful depiction of a gay man's struggle with a gruesome disease. This disappointment was tempered by the recognition that the picture was clearly not meant for the gay audience. Wrote Ronald Mark Kraft in *The Advocate*: "Gays and lesbians may very well feel cheated by *Philadelphia*—it's AIDS 101 and Gay 101 all neatly tied up with a red ribbon—but this movie wasn't necessarily made with them in mind. But if, like the Liberty Bell [a shot of which appears in the opening moments of the film], it has a few cracks, it is no less a wonder to behold."

Out called *Philadelphia* "maddeningly closeted." Like the straight press, GLBT publications bemoaned the movie's lack of realism or boldness and its conservatism in presenting inti-

mate relationships. Many gay viewers objected that Joe Miller (Denzel Washington) and his wife were shown affectionately hugging in bed, while Andy and Miguel (Antonio Banderas) shared no similar scene. Some critics regarded Andy's ecstatic experience of an aria sung by Maria Callas as a gay cliché. Perhaps most damning was Andy's contraction of HIV in a gay porn theater. A spokesperson for the Philadelphia AIDS Consortium said of the porn cinema allusion: "The movie seems to say that simply by going there, Andrew put himself and his lover at risk for AIDS." Two established and out entertainment figures vehemently objected to the film: Scott Thompson and Larry Kramer.

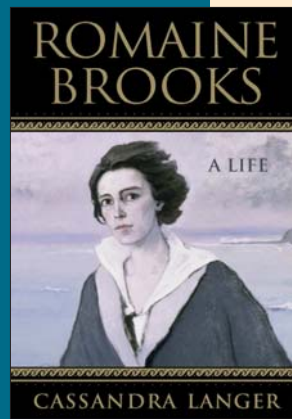
Best known as one of the regulars on the comedy serial *The Kids in the Hall*, actor Scott Thompson hoped *Philadelphia* would fail at the box office: "The movie was too polite, too ginger. If Hollywood is using this movie to make America love us, they are making them love a false image. I don't want that kind of acceptance." Gay activist and playwright Larry Kramer was even more damning in his attacks, syndicating an essay titled "Why I Hated *Philadelphia*" in seven newspapers. Wrote Kramer: "It's dishonest, it's often legally, medically and politically inaccurate, and it breaks my heart that I must say it's simply not good enough and I'd rather people not see it at all." However, after the film became a hit with audiences nationwide, Kramer reversed himself: "I never thought I'd say this, but I guess *Philadelphia* did some good after all."

Like the straight press and its grudging endorsement of the film, Kramer may have altered his views when he realized that *Philadelphia* was disseminating information to mainstream viewers. Tom Hanks' character may have presented a stereotypical face, but it was a human face. In the end, most of the gay community forgave the film for its Disney-like depiction of gay life; it was awarded "outstanding studio film of the year" by the Gay and Lesbian Association for Anti-Defamation. Like Kramer, most in the GLBT community came to believe that visibility was more important than realism.

The film's narrative is fairly straightforward, leaving little room for symbolic or metaphoric meanings. Considering Demme's fear of alienating his audience, it's not surprising that the film avoids even coded messages that might be picked up by gay viewers. He modeled *Philadelphia* on the courtroom drama and just as in a court of law, presents his case for the defense in a clear, articulate manner. Still, there are a few scenes that might be seen as directed to gay viewers: Andy's flashback to the porn movie and to the athletic club showers when he realizes his boss is homophobic; Joe being cruised in a drugstore; and Andy's caregiver Bruno's gaze in the few moments he has on-screen. I highlight these scenes because the "gay gaze" of the audience is fundamental in reading them, and they become meaningless or comic without the use of a gay viewpoint.

While testifying in the trial sequence, Andy recalls his encounter with Robert in the Stallion Showcase Cinema, and Demme provides a flashback that takes up a few seconds of film. Sounds of moaning emanate from the pornographic film while shadowy images outline the pair as they complete their brief introductions and proceed (we assume) to have sex. These brief images illustrate what film scholar R. Bruce Brasell calls the "hustling gaze": "In hustling, sex is commodified by its transference into cash which can then be exchanged at a later time. Sex acquires an economic/monetary value as a result of the

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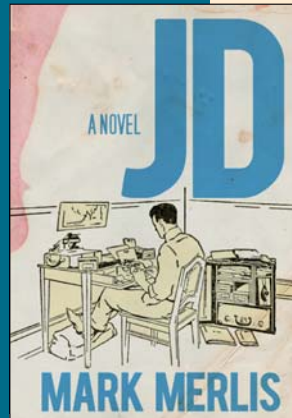


ROMAINE BROOKS A Life

Cassandra Langer

"Langer makes clear that Romaine Brooks was an artist of unusual courage and originality, tracing her development not only as an artist, but as a woman artist and a boldly lesbian artist."

—Jerry Rosco, author of *Glenway Wescott Personally: A Biography*

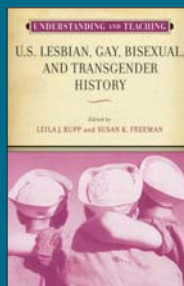


JD A Novel

Mark Merlis

"This is a chamber drama about one family, yet it's full of windows that look out on the wider worlds of the Vietnam War, New York literary politics, and the gay revolution. Mark Merlis is a major writer and this is his best novel yet."

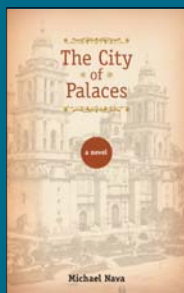
—Christopher Bram, author of *Eminent Outlaws* and *Gods and Monsters*



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transaction.” Hustling creates a closed system and results in objectification in which a body is reduced to a commodity to be bought and sold. This anonymous sexual encounter is not only the sole instance of hustling in *Philadelphia*, it is also the one in which Andy contracts HIV.

Importantly, the hustling scene happens in a public setting. Brasell defines the significance of private and public places in his discussion of gay spectatorship: “The two locations create different performance spaces for gay men, one in which we project outwardly for the public and the other in which we perform privately for each other.” The public (libraries, stores, athletic clubs) and the private (living rooms, kitchens, bathrooms) are the same as in everyday usage, but become performance spaces that place different demands upon the gay male. What may be relatively acceptable behavior for two men in private becomes threatening when it occurs in public. By performing a sexual act in the public cinema, Andy has broken a more serious taboo and is further condemned. Our own spectatorship magnifies this effect, and we find ourselves watching two men having sex. Andy’s moment of hustling makes him guilty on three planes: his objectification of Robert, by which he also objectifies himself; our own complicity in the exchange; and its public setting, which involves a movie theater like the one we’re sitting in, as if we’ve turned around in our seats at the Stallion Cinema to watch the pair consummate their deal.

Demme limited the hustling sequence to a few seconds but chose to dwell upon a cruising scene. Cruising requires more finesse and orients itself toward gay spectatorship. Brasell explains that “in cruising ... sex is not commodified because, unlike hustling, cruising is not an economic exchange but a bartering system.” Hustling creates a closed system between two individuals, while cruising allows for a complex interplay involving multiple parties. An example of cruising takes place when Joe meets a young law student who’s shopping for diapers in a drugstore. The attractive, soft-spoken black youth praises Joe’s courage for defending Andy, and Joe (impressed by the flattery) offers him potential employment once he graduates. The young man invites Joe for a drink, but he declines. The younger man then leans over a shelf full of medicines and explains to Joe that he does not usually pick up men in drugstores. Finally realizing that he is being cruised, Joe reacts violently to being taken for gay and threatens to kick the young man’s “faggoty little ass.” The law student remains calm and explains he meant no offense. To Joe’s threat he quietly retorts, “Want to try to kick my ass, Joe?” The youth casually tosses a football in the air as Joe exits the store at a brisk pace. The gay male depicted in this scene remains utterly relaxed and at ease, while the straight male demonstrates reactionary hysteria.

Through this sequence, Demme explains the ritual of cruising to an audience he fears is as naïve as Joe. He exposes one of the rituals of gay culture, not as an indictment but as a means to get the audience to question its prejudices. The law student is the epitome of masculinity, informing Joe that he has just been working out. He has invited Joe for a beer and wears a football jersey while he tosses the ball in the air, completely at ease with the situation and himself. The gay man is not some monster but a pleasant person cruising a man he finds appealing. Joe sees a horrifying creature before him when he realizes he is being cruised, but the audience doesn’t share Joe’s horror, having ob-

served the law student merely trying to open a dialog and disengaging politely upon realizing his mistake.

In perhaps the most disturbing scene for gay viewers, taking place in court, Andy recalls the moment he decided not to tell his employer, Charles Wheeler (Jason Robards) that he was gay. We flash back to the athletic club and the law partners telling jokes as they enjoy the sauna. One of them starts a joke, “How does a faggot fake an orgasm?” Wheeler provides the punch line: “He throws a quart of hot yogurt on your back.” The men break up in laughter as the camera pans to Andy with a false smile frozen on his face. The sequence is important in establishing Andy’s closeted stance within his former firm and in exposing the organization’s bigotry.

Just before Wheeler tells his cruel joke, the camera pans across the pool of the athletic club. A naked man dives into the water while a youth with a white towel around his neck observes the activities of the swimmers. A young man then wanders to the edge of the pool with a towel draped casually over his shoulder, and the camera drops back to reveal the middle-aged partners as they lounge about telling fag jokes. Even within the inner sanctum of homophobia, cruising carries on undisturbed. The naked diver sparks our interest followed by two men clearly cruising the baths. These handsome, fit men mark a sharp contrast to the older, discriminatory lawyers with their pasty complexions and shallow spirits, yet the homoerotic play is soon cut short by the realities of homophobia. The brief sequence provides the gay audience with a bit of erotica, allowing them to cruise for a few moments while nameless, beautiful youths cavort about the pool like visions out of classical Greece.

Andy’s primary caregiver, Bruno (played by performer-playwright David Drake), possesses a soft-spoken, gentle manner and mainly provides empathetic reaction shots in difficult moments when Andy is suffering. And it is Bruno’s point of view that closes *Philadelphia*. At Andy’s wake, friends and family watch childhood videos of the fallen protagonist. Bruno is the last character we see. He utters no words, but his look conveys everything that we’re feeling toward Andy—love, loss, lust, longing, anger, anguish, affection. Bruno’s look is a combination of hustling, cruising, and caring. He reacts for the straight audience, which may be unsure of how to feel toward Andy in unfamiliar situations.

Tom Hanks was awarded the Best Actor Oscar for his performance as Andrew Beckett, and *Philadelphia* won another Oscar for best original song, Bruce Springsteen’s “Streets of Philadelphia.” *Advocate* contributor Bruce Vilanch named the movie one of the four best gay and lesbian motion pictures. However, after making \$207 million worldwide and becoming the twelfth highest-grossing film of 1993, the film’s profits remain perhaps its greatest legacy. One might argue that *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which earned \$178 million worldwide, or *The Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), which earned \$55 million, would not have been made without *Philadelphia*, and there have been quite a few other films that were perhaps made possible by the success of Demme’s work.*



* *The Birdcage* (1996) grossed \$185 million, but cross-dressing gay comedies (with the exception of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) earning \$11 million) provoke less thoughtful consideration from the audience. Too often they are films about queers as clowns. Hanks’ *Philadelphia* Oscar acceptance speech inspired *In & Out* (1997), which grossed \$64 million worldwide.

Lillian Faderman Tells the Gay Story to Date

MARY MERIAM

HISTORIAN Lillian Faderman is an LGBT culture hero who has won several lifetime achievement awards for her groundbreaking scholarship in LGBT history. Her most recent books are *Gay L.A.* (2006), co-authored with Stuart Timmons, and two memoirs, *Naked in the Promised Land* (2003) and *My Mother's Wars*. Two of her earlier books, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) and *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991), were named "Notable Books of the Year" by *The New York Times*.

Faderman has outdone herself in her new book of history, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, just published by Simon & Schuster. The book tells the story of the past 65 years of our "gay revolution," starting in the 1950s and bringing it right up to breaking news in May of this year. In addition to extensive archival research, she conducted 150 interviews to produce an 800-page book that's undoubtedly the most complete and authoritative of its kind ever published.

I interviewed Lillian Faderman by phone and e-mail in June.

Mary Meriam: How many years did it take to write *The Gay Revolution* and what was the biggest challenge?

Lillian Faderman: It feels like this has been my life's work. I've been collecting material on our history since the 1970s, and I mined a lot of it for my other books. But for this book I wanted to present history as personal stories and group stories that would show the drama of the hard-fought battles for LGBT civil rights. So over a period of four years, I spent a lot of time in archives, finding letters and all sorts of documents that told important stories that hadn't been told before. And I interviewed more than 150 people. Some of them had been leaders in the various movements—homophile, gay, lesbian-feminist, gay-and-lesbian, LGBT, and so on; and some had just lived through the history and had revealing and riveting personal stories to tell. So, for example, I interviewed people who in the mid-20th century had been committed to mental institutions and given shock therapy or had been hounded out of their jobs because they were homosexual. I interviewed people who helped start homophile organizations to begin to fight back against such treatment. I interviewed people who rioted or staged zaps to protest injustices to the LGBT community, and people who fought the govern-

ment in the courts or got elected to public office so they could fix those injustices.

I think the biggest challenge has been to make this a book that tells the story of the whole struggle—not just as it was fought on the East and West Coasts, not just as it was fought by radicals or by mainstreamers, or by gay men or white people; but the story of how an incredibly diverse group of individuals—who often had little in common but sexual orientation or gender identity—managed to bring about the remarkable changes that transformed us from pariah status to a status that finally begins to approach first-class American citizenship.

MM: Why do you call the book the "gay" revolution?

LF: It was a challenge to settle on a historically valid adjective. I was able to trace the popular underground use of the word "gay" for a diverse community way back to the beginning of the 20th century. For example, Gertrude Stein used "gay" to describe les-



bians in her 1908 story, "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene." Up to the 1970s, when lesbian feminists reclaimed the word "lesbian," and the 1990s, when trans people began describing themselves as "transgender" and young people began calling themselves "queer," "gay" was the preferred underground term for all of us who were sexual or gender "outlaws." The world outside called us "homosexual" or "invert" or "lesbian" or "queer" (all terms that were meant as insults), but "gay" was the word most of us used among ourselves. LGBT is a relatively recent term—and now it's becoming dated in favor of LGBTQ or LGBTQIAAP, or even no term at all to express sexual or gender "fluidity."

MM: How is *The Gay Revolution* different from other LGBT history books, and why did you write it?

LF: I think there have been many wonderful LGBT history books, but most of them have

focused on a particular period, or a particular aspect of our history, or a particular city in which that history happened. I wanted to write a sweeping history: one that began in the mid-20th century, when things were as bad as could be, and went all the way up to the present, when the president of the United States supports us publicly, and the laws that made our lives miserable are being struck down all over the country.

I wrote this book for the same reason I generally write a book: I'm interested in finding the answer to a question. In this case, it's the question I ask at the beginning of the book. First I present the story of a much-loved professor at the University of Missouri who was brutally shamed and fired from his job in 1948 after being accused of sodomy, and then I present the story of a woman in 2012 who was promoted to brigadier general in a public ceremony in which her wife pinned the general's star on her epaulet. The question is: how did America change from a country in which Professor E. K. Johnston was destroyed because of his sexuality to one in which General Tammy Smith's sexuality is considered irrelevant by the Department of Defense? The story of that transformation is what the book is about.

MM: Is the "gay revolution" over?

LF: Despite all the victories we've had in recent years, there's still work to be done. In the mid-1970s, Congressmembers Bella Abzug and Ed Koch tried twice to get a sweeping federal gay rights bill passed, but they couldn't get traction. Senator Ted Kennedy tried in vain for decades to get ENDA—the Employment Non-Discrimination Act—passed, but we still don't have a federal law. And the Right continues to invent outrageous ploys, such as the so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" that would, for example, allow wedding-cake bakers or gown-makers to refuse service for a same-sex wedding if their religion frowned on such unions. Fortunately, there was such an uproar in Indiana and Arkansas last spring when their legislators passed such laws that the two states' governors had to back down. But just as the Right will keep trying to hurt us, we'll keep fighting them—and as polls are showing, we no longer have to fight alone. The majority of America seems to have come over to our side.

Mary Meriam's latest book is *Lady of the Moon*.

Mark James talks with the author of *New Queer Cinema*

What's New Is *How We View*

B. RUBY RICH

LEAVE IT to director John Waters to succinctly capture why film scholar and critic B. Ruby Rich is such a pleasure to read: “Ruby Rich has to be the friendliest yet toughest voice of international Queerdom writing today. She’s sane, funny, well-traveled, and her aesthetics go beyond dyke correctness into a whole new world of fag-friendly feminist film fanaticism.”

In an influential 1992 essay in *The Village Voice*, Rich coined the term “New Queer Cinema” to label what she saw as a new cinematic phenomenon, arising in the mid-1980s as a result of a technological advance, affordable high-quality camcorders, along with widespread outrage over the AIDS epidemic and the government’s disastrous response to that crisis. Soon the term expanded to encompass a whole generation of queer filmmakers, artists, and even like-minded political activists.

Ms. Rich’s most recent book, titled *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut* (Duke University Press, 2013), reflects her interest in this phenomenon. It’s a collection of her writings from her initial piece in the *Voice* to the present. Reading it is like binge-watching your way through a history of modern gay cinema. Throughout the essays, Rich implores avant-garde filmmakers to cultivate an audience and then challenge its expectations: “I was troubled by a pronounced audience tendency: the desire for something predictable and familiar up there on-screen, a sort of Classic Coke for the queer generation, not the boundary-busting work that I cared about and wanted to see proliferate.”

B. Ruby Rich is a professor of film and digital media at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She has also taught documentary film and queer studies at UC-Berkeley. Rich has been a regular contributor to *The Village Voice* and the *British Film Institute’s Sight & Sound*. She currently serves as the editor of the magazine *Film Quarterly*. Her 1998 book *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Duke) is considered a definitive collection of essays on the origins and development of feminist films.

I spoke with Rich in San Francisco on *Pride Sunday* in late June—which is also the final day of the City’s *Frameline LGBTQ* film festival—about current trends in queer cinema.

Mark James: You’ve been a presence at LGBT film festivals for many years, and you just returned from the Provincetown International Film Festival, correct?

Mark James lives in San Francisco where he writes about film and culture. He has contributed to The Advocate, Hello Mr., Film International, and other publications.

B. Ruby Rich: Yes, I go every year, and I do the on-stage tribute. This year they were honoring Jennifer Coolidge. I don’t know if you know her from the Christopher Guest movies. She does wacky characters; she was in *Legally Blonde* and in *Two Broke Girls*. I guess she has a big gay boy following, so she received a lifetime award in Provincetown [the Faith Hubley Career Achievement Award].

MJ: I can attest to her having a big gay following! You travel the global film festival circuit extensively. Do you see a changing audience?

BRR: Lately I’ve been going to a lot of festivals in Europe, and it’s like going back in a wonderful time machine for the queer community. They still have audiences that I recognize from the ’80s, ’90s, and 2000s. There are still big lesbian populations, and there are still people of all ages, both men and women. They’re coming out for these events. I was recently in Zurich and Hamburg, and I was captivated by what a vibrant sector queer film festivals still are in Europe.

MJ: How would you contrast that with North America?

BRR: Well, frankly, film festival audiences here are graying. All film festivals, with the possible exception of Asian-American ones, are following this trend. In the U.S., going out to a theater seems to be a foreign thing for young people. They watch at home, streaming with a few close friends or, increasingly, alone. I still teach college students, and I ask them, “What about the audience experience with the public?” And they look at me with complete puzzlement. There are exceptions, but for undergrads that’s the response I get. So we have a crisis—not specific to festivals or even to cinema—that in general public spaces are disappearing. Apart from farmer’s markets! But do younger people still go to film festivals in the age of Grindr? I do not know.

MJ: With that in mind, do you think LGBT festivals need to alter their mission?

BRR: They have always had to defend their right to exist. Right from the start, people questioned what purpose they served, or predicted their demise due to changes in demographics, or whatever. So people have been too eager to announce the funerals of these events, which puts an extra burden on them taking place.

MJ: Yet *Frameline* attendance seems strong.

BRR: Well, I was there yesterday morning for the Yvonne Rainer film [*Feelings Are Facts: The Life of Yvonne Rainer*], and I was surprised that there was quite a large audience. Also,

I was really pleased with the film, which was wonderful.

MJ: So you do see a lot of queer films. What stands out in recent years?

BRR: The film I keep missing but am eager to see is *Tangerine*. I want to find out if that is as wonderful as people are saying. And I really liked this new French-Lithuanian film *The Summer of Sangaile*.

MJ: I haven't seen it, but from the trailer it looks visually beautiful. I always have faith in the team at Strand Releasing, which picked up *The Summer of Sangaile*. Another of their acquisitions was the new Peter Greenaway film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, which is a look at Sergei Eisenstein's sexual awakening in Mexico. Greenaway revels in using computer-generated imagery or CGI and split screen triptychs—it's classic Greenaway.

BRR: I'm always looking for something different. I am watching *Transparent* (Amazon Prime) and *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix). I think *Transparent* is terrific television. Hats off to Jill Soloway for writing, producing, and directing it. This is a giant landmark. And I love that she's hiring trans directors and writers, and that she's inspired by her own father's transition. It will really make a difference in how people see trans women—but like Caitlyn Jenner on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, trans women have to be portrayed outside of the new narrow window of wealthy fabulousness.

MJ: Did it remind you of *An American Family*?

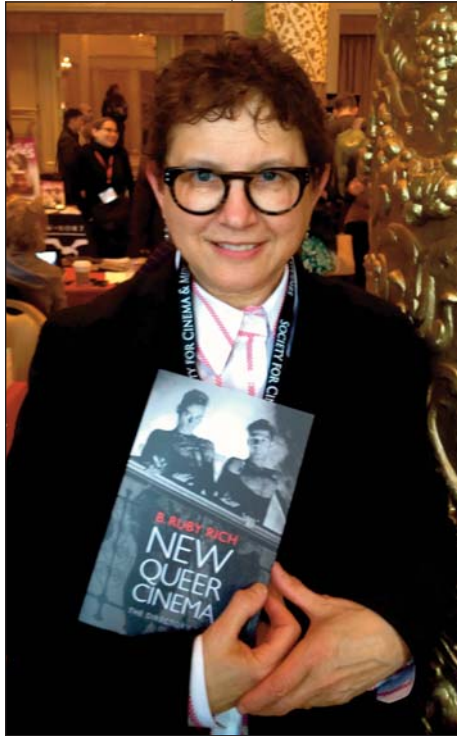
BRR: No, not at all. More like *All in the Family*, actually.

MJ: I see the show being as much about Jewish identity and family as it is about Maura's transition.

BRR: I agree with you. It's as much about rich Jewish life in L.A. as it is about transitioning. I think it's a hilarious send-up of Jewish upper-middle-class privilege, mores, and neuroses, and a great portrait of Jewish life in modern luxe L.A. Really updates the old farmers-market-style Jewish L.A. This is the "post-deli" universe. It might even make being Jewish sexy again!

MJ: You're interested in the rise of streaming on TV—

BRR: One of the things I've been talking about with various people is this trend of young people streaming and watching work by themselves. What I've noticed is that the style of a lot of queer film is changing: it's becoming much more focused on individuals rather than groups, which were an integral part of New Queer Cinema, which often touched on political action and political involvement. I've noticed when people want to do that now they have to set the films in the past. I was intrigued by *Pride*, the British film that came out last year. Here is the most upbeat film about organizing, love, and politics we've had in years, but to do that it had to be set quite a ways back in history [in 1985, during the UK's Thatcher era].



MJ: What are some films that you think are individualistic in this sense?

BRR: I suppose an example would be *Love is Strange*, where "the group" is actually demonized. The individuals are in peril. One is taken in by the queer cops downstairs, who are always partying, and the group becomes something negative. In the past, queer cops hosting a party would be a real celebratory scene, but here it stands in for everything wrong in their world.

MJ: There seems to be a wider trend away from celebrating sexuality in gay films. I just returned from the main men's shorts program at Frameline, and it was devoid of any overt sexuality.

BRR: Well, I didn't see them, but I will say that over the past few years shorts have changed—from being the place where you would find the really radical work to being a place where the film school graduates are auditioning for their first feature. So that's a shift in the field and in the profession. You know, the people I wrote about [in *New Queer Cinema*—very few of them had gone to film school. They were people who were just picking up the camera—and that has changed.

Another film to be on the lookout for is a work from Switzerland called *The Circle*. While I thought it was workmanlike as a film, I loved learning about that history [of the Swiss organization Der Kreis, "The Circle," widely credited as Europe's first gay rights organization]. And the queerest thing is that I saw it on an airplane! I can't believe European airlines offer up films like that!

I just want to mention a film, *Valencia*, that's an example of a current film made in the spirit of another time. It's based on the Michelle Tea novel of that name and made by a whole lot of filmmakers, each of whom made a chapter. The character of Michelle is very unstable and is played by different people in the film, and it's really quite wonderful. It's very much about a group, a gang of friends who want to change the world if only by partying and having sex with each other.

MJ: Frameline boasts that 64 films exhibited this year are made by women, but clearly we still have work to do even here.

BRR: It's tough for queer women filmmakers overall because men are still men. Lesbians are not only women but "lesbians." So we are just at the beginning; there's still a huge imbalance.

MJ: What other projects are you currently working on?

BRR: My book *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* was published by Duke University Press two years ago and has gone into a second printing. My latest update is an article translated into German and published by *Der Spiegel* in October 2014. I am now the editor-in-chief of *Film Quarterly*, the oldest film journal in the U.S., where I'm trying to bring together voices from throughout the field. Check it out!

Contemplating the Navel

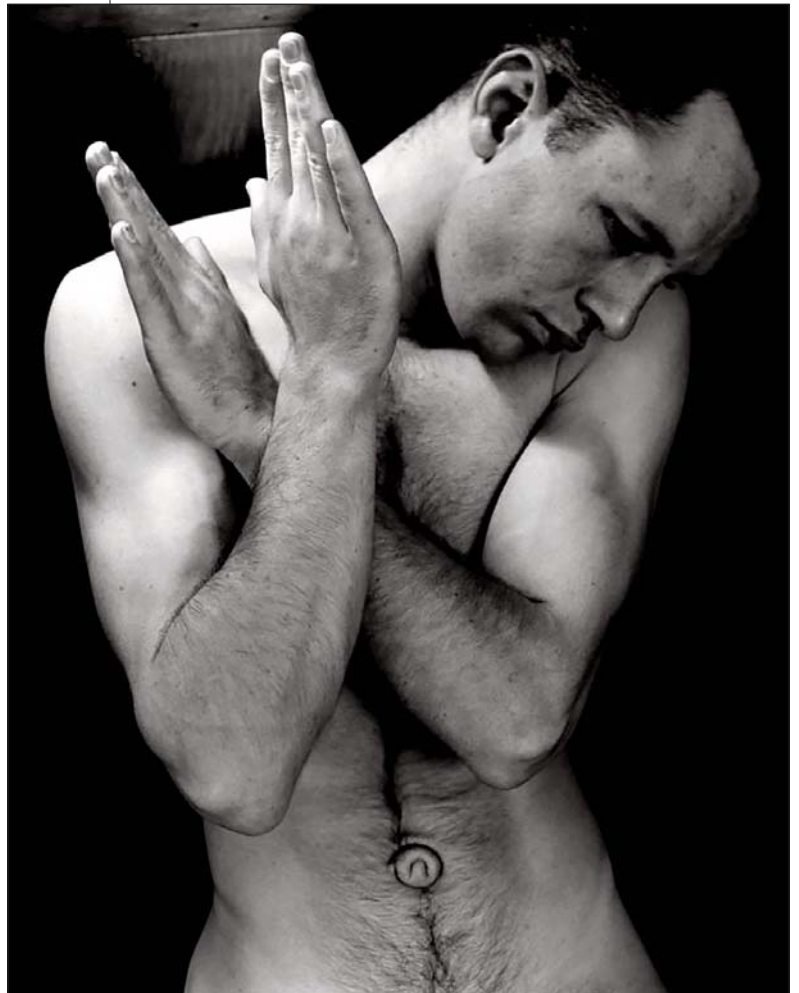
STEVEN F. DANSKY

THE HUMAN NAVEL has historically symbolized the evolutionary past, through millennia cross-culturally, and for all ethnicities. The navel represents the universal maternal connection embodied in 6th-century Persian silver shallow drinking bowls with a bulbous bellybutton indentation; in a rosette of lotus petals radiating from the Hindu god Vishnu's navel; or, in Greek mythology, in the conical-stone omphalos (the Greek word for navel) at the Sanctuary of Apollo on Mount Parnassus, designating the earth's center. The navel also symbolizes the unknown and mysterious. When Freud conceded that not all dreams were interpretable—some contained an inextricable knot—he labeled this predicament a “navel.” The *Belly-Button Biodiversity Project* studies the navel as the gateway for a microbial ecosystem: for years the bellybuttons of hundreds of participants have been cotton-swabbed so the bacteria found there can be analyzed. Surprisingly, many specimens have revealed microorganisms found only in marine environments or in foreign soils. The navel can arouse pleasurable unpredictability. Madonna, whose navel is pierced with a gold ring from which dangles a diamond horseshoe charm, exclaimed: “When I stick my finger in my belly button, I feel a nerve in the center

of my body shoot up my spine.”

Whether exposed and erotic or concealed and mysterious, navels generate attention. Of course, obsessive preoccupation with the navel can be classified negatively as fetishistic, as a personality disorder known as omphaloskepsis, which is narcissistic navel-gazing. The navel has been an element within many photographic images. Critic A. O. Scott observed that photographers such as Richard Avedon extended their omphalic inquisitiveness to making portraits that featured bellybuttons, from one of Truman Capote's navel peeping through a dark shirt, “a winking eye in an expanse of pale flesh,” to the exposed midribs of the Fugs, a 1960s band, to truck-stop waitresses, rodeo cowboys, and drifters.

In Minor White's 1948 nude photograph of William Smith, the focal point of the portrait is its distinctive navel, which is contoured like a tortellini. Smith's navel seems like a relief carved in stone upon the landscape of a body. The photograph resonates with the specificity of other 20th-century homoerotic



Above: Richard Avedon, Truman Capote, 1960s. © Random House, 1999. *Right:* Minor White, Tom Murphy, San Francisco, California, 1948, *The Minor White Archive, Princeton University Art Museum, bequest of Minor White.* © Trustees of Princeton University.

Interpersonal
Marketing

Online
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reach the
gay & lesbian community

leverage the
power of social relationships

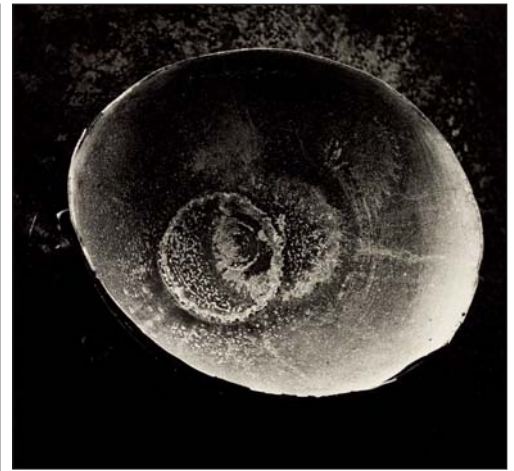
artworks. The portrait is a prototype that anticipates the sexual-outlaw erotic imagery of later gay photographers such as Peter Hujar and Robert Mapplethorpe.

Minor White (1908-1976) was renowned as one of the masters of American photography, having worked with Bernice Abbott, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston. Like them, White was determined to legitimize photography as an art form. He cofounded *Aperture* magazine in 1952, which was one of the most influential forums for contemporary art photography, and he served as its editor for 23 years. He was a curator at George Eastman House, the world's oldest photography museum; taught at the California School of Fine Arts and both the Massachusetts and Rochester Institutes of Technology; and was a photographer for the federal New Deal agency known as the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

White encountered and resisted heterosexist institutional censorship and exclusion throughout his entire career, beginning in 1947 with *Amputations*, his first sequence of photographs, which was scheduled for exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. The photographic sequences had nude photographs of Tom Murphy and some shirtless images of U.S. Army buddies with whom he served, and it incorporated poetry alongside the images in a way similar to photographer Duane Michals, who also documented homosexual identities with captions. The exhibition was canceled on the pretext that the poetry wasn't sufficiently patriotic.

During the 1970s, the feminist art movement came into existence in reaction to similar widespread gallery and institutional ostracism, and LGBT artists are indebted to them. Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* was labeled obscene by the U.S. Congress, which threatened to withdraw public funding from all institutions that showed it, and the work was banished into storage for nearly thirty years. The exclusion of gay and lesbian artwork is persistent throughout this period, from the attempts to censor Robert Mapplethorpe from the 1980s through the 1990s into the 21st century with the removal of David Wojnarowicz' "A Fire in My Belly" video from the groundbreaking exhibit *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery in late 2010. In 2015, the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art mounted *Irreverent: A Celebration of Censorship*, an exhibition that documented decades of intentional exclusion, acts of violence, and vandalism against gay-inflected artwork.

When Paul Martineau curated *Minor White: Manifestations of the Spirit* at the J. Paul Getty Museum and edited its accompanying catalog, he included a series of 32 gelatin-silver prints from a maquette titled "The Temptation of St. Anthony as Mir-



Left: Minor White, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, 1957. Above: Minor White, Rochester, New York, 1963. Both courtesy of the Minor White Archive, Princeton Univ. Art Museum. © Trustees of Princeton University.

rors." Martineau called it a "visual love poem." The images were portraits of Tom Murphy. Some have him clothed in various environments, situated on coastal rock formations, rooted in woodland vegetation. Some are full-frontal nudes referenced against driftwood, roses, or leaves, others quasi-anatomical studies of body parts—hands, feet, buttocks, and of course, bellybuttons. The sequence was never before shown or published in its entirety, as White made only two copies of the album, one for Murphy and one for himself. His copy is housed at the Minor White Archives at the Princeton University Art Museum.

In 1989, thirteen years after Minor White died, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) held a retrospective titled *Minor White: The Eye That Shapes*. Ingrid Sischy wrote in *The New Yorker* that White had two bodies of work: one private and hidden from public view, the other intended for public exhibition. And yet, his same-sex sexual orientation is watermarked into nearly all of his images. In a *New York Times* review, Andy Grundberg acknowledged White's "lifelong interest in the male subject, and in homoerotic imagery in particular," observing a 1975 portrait of a young man with shoulder-length hair at the exhibition. No less an authority than Peter Bunnell, author of the exhibition monograph, MoMA's former photography curator, and the person responsible for White's archive at Princeton University, opined that "White's sexuality underlies the whole of the autobiographical statement contained in his work." In a 2008 essay, "Cruising and Transcendence in the Photographs of Minor White," Kevin Moore asserted that White "queered" documentary photography by staging "the breakdown of a heroic modernist tradition." White accomplished this by making images of men posing in the nude, whether contemplative or directly gazing into the lens, or as a flâneur emerging from the shadows of a city street or peering out from a half-hidden doorway in a provocative stance.

Rather than retreating into abstraction, White recontextualized the ideals of so-called "straight" or "pure" photography, which emphasizes the ability of photography to capture the world in sharp focus, as distinct from Pictorialism, which is a painterly rendering using soft focus, dreamy effects, and the manipulation of surfaces. He achieved this through an encryption of sexual orientation into most of his photographs. Of photo-

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

graphing a bowl that shattered on a kitchen floor he wrote: “The splinter of china was more loving than the bowl had been, as if in this form all the love of the craftsman had crystalized ... turned into the symbol of the female principle, and then into the thumb print of a goddess. ... I need only enough technique to remember to use my camera without bungling when I am transfixed by light.” The symbolism of the bowl or omphalos is essential to White’s personal iconography. In his photograph of William Smith, with whom he had a love relationship for more than three decades, Smith’s slender hands gracefully offer a bowl that contains only light, the fundamental element that determines what is recorded on film. (See *Rochester, New York* at left.)

Ansel Adams noted in *An Autobiography* (1985) that White was more interested than he was in the subjective meaning(s) of photographs: “It was always the inner message of the photograph that most concerned him; he always wanted to know the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of the artist to the subject and his image.” As a proponent of “equivalence”—a theory of photography in which colors, shapes, and lines reflect the artist’s inner experience or emotive state—White felt that photographs were retained in consciousness, left behind as if memorized, as mental afterimages even when out of sight.

White also came to be known for his mystical approach to photography, and he incorporated the principles of Zen into his contemplative photographs and teaching workshops. In *The Zen of Creativity* (2004), John Daido Looi described an experience

**Minor White:
Manifestations of the Spirit**

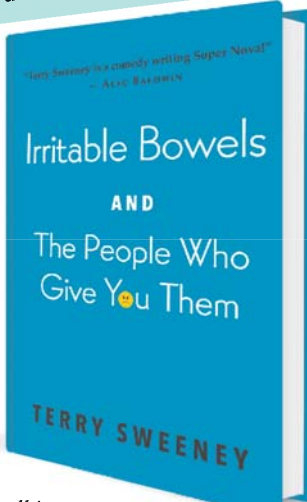
by Paul Martineau
Getty Publications
200 pages, \$39.95

as a student in one of White’s workshops. During an exercise, White enigmatically instructed his students to “photograph who you really are. Go deeply into the core of your being and photograph your essence.” White himself did just that—in a photograph of a metal ornament that belongs to a

1959 sequence—after spending several months intensively meditating on the meaning of a koan, a philosophical paradox in the form of a question used in Zen Buddhism. White found the answer to the koan, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” in the form of this metal ornament. “After several months of intensive work on this koan, I saw rather than heard any sound.” And he photographed it (see image at left), after reaching the center point, recalling an afterimage, rendering its representation, and documenting his consciousness of the object. The ornament in which he could see sound was a metaphoric representation of Tom Murphy’s navel.

It is an extraordinary arc of history to see *Aperture* devote an entire issue, titled “Queer,” to LGBT photography. It’s a magazine that Minor White founded more than six decades ago at a time when gay people were subjected to intense criminalization, incarceration, institutionalization, and marginalization. Some have claimed that White was closeted and that he ascended into abstraction to avoid homophobia, as if the closet door could be slammed shut once it had been opened. The body of his work reflects something quite different—images that evoke homoerotic possibilities and that counter patriarchal representations of masculinity and male beauty.

From the first openly gay actor on American Television




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Humorous essays
BY TERRY SWEENEY

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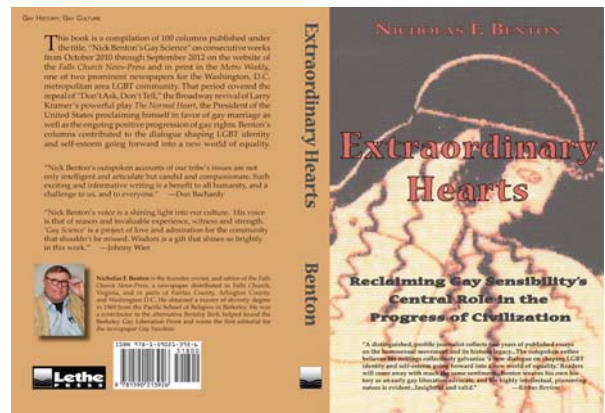
“I was in stitches laughing out loud page after page.”
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Toward a New Gay Cultural Paradigm

‘A vital moral book about who we are and who we should be. I admire it and its author enormously!’ -- Larry Kramer



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The Stained Glass Closet

DOMINIC JANES' book about Victorian Englishmen attracted to their own sex—"sodomites" was the term at the time—in the Anglo-Catholic branch of the Anglican Church is not about the usual suspects. We do have Oscar Wilde and Cardinal Newman (founder of the Oxford Movement that began it all), but there are also chapters on people you may have never heard of: William Bennett, a provincial priest who had a Stations of the Cross built outside his church in Somerset; Father Ignatius, who founded monasteries based on the Benedictines; Frederick Rolfe (aka Baron Corvo), the author of *Hadrian the Seventh* (1904), the famous novel about an alternative pope. There are also the authors of children's books based on the story of David and

Derek Jarman



ANDREW HOLLERAN

**Visions of Queer Martyrdom
from John Henry Newman
to Derek Jarman**
by Dominic Janes
U. of Chicago Press. 257 pages, \$50.

Jonathan; and, finally, the gay film maker Derek Jarman, who made a movie about Saint Sebastian and was himself canonized by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence on a beach in Dungeness not long before he died of AIDS.

Visions of Queer Martyrdom is essentially the story of the clash between the "muscular Christianity" of the Protestant Church of England and the Anglo-Catho-

lics who, while remaining in the Anglican fold, formed a counterculture of their own by turning to Catholic ritual, sacraments, and imagery. Newman ultimately converted to Roman Catholicism, as did another figure who is curiously absent from this book, though he would seem to epitomize its subject, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, who suppressed not only his sexuality but his literary gifts in order to be a Jesuit priest. Flirtation with, much less conversion to, Catholicism was a radical act in Protestant Britain. When Hopkins told his parents what he planned to do, it was like a death in the family; but when they asked Dr. Pusey, a leading light of the Oxford Movement, to counsel him, Pusey wrote back that it would do no good—when "perverts" were determined to go over to Rome, a meeting with him was simply an opportunity for them to say Pusey had failed. Here, of course, "pervert" means someone who wished to become a Roman Catholic.

It was perverse in the eyes of English Protestants to convert to Roman Catholicism, or even to introduce into the Church of England a sensibility and ritualism associated with the Middle Ages. But something was obviously going on in the culture at large; the Pre-Raphaelites were also returning to medieval subject matter. Reading Janes, we are shown the connections between Anglo-Catholicism and the pre-Raphaelites, including the homosexual artist Simeon Solomon, between Simeon Solomon and Oscar Wilde, Oscar Wilde and Father Bennett, Father Bennett and Father Ignatius, Father Ignatius and the Victorian emphasis on the innocence of children, the innocence of children and the suspicion the English media had that there was something rotten going on in the monasteries. There is a lot of evidence for Janes to examine, not only sermons and literature, sculpture and painting, but even the poofy preachers on ice skates who illustrated the Christmas cards that began to be circulated among the upper classes in Victorian times, not to mention the cartoons in *Punch* that relentlessly made fun of what was seen as the effeminacy, aestheticism, and mumbo-jumbo of the Anglo-Catholics. The "muscular Christianity" of Charles Kingsley—whose attacks on Cardinal Newman brought the latter to tears—saw the Oxford Movement as nothing less than a threat to British manhood.

But for men attracted to their own sex, becoming an Anglo-Catholic had several advantages, as Janes points out. In identifying themselves with Christ, the "original Catholic martyr,"

they could express their own sense of suffering and ostracism. They could also appreciate Jesus as an aesthetic object. Here, for instance, is how Hopkins described Christ in a sermon: “moderately tall, well built, and tender in frame, his features straight and beautiful, his hair inclining to auburn, parted in the midst, curling and clustering about the ears and neck as the leaves of a filbert, so to speak, upon the nut.” And here is what a chaplain named Gerald Moultrie wanted you to imagine as you meditated on Jesus: “Lo, thy Beloved offers himself in his nakedness to thy gaze. With fixed feet he stands. He claims thy approach. He desires thy free access. He opens wide the arms of his all-embracing love. He shows his open wounds. His head he bends to thy kiss... Touch the Cross with love. Embrace it with the ardor of devotion. Clasp it and kiss it in the tenderness of thy sorrow.”

Roman Catholic ritual in England at the time was actually much plainer and poorer, Janes writes, than the ceremonies of the Anglo-Catholics (which leads one to wonder: Is “smells and bells” still the gay slang for High Church pageantry? And is there still a church in Manhattan called Smoky Mary’s? And does anyone still tell the joke about the naïve parishioner who, seeing the priest swinging the censor in a procession, runs up to him and says, “Excuse me, but your purse is on fire”?). Anglo-Catholics were extremely good at ritual. They were also able to find comfort in the company of men like themselves—though it’s not clear from reading Janes how much of the latter was expressed physically. Protestants, who considered marriage a way for their clergy to satisfy their sexual needs, found celibacy suspect. But by observing the rule of celibacy, Anglo-Catholics escaped the Victorian pressure to marry. Of course, Janes repeats, they paid a price for this: no sex.

How strictly the ethic of restraint was followed is not investigated here, besides references to a comely young monk taken under the wing of the famously androgynous Father Ignatius. Whether it was as flamboyant as the opening scene of Ronald Firbank’s *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926), in which the eponymous prelate dies of a heart attack while chasing a choirboy around the cathedral, is not gone into. These days everything’s changed: priests and monks are virtually assumed to be gay unless proven otherwise. Gene Robinson, the retired gay bishop of New Hampshire whose election nearly caused a schism in the Anglican Church (between European and African bishops) is quoted here as saying that the Church would be shut down if gay people were no longer allowed to staff it. And Ireland just voted to legalize gay marriage after a series of sex scandals seems to have broken the hold the Catholic Church had on that country.

In this book, Janes has a rich, rich subject, a gold mine, really—especially for anyone who’s read Firbank, or Hopkins, or *Brideshead Revisited*—though the cool, dry quality of the writing keeps it from being the absorbing narrative one might wish for. Words like “constitutive,” “reinscribe,” and “problematize”—and phrases like “systems of meaning,” “hegemonic cultural practice,” and “subversive subject position”—act as a sort of formaldehyde. How can Ann Cvetkovich’s observation, quoted here, that “the manipulation of images becomes a form of ownership facilitating the process by which they are collected and installed within personal systems of meaning” do anything but crush the prosaic fact that Frederick Rolfe (aka Baron

Corvo) had a private altar in his home composed of the sort of pictures and ephemera with which many of us made collages, or scrapbooks, or even, yes, private altars, when we were growing up? A private altar is a private altar; does it have to be a system of meaning? The language of queer theory is so deadly that one really has to wonder if, in using it, and thereby restricting their audience, not to mention desiccating their own material, professors are not performing a martyrdom of their own.

That said, the details of this story are delicious: the cartoons in *Punch*, the children’s literature, the Christmas cards, the private altars, the photographs of tonsured monks. It’s worth the occasional patches of jargon to learn that Cardinal Newman was buried with a close friend—though this was not necessarily evidence of homosexuality; there was a tradition of English clerics being buried side by side. Or that “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” was written eight years after the loss of Thomas Grey’s friend and probable lover, Richard West. Or that the idea of the “Real Presence” (that the body of Christ is being consumed at Communion) so appalled Anglican parishioners that Father Bennett was brought to trial by one of his parishioners for espousing it.

In the end, however, the stained glass closet was busted open by Oscar Wilde, a Protestant who’d always been fascinated by the Catholic Church but saw it as Protestants did, as a sort of “femme fatale”: gothic, sensual, masochistic. Wilde was more Hellenistic than Christian, but he became a real martyr after being sent to prison—though *De Profundis*, the long letter he wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas after his release, is not, Janes argues, the Christian weeper critics take it for, but rather the construction of a new homosexual identity using Christian tropes. And after Wilde came yet another Protestant to shatter further the Anglo-Catholic hideaway: Edward Carpenter, the gay activist who despised the artificiality and snobbery of the English elite, took a working-class man as his lover and lived happily ever after in a cottage in the country. And then, many decades later, the final break: gay liberation, whose proponents disdained the Anglo-Catholics as a bunch of closeted fairies.

Janes does not share this disdain. In his view the stained glass closet was not antithetical to gay liberation but a forerunner of it—if only because it was members of the Anglican Church who lobbied for the decriminalization of homosexuality during the deliberations that led to the Wolfenden Report (in part because they wanted to protect their own priests from blackmail). As for the present day: “In my opinion,” Janes writes, “the Churches and the gay community have a great deal to offer each other in terms of the mingling of ethical and æs-



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thetic stances.” But just what these stances are is not made clear. Like so many similar observations in the book, they remain frustratingly abstract. Just how did gay liberation grow out of the church closet, unless it was in reaction against it? As for the current struggle between Christian congregations and openly gay clergy, Janes writes: “It seems ironic ... that it is at this very time that strong elements in the Church of England, alongside others in the Church of Rome and in many other Christian denominations, have stood against the liberalization of rules concerning gay clergy. By clinging on to the old model of private queer martyrdom in the closet, these churches are preventing their priests from engaging with a changed society.”

Do gay men still see themselves as martyrs? It’s quite possible—even with political success and assimilation. What we read in Hopkins’ last great poems, the so-called Terrible Sonnets—terrible because of his despair and sense of abandonment—are surely emotions that people still feel today. But in a

secular age, identification with Christ seems less of an option. Prompted to name a gay martyr now, one’s first thought, at least in the U.S., would probably be Matthew Shepard, or the AIDS dead, or the countless people fag-bashed on the street who were not Matthew Shepard. Abroad, it would be the gay men executed in Iran, the demonstrators beaten by thugs at gay marches in Moscow, the men jailed and murdered in Uganda and other African countries. But how many gay people see themselves, in the privacy of their own hearts, as ostracized and suffering like Christ, one cannot say. Is the gay Anglican group Dignity all that’s left of the Anglo-Catholics? Bishop Robinson writes a column for *The Daily Beast* and rode past me in a convertible in the Gay Pride Parade in Washington this summer. The Catholic Church allegedly screens applicants to the religious life to eliminate homosexuals and is still paying out to the victims of abuse. Yet the current pope seems to be welcoming in a way that his predecessor was not. The story goes on. 

Tóibín’s Connection to Bishop: Silence

IT COMES AS SOMETHING of a surprise to find Colm Tóibín writing a book about Elizabeth Bishop. She died in 1979, and the Irish writer (born in 1955) never met her. His bailiwick is fiction, with three novels nominated for the Man Booker Prize, while Bishop was a celebrated American poet. More fundamentally, their photos *look* so different: the novelist’s ruddy face, with thick dark eyebrows, furrowed jowls, and disheveled hair, versus the fair poet’s precision-combed locks, thin lips, and serene gaze—almost, but not quite, demure.

On Elizabeth Bishop describes how Tóibín was influenced early on by Bishop, not only by her assiduous attention to detail but also by what she left unsaid, by the power of her empty spaces. Conversational in tone, this book is the fifth in Princeton University’s lively series, “Writers on Writing.” But what genre of work is it? It’s not a biography, really, and the structure is only vaguely chronological. Nor is it literary criticism: there are few analytical insights, and little theory. Tóibín briefly tackles rhyme schemes and meter, but he mostly ignores mechanics in favor of imaginative associations: departure as a motif, the notion of return, the roughness of experience. The thirteen essays touch on subjects such as Bishop’s use of memory and the intricacy of her noticing, painting a layered picture of the poet’s work.

Tóibín bought Bishop’s *Selected Poems* as a teenager and carried the slim volume with him when he left Ireland for a stay in Barcelona, which became the basis of his first novel, *The South*. Bishop’s early childhood was spent in Great Village, Nova Scotia, with weather similar to that of Tóibín’s County Wexford. Fog, tides, and cold characterize both writers’ accounts of home. She later lived in South America, where Tóibín

Rosemary Booth is a writer and photographer living in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

ROSEMARY BOOTH

On Elizabeth Bishop
by Colm Tóibín
Princeton University Press
224 pages, \$19.95

has also spent time, and in New York City, where he now teaches for half the year.

Poet Charles Simic has admired the “naturalness” of Bishop’s tone, which Tóibín links to her use of precise details. He offers as illustration “The Moose,” a poem finished in 1970 that recounts an overnight bus trip from Nova Scotia to Boston in 1946. The journey is long and tiring,

and riders lapse into idle talk, or dreams. Suddenly, with no warning, an enormous moose appears in the road, blocking the bus and halting people’s chatter. Driver and passengers stare at the intruder, captivated. Given the animal’s preposterous bulk and sheer impact, a poet might be tempted to turn the animal into a symbol, but Bishop’s moose does not get transformed. Instead, she remains incontestably alive and ambles off into the woods. Bishop preferred signals to symbols, observes Tóibín, whose own fiction holds explicitly rendered scenes—of deathbed vigils, sexual encounters, and seaside wanderings—that are similarly provocative but resistant to interpretation.

Beyond her meticulous use of imagery, Bishop is praised for her appreciation of individual contingency, her willingness to grant uniqueness to every creature, whether human or beast. She discovered this singularity early, he says, citing “In the Waiting Room,” a poem in which Bishop tells how as a child of seven she came to realize her own distinctness, and by extension her isolation.

But Tóibín has been drawn to Bishop, a lesbian, on a personal as well as technical level. In two intriguing essays, “The Art of Losing” and “Grief and Reason,” he tells of reading “with considerable intensity” her work and that of three other gay writers—novelists Thomas Mann and James Baldwin, and poet Thom Gunn—while still in his teens. More recently, he published *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodóvar*, “to recover these writers, relate to them, almost get in touch

with them as a gay man myself,” Tóibín says.

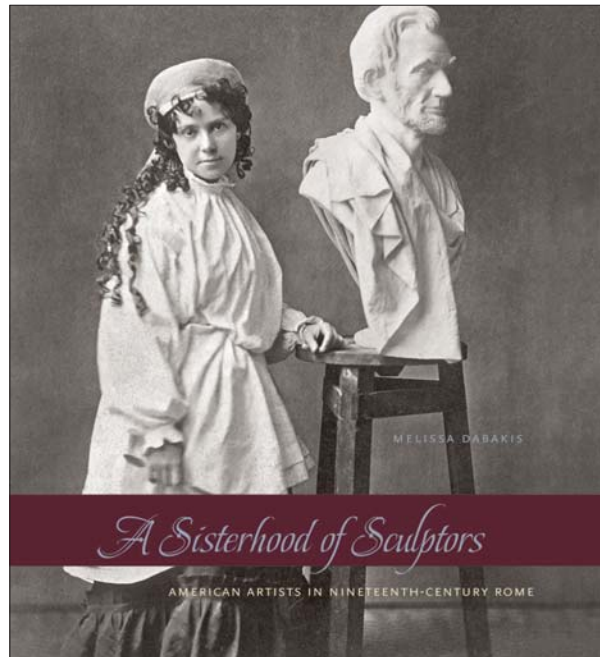
Reflecting now on what drew him especially to Bishop, Mann, Baldwin, and Gunn, Tóibín says that “homosexuality was only part of the story. The other part of the story was that each ... had lost a parent in childhood or early adulthood.” Having suffered the death of his own father at the age of ten, he was drawn to these writers because they had endured the same devastation. Tóibín finds Bishop and Gunn in particular to be writers who “masked their grief with reason,” evolving a “tone of impersonality ... of an immense and powerful withholding” as part of their poetic voice. Both kept their distance from readers by avoiding confession or easy disclosure. Bishop was “not concerned to resolve anything,” he says with approval, and her late poems especially “use exact detail to contain emotion, and suggest more, and then leave the reader unsure, unsettled.”

Tóibín recognizes this restraint as his own strategy. In a 2012 interview with *The Guardian*, he has told how, as an eight-year-old, he developed a stammer immediately after his father, a teacher, returned home from brain surgery at a Dublin hospital. As his father’s condition deteriorated, any exchange became awkward, and, after his death two years later, “his name was hardly ever mentioned again. It was too much that he had died, too hard,” Tóibín says, adding that as a writer he continues to have a strong sense of “things known and not said.”

He connects with Bishop in terms of this silence. Having lost her father as an infant, she became in effect an orphan when her mother was institutionalized with mental illness four years later. Tóibín says that Bishop was struck dumb in terms of writing about these catastrophes, publishing only one story (“In the Village”) about her mother’s death and nothing about the suicide of her beloved partner, Lota de Macedo Soares. But if Bishop could not confront these losses directly, she nevertheless resolved to “tell the truth” in her poetry. She did so by observing limits and using caution, Tóibín says. She also openly pointed out excess and errors in poems that her good friend Robert Lowell sent for comment, but added compliments. For example, she told Lowell “how wonderful it was when he named his posh ancestors in the poems of *Life Studies*,” her diplomacy helping to sustain their “rather fierce and oddly loving life-long competition.”

Tóibín’s take on Bishop’s friendship with Lowell makes sense, but he seems hesitant to parse her relationships with women and to hazard a guess about how those connections affected her writing. Bishop’s letters confirm that she was often lonely. Tóibín believes her isolation was devastating, which leaves unexplained how Bishop managed to form deep romantic bonds—for example, with Lota for more than fifteen years in Brazil; earlier, with Marjorie Stevens in Key West; and for her last years with Alice Methfessel in Boston. If she was at times desolate, it seems the poet could also find companionship, and love.

On *Elizabeth Bishop* conveys Tóibín’s admiration for Bishop the person and his esteem for her poems. In the last essay, “North Atlantic Light,” he links Ireland with Nova Scotia, two places where “light is scarce, the spirit is wary and much is unresolved,” going so far as to pair Bishop with that effusive expatriate, James Joyce. Both writers valued a “tone of scarcity,” he says, clearly and without further ado concluding these fresh and nimble takes on his extraordinary subject. 🌈



A Sisterhood of Sculptors American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome

Melissa Dabakis

“In this lavishly illustrated, well-researched, and highly readable book, Dabakis builds on and synthesizes recent scholarship that has treated these artists . . . [and fleshes out] the politically charged atmosphere of Italy in the 19th century, when it was in the midst of a revolution. Additionally she builds a vital context for how the work of these artists also served as pointed and particular responses to issues at home, such as the Civil War, abolitionism, Reconstruction, and suffrage. As Dabakis elucidates, their work and their careers served as inspiration and models for a younger generation of women artists at a time when ‘genius’ was a quality reserved primarily for men.”

—K. P. Buick, *Choice*

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton penned the Declaration of Sentiments for the first women’s rights convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, she unleashed a powerful force in American society. In *A Sisterhood of Sculptors*, Melissa Dabakis outlines the conditions under which a group of American women artists adopted this egalitarian view of society and negotiated the gendered terrain of artistic production at home and abroad.

Between 1850 and 1876, a community of talented women sought creative refuge in Rome and developed successful professional careers as sculptors. Some of these women have become well known in art-historical circles: Harriet Hosmer, Edmonia Lewis, Anne Whitney, and Vinnie Ream. The reputations of others have remained, until now, buried in the historical record. At midcentury, they were among the first women artists to attain professional stature in the American art world while achieving international fame in Rome, London, and other cosmopolitan European cities. In their invention of modern womanhood, they served as models for a younger generation of women who adopted artistic careers in unprecedented numbers in the years following the Civil War.

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Homo Politicus

GAY, JEWISH, and left-handed, Barney Frank likes to say that he's a natural advocate for minorities. At the same time, had he not been gay, or so he insinuates here, he might have risen even higher in national politics as a voice of economic equality, universal health coverage, fair housing, and social reform. Born in New Jersey in 1940 to a middle-class family, his lifelong association with Massachusetts came by way of Harvard. After college, he began a doctoral program in government there, but left in 1968 to run the office of newly elected Boston mayor Kevin White. His "very short attention span," which disposed him poorly for a life of scholarship, proved advantageous in the hurly-burly of political life. He returned to Harvard in the mid-'70s to take a law degree.

Stonewall was rippling in the background at this time. Deeply closeted, Frank met activists in Boston, including Rep. Elaine Noble, the first openly gay person to be elected to a state legislature in the U.S. (Ironically, after redistricting, Frank won Noble's seat in the statehouse in 1974.) Still, he went out of his way to dispel suspicions of being gay. In a discussion pertaining to a liquor license for a Boston gay bar, he was asked under oath whether he was gay. He denied it, fearing that "taking the Fifth" would give him away. "Had my resistance to honesty been based wholly on fear of the electoral consequences, I would have had more courage," he writes. "Most important, though, I simply was not ready to expose my previous masquerade and to share the deep secret I had kept for twenty years."

He made up for this personal compromise by showing political courage in the Massachusetts House, where he sponsored pro-GLBT legislation at a time when some closeted Democrats opposed gay rights legislation to avoid being implicated. It was the 1980 election, when Reagan was first elected president, that brought Frank to the U.S. Congress in Washington. Still closeted to the public, he was now open in the capital's GLBT circles. He explored Washington's gay social scene and embarked on his first relationship. Leaders of the gay and lesbian movement considered him their undercover ally in government.

This equilibrium was threatened in 1986 by a book identifying Frank as gay. The book didn't get much attention, and the mainstream press—then as now—studiously avoided outing public figures against their will. But increasingly Frank was sharing with his colleagues his intention to come out. His fellow Democrats were supportive if apprehensive: good for him, but why should he needlessly compromise his political standing? "I'm sorry to hear it," Speaker Tip O'Neill told him. "I thought you might become the first Jewish speaker."

In 1987 he finally gave *The Boston Globe* the go-ahead to broach the question in an interview. His fears proved unfounded.

YOAV SIVAN

**Frank:
A Life in Politics from the Great
Society to Same-Sex Marriage**

by Barney Frank
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
400 pages, \$28.

Many politicians, including two Republican senators, praised his courage, while others were indifferent. Michael Dukakis, the Democratic governor of Massachusetts, annoyed Frank by keeping silent. (Not wasting time on his enemies, Frank takes offense mainly from his allies.) A poll showed his popularity in his district actually inched up a bit. "Until then," he writes, "I hadn't realized the full effect on my personality of living in the closet. Simply put, I was now nicer." This

from a man known for his impatience, even rudeness, in his dealings with staff and colleagues. And the payoff was also personal: he entered into an eleven-year relationship with Herb Moses. He is now married to Jim Ready, whom he met at a political event.

In 1989 Frank was implicated in a scandal involving Steven Gobie, a prostitute who was reportedly entertaining clients in Frank's Washington apartment. Frank was afraid this would end his career, but a heartfelt speech on the House floor helped him get by with a Congressional reprimand. This is also the narrative's



Yoav Sivan is an Israeli journalist and a regular GLR contributor.

lowest point. If this could have been an opportunity for Frank to disclose what really happened, we are instead reminded of the quick-thinking politician who says he takes full responsibility but doesn't say for what.

Once he did come out, around midway through the book, he was able to turn his sights more single-mindedly to legislative matters. Looking back on some high points, he offers an insider's take on the 1993 enactment of "Don't ask, don't tell," the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996, and the Clinton impeachment. As chairman of the Congress Finance Services Committee, Frank helped save the U.S. banking system during

the financial crisis of 2008-09, and the monumental Dodd-Frank Act of 2010 bears his name.

What comes through unmistakably is Frank's political pragmatism, formed as a reaction to the leftist utopians he first encountered at Harvard. He now criticizes GLBT leaders' penchant for taking a short-term outlook. As for his personal life, it remains for the most part private. A dance with a boyfriend in a White House reception is a public statement, not a moment of intimacy. While Frank says that no one is too busy or virtuous not to enjoy a private life, we must conclude that the world of politics is essentially where he has lived his life.



The Company He Kept Company

THERE'S an oft-repeated quotation by Truman Capote, who learned of Denham Fouts' 1933 meeting with Adolph Hitler through his affiliation with the brother of World War I flying ace Manfred "the Red Baron" von Richtofen. Capote quipped that "had Denham Fouts yielded to Hitler's advances there would have been no World War Two."

"Denny Fouts" is a name that circulates in the margins of gay history. Fouts was famous less for his own accomplishments than for those of the people who befriended him, took up with him, petted and paid his way. Testimony to his legendary beauty is offered in at least one photograph by George Platt Lynes, though the close-up portrait of a youth with his eyes closed and with lush eyelashes tells us little about his character. The tale of Fouts' delicate death at age 34, prone on the floor of a bathroom in Rome, sometimes ascribed to a drug overdose, has become a lurid coda to his glamorous yet dissolute life. Fouts had an undiagnosed congenital heart malformation.

The rationale for a biography of Fouts is contained in the book's subtitle, which serves as a defense and a caveat, alerting us that Fouts may be less interesting than the people around him. We might even be forgiven for concluding from this biography, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, that there isn't much there there. It's not that there isn't sufficient drama or adventure in the life of this boy from Jacksonville, Florida, born in 1914, but that evidence from Denny's own hand—letters, diaries, journals, etc.—is relatively thin. Author Arthur Vanderbilt presents his subject not as someone who speaks for himself but as an appendage to others, usually men of wealth and position and/or noteworthy talent. Vanderbilt spends page after page laying out their background stories so that we understand why each one fell for this Southern belle who was by most accounts witty and charming but also deeply insecure. This is Vanderbilt's own reading of Fouts, who could never understand why he was so attractive to so many, but who used his looks to secure the life of the "best-kept boy" around.

A friend who worked in a bookstore introduced young Fouts

ALLEN ELLENZWEIG

**The Best-Kept Boy in the World:
The Short, Scandalous Life of
Denny Fouts, Muse to Truman
Capote, Gore Vidal, and
Christopher Isherwood**

by Arthur Vanderbilt

Magnus Books. 190 pages, \$19.99

to novelist Glenway Wescott, a Midwesterner whose own European expatriation in the 1920s gave him the experience and outward veneer of an *homme du monde*. Fouts, realizing he didn't want to be a street whore, yet sensing he had something of value to put on the market, asked Wescott's advice about how to become a "kept" boy. "To begin with," Wescott intoned, "you must never use that word—'kept.' Think of something you want to do that takes money to learn. Then ask someone for help and guidance. You'll

get much more money that way than by coming at it straight on."

So began Fouts' worldwide peregrinations in the company of the well-heeled or the simply raffish: a German baron swooned over him from New York to Berlin; a Greek shipping tycoon snagged him while hitchhiking to Venice and took him on his yacht, from which Fouts, taking up with a sailor onboard, jumped ship with stolen money so the two could whoop it up on Capri. Then there was Evan Morgan, the last Lord Tredegar, walking through a hotel lobby with his wife, trailed by a "retinue of retainers," who spotted Denny just as he was about to be arrested for skipping out on his bill. Announced Lord Tredegar to the guardians of the law: "Unhand that handsome youth, he is mine." He began his ascent in New York City in the early 1930s, where he turned heads every time he entered Jimmie Daniels' Harlem nightclub, his favored hangout—perhaps because, as a Southerner, he was breaking the color line and defying family traditions. It soon became apparent to Denny that "wherever he went ... he commanded every room he entered."

Lord and Lady Tredegar traveled the world with Fouts in tow; in China, Denny, visiting the local opium dens, picked up the habit that would dog him the rest of his life. Back in Tredegar Park—think Downton Abbey for madcap bohemians—Denny joined in manifold festivities among a cast of pampered eccentrics and artist celebrities, including H. G. Wells, Lord Alfred Douglas, George Bernard Shaw, and Lady Nancy Cunard. Here, according to Vanderbilt, drink and drugs fueled a continuing roundelay of circus-like weekend gatherings. At one, Prince Paul of Greece, exiled in London since the abolition of the Greek monarchy in 1924, took a shine to Fouts and swept him up for a long Mediterranean cruise—perhaps Denny's greatest catch and

Allen Ellenzweig is the author of The Homoerotic Photograph and a frequent contributor to this magazine.

one of which he would boast for years to come.

His relatively fleeting alliance to the Prince may have proved Denny a courtesan worthy of the highest echelons of European royalty, but it was his long relationship with Peter Watson, son of Sir George Watson, the man who made his fortune with the invention of margarine, that finally established Denny's reputation, for better or worse. When Sir George died, his son Peter, Eton and Oxford educated, with a passion for modern art, was able to live off his inheritance like an English gentleman and pursue the latest in School of Paris paintings.

Peter Watson was well connected to the worlds of art and literature. Society photographer Cecil Beaton, although himself madly in love with Watson (who never reciprocated, though he gave friendship), said that Watson was "an independent, courageous person." On Watson's first meeting with Denny at a nightclub, Watson followed the young beauty back to his hotel, where Denny "gave himself cocaine injections." Of this fateful meeting, Vanderbilt writes: "And there, in Denny's hotel room, Peter stayed. ... [He] had to possess this god-like creature ... as he had to possess the museum quality paintings of de Chirico, Gris, Klee, Miro, and Picasso he had been collecting. Denny ... sensed he had found himself someone who might be a worthy acolyte. ... Peter was hooked." Thus began a peripatetic episode of *l'amour fou* in London and Paris, a relationship we might today call one of co-dependency, complete with arguments, break-ups, and drug rehabs. A friend characterized Denny as "the great, destructive love" of Peter's life. Despite himself, Peter recognized that he and Denny were from different worlds: "We never shared any intellectual interests whatsoever and he always resented that side of me."

As war approached, Peter sent Denny to America, where he eventually landed in California and was taken in by British expatriate Christopher Isherwood, then writing for the Hollywood film industry. Denny proceeded to join Isherwood in his study of Vedanta, a religion related to Hinduism. The two supported each other through a period of stable daily habits and celibacy, which was natural to neither. Like Isherwood, Denny was a conscientious objector during the war, which led to his working at a logging camp, where he entertained the workmen with tales of



Denny Fouts. Cover photo for the book under review.

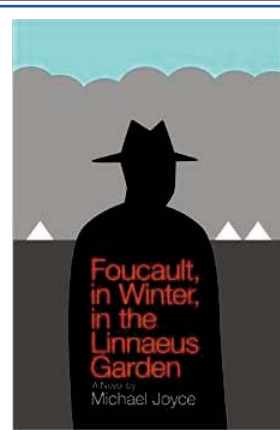
his European adventures. Denny also began taking correspondence courses to get his high school diploma in preparation for a "program of higher education to become a psychiatrist." Vanderbilt never inquires into the reasonableness of such a course of action. In any case, Denny's own studies didn't stick, but Isherwood would turn him into a character in his novel *Down There on a Visit*. Vanderbilt produces Isherwood's original diary entries about Denny followed by the corre-

sponding fictional passages, which often follow almost word-for-word.

When Denny returned to Paris after the War, Peter Watson's elegant apartment on the rue du Bac was a shambles. But Denny soon took up his old habits, which now included heroin and teenage boys. (Denny once boasted of having fucked his pretty younger brother when both were adolescents.) Peter fled for New York, leaving Denny in the apartment with his latest *mignon*. In this immediate postwar period, Denny became a vampiric figure holed up in his bedroom, strung out on drugs but able to receive guests, eventually making it out into the waning Paris sunshine. Gore Vidal, a freshly minted novelist, introduced himself to Christopher Isherwood at Paris's famed café Les Deux Magots and got himself invited to meet Fouts the next evening. Vidal would later claim that Denny's "legendary beauty was not visible to me." This didn't stop him from also morphing Denny into a fictional character in his novel *The Judgment of Paris?* (1952) as well as in a short story titled "Pages from an Abandoned Journal."

Glimpsing the photo of the young Truman Capote that graced *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Fouts is reported to have sent Capote a blank check with the simple message: "Come." When they finally met, the two Southerners "hit it off instantly." Capote thought Denny "the single most charming-looking person I've ever met." Soon enough, Capote persuaded Denny to go to a Swiss drug rehabilitation clinic on the promise that they would both meet up in Italy afterward, a promise that Truman had "no intention" of fulfilling, afraid as he was of Denny's "derelict life" and, as Vanderbilt supposes, "what his own future might hold—Denny as the ghost of Christmas Future." All the same, Denny made it into Capote's unfinished last book *Answered Prayers*, this time under his own name, as Truman recounted and perhaps embellished the cautionary tale.

The main body of this biography is too often the peripheral stories that the author feels compelled to share: Isherwood's search for spiritual balance after his exile from England; Vidal's loss of his mythic youthful love, Jimmie Trimble, whose own story bled into Denny's when Vidal wrote fiction; and Capote's early innocence eroded by contact with the drug-addled Fouts. As it happens, Capote missed the moral of Denny's story, drifting into his own addictions. *Best-Kept Boy in the World* brought out the scold in me; for all the many interventions, Fouts never received the tough love that he needed to get well. Instead, everyone—Peter Watson excepted, for he ultimately abandoned Denny to his own devices—played adoring witness to his self-destruction. If nothing else, he had a talent to amuse.



**Foucault, in Winter,
in the Linnaeus Garden**
by Michael Joyce

A polylingual operatic fantasy consisting of invented letters that present an imaginary history at least doubly fictional: an imagined-imagined life of a philosopher.

"Joyce is part of a revolution in narrative form." — *Newsweek*

www.starcherone.com

Meditations of a Freudian Philosopher

AFTER a fifty-year career of thinking, teaching, and writing, Leo Bersani, a professor emeritus at Berkeley, still sounds nothing like an old man. The six essays in this collection are suffused with an urgent sense of discovering more to say about familiar subjects: Descartes, Freud, Proust, literature, film, queer theory.

At the heart of *Thoughts and Things* is a philosophical concern with how the thinking subject relates to the world. The modern impulse to master the external world by viewing it as the other, more often than not using violent methods, began with Descartes. More fundamentally, Bersani's reading of Freud convinces him that there's "an intractable destructiveness intrinsic to being human." This destructiveness can be environmental, social, and psychic; it threatens, but does not discourage, his belief in a cosmic connectedness to which we all belong. Throughout his career, Bersani has shown us ways to resist structures that oppress and to discover modes of relatedness to the world around us.

No writer engages Bersani more than Freud, who assumed a fundamental antagonism between the self and the external world. The infantile ego, threatened by everything outside of itself, forges its identity by hating the other. Hatred evolves into a suspicion of the world's difference and then into a desire to master it through what Freud called "nonsexual sadism." This is the psychic origin of a divide between the self and the world. What interests Bersani most about Freud are the self-revelations contained in his writings, his habits and contradictions, and the unintended slips that show connections to his own psyche. In "'Ardent Masturbation' (Descartes, Freud, Proust, et al.)," an essay about how the tendency toward introspection in these three writers leads to a state of solitary self-creation resembling masturbation, Bersani spends several pages analyzing passages from an essay by Freud about sexual object choices. Freud's writing contains discontinuities that are more characteristic of the unconscious mind than of logical argument, thus exemplifying an "incoherent connectedness" to the psychological state he is trying to describe. For Bersani, this is the source of Freud's genius.

In another essay with Freud as the focus, Bersani proposes that the visual arts provide models of an "aesthetic ethic of correspondences between the self and the world" that serve as an alternative to the Freudian subject-object dualism. *Beau travail*, a French film from 1999 about the French Foreign Legion in Djibouti, contains a scene in which a group of men moves together in physical exercises that demonstrate the "nonpurposive pleasures of touch." Bersani calls this a manifestation of "non-sadistic movement," a moment when any tendency to violence in the psyches of these military men has been stilled by the col-

DANIEL A. BURR

Thoughts and Things

by Leo Bersani

University of Chicago Press

119 pages, \$30.

lective sociability they have achieved in their all-male community.

Bersani has never been easy on gay men, decrying in a number of books what the gay movement loses when it strives to assimilate itself to the dominant culture. "Illegitimacy" begins with a discussion of the drag queen Divine, the central character in Jean Genet's *Our Lady of the Flowers*, who is

neither male nor female despite attempts to perform both roles. By being unnameable, Divine is also free from classification. Bersani is concerned with the tendency of social structures to classify, to create legitimate and non-legitimate groups, because these structures derive power from our willingness to accept the identities they impose upon us. He considers marriage the "institutional legitimization of intimacy," a form of coercion that the legalization of gay marriage will never change, and challenges us to acknowledge the only valid defense of gay marriage is a legal one. Bersani has a history of contrarian views. During the AIDS epidemic, he argued that a homophobic culture offered gay men a new form of legitimacy if they accepted a "masturbatory retreat" from sexual intimacy with each other, an offer they should have refused.

The energy in these essays derives from Bersani's attempts to imagine escapes from dualistic thinking and restrictive structures. Simple transgression of the rules, the historic mode of gay resistance, is not enough. In "I Can Dream, Can't I" he locates one possibility of escape in the world of dreams, both actual and as exemplified in Godard's 1982 film *Passion*. Dreams and art have the ability to "move us to an enlarged field of potentiality." Such states contain elements of the incongruous, the inexplicable and the unfinished; they work by analogy and repetition rather than a linear logic that seeks certainty. In these essays Bersani breaks down the distinction between past and present, conscious and unconscious, the cosmos and our own bodies. We can enter this state of "virtual being" only if we abandon our desire to control the world around us and become available to our relatedness to that world. To underscore the importance of connectedness, the final essay discusses a short French novel, *La Casse* (1994), by Pierre Bergounioux, depicting the narrator's failure to connect with the world.

Age enters *Thoughts and Things* at the end. The forlorn narrator of *La Casse*, who has spent his life assiduously collecting bits of scrap metal, remnants of tools used to conquer, has a momentary vision of a world where people are linked in a human community. But should such a world come to pass, he realizes, it will not matter to him because time will have passed and he'll be gone. In his valedictory to this book, Bersani admits that if the oneness of being of which he believes we are capable does someday arrive, he will miss this "utopic reality" because "I will no longer be here." True, but Bersani's body of work ensures that his vision of a human community will remain with us.

Daniel Burr is an assistant dean in the Univ. of Cincinnati College of Medicine, where he teaches courses in the medical humanities program.

Life of a Poet, Friend, Ventriloquist

JAMES MERRILL (1926-1995) was that rare breed: a 20th-century poet who had money. His father had founded Merrill Lynch and provided a lifelong income for his son. Merrill had extraordinary talent too, and, if this marvelous, comprehensive critical biography showcases every jewel of social incident, glamour, fame, travel, and sexual adventure, it also brings home the sheer size of Merrill's poetic achievement—and also, on occasion, comparable ones in prose and drama. Merrill published two ludic but charming novels, *The Seraglio* (1957) and *The (Diblos) Notebook* (1965), and, near the end of his life, a memoir titled *A Different Person* (1993).

But Merrill was a born poet: driven, as he insisted, to “make song” out of the otherwise senseless “empty hive” of the poet's day-to-day existence; to make sense of stasis; to make good of loss; above all, to make meaning out of chaos. From *Black Swan* (1946), his first fully formed collection, published (albeit in a vanity edition) when he was twenty, Merrill began as a formalist. He took readily to all manner of inherited poetical forms at the least fashionable moment in America to do so. Nor did he eschew the Baroque, the outré, or the obscure in his poetic vocabulary. Whatever was bohemian or unorthodox in his life could only find indirect form in Merrill's writings, which effectively, paradoxically, sought to “contain” and distill it.

The contrast between Merrill and the emerging Beat movement, or rock-and-roll music, or the arrival of the teenage rebel in the 1950s, could not have been greater. Later, there would be fellow travelers, such as Thom Gunn, but Merrill's cool, inexpressive qualities, while securing critical recognition, struck many reviewers as aloof, or too knowing, or obscure. Writing verse was a desk job for Merrill, requiring specific tools—in particular, a rhyming dictionary—and mental aptitude. Though he did read his own verse in public, he could never have “performed” it à la Allen Ginsberg. Nor was there a “personality” which it contrived to impose on the reader. When asked once if he longed for a wider readership, Merrill recoiled: “Think what one has to do to get a mass audience. I'd rather have one perfect reader.”

The second part of Merrill's career saw not so much a reversal of direction as a sharp tangent. The three volumes that came to constitute *The Changing Light at Sandover—The Book of Ephraim* (1976), *Mirabell: Books of Number* (1978), and *Scripts for the Pageant* (1980)—emerged out of Merrill's consultation, along with his partner of four decades, David Jackson, of otherworldly spirits during Ouija sessions that they hosted. The deployment of messages from beyond allowed Merrill a thematic and dramatic freedom that would extend across more than

RICHARD CANNING

James Merrill: Life and Art
by Langdon Hammer
Knopf. 912 pages, \$40.

17,000 lines. This was still poetry, but apparently written at the behest of forces outside of the author. Just as the “different voices” in *The Waste Land* had liberated T. S. Eliot, the spirits in Merrill's work structure, offer commentary on, and render coherent, the three parts of his epic. Liberated from any mortal coil, they speak freely, wittily, bitchily, irreverently. The poet himself could select, while not being seen to select, from among the voices of the deceased. One recurrent voice is that of the recently deceased English poet W. H. Auden. Wallace Stevens also intrudes. But Merrill also ventriloquized close friends who had died, plus larger figures such as archangels and prophets. The result is a sustained, idiosyncratic, visionary poetic universe—a “homemade cosmology as dense as Blake's,” as one critic recently put it; an “occult splendor” in Harold Bloom's succinct summary.



Richard Canning is completing a biography of English novelist Ronald Firbank, having brought out an edition of Firbank's Vainglory in 2012 (Penguin Classics).

Sandover remains Merrill's outstanding achievement, its breadth and porousness allowing it to seem paradoxically replete: a sort of achieved, personal mythos. At the same time, its eclectic cultural, social, personal and even political allusions seem consonant with prose experimentation we might describe as "postmodern"; Samuel Beckett is a key touchstone here. Above all, its apocalyptic thrust came to articulate, uncannily early, the growing concerns of an American, and also a global population, sensing the slow senescence of Planet Earth, ravaged and terminally endangered by its exploitative occupants and their mindless material pursuits.

Among the longest and most challenging of literary epics in any language, *Sandover* continues to beguile and challenge readers precisely because of its arcane references and its elliptical and obscure qualities. In life, Merrill was contrastingly immediate and direct. He and Jackson may have traveled frequently, but wherever they settled, they lived modestly. They made their American home in the unlikely redoubt of Stonington, Connecticut, far from any metropolis. For over a quarter century they spent winters in Athens, where both partners had recourse to a succession of Greek gigolos, party boys, and soldiers, as well as a series of more serious lovers. Merrill relished witnessing the real hardship and life choices facing those with uncertain careers, limited income, and changeable circumstances. He never consorted with the social elites.

Reflecting on his pampered upbringing in an interview with fellow poet J. D. McClatchy, Merrill recalled how, unlike the members of his family, their servants had "lives [that] seemed by contrast to make such perfect sense. The gardeners had their hands in the earth. The cook was dredging things with flour, making pies. My father was merely making money, while my mother wrote names on place-cards, planned menus, and did her needlepoint." Later, when Key West came to replace Athens as the couple's second home, they lived equally frugally, entertaining and being entertained by other writers, artists, and academics—among them Alison Lurie, whose memoir of their friendship, *Familiar Spirits* (2002), provides an animated complement to Hammer's biography.

One thing Lurie could never quite do, perhaps, was explain fully the Merrill-Jackson bond. The couple tired of one another but stayed together. For Merrill, this seems to have stemmed from a personal ethic: this was loyalty, plain and simple. For Jackson, it was perhaps more materially circumscribed. An aspiring novelist when he and Merrill first met in 1953, Jackson found himself invariably blocked. Still worse, when he did write, the results struck both himself and Merrill as mediocre. He turned to painting, interior design, decoration, hosting, and entertaining by turns, all without particular distinction. But in his prime (before his drinking took hold), Jackson was evidently a stabilizing influence on his partner, and also a great social force. He seems brasher than Merrill, someone who allowed the poet to adopt the reflective, responsive, if still gregarious role he needed to create.


Other lovers and friends continued to appear in Merrill's shorter verse, which retained a highly distinctive lyricism while vaguely echoing the subtle and allusive homoerotics of some of Auden's verse, or indeed much of Constantine Cavafy's. Merrill ruminated on the allure of beauty, but just as much on the pull of intellectual ideas, belief systems, word play, number

games, and the logical cut-and-thrust of intellectual debate. His last two volumes, *The Inner Room* (1988) and *A Scattering of Salts* (1995), offered a set of codas to the expansiveness of *Sandover*. Mortality, physical decline, and the transience of worldly pleasure loom large. Although Merrill never declared it publicly, he knew he was HIV-positive, and his health saw consequent acute peaks and troughs. Key friends he lost and elegized included David Kalstone, the critic who first, and perhaps best, recognized Merrill's gifts, placing him among American poets like Elizabeth Bishop (also a friend), Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, and John Ashbery. Hammer, in contrast, emphasizes Merrill's closeness to Wallace Stevens, also from Connecticut, and likewise a formalist poet dedicated to the elusive significance of the quotidian.

Merrill experienced his difficult final years—estranged from Jackson, increasingly reclusive in Key West—pursuing relationships with a succession of improbable candidates, including, over the last decade or so, the actor Peter Hooten, who had played the Marvel Comics character Dr. Strange in a TV movie and who collaborated with Merrill on a misconceived film version of a stage adaptation of Merrill's great work, *Voices from Sandover* (1990). The poet was increasingly feted, within and beyond academe, after he won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for the 1976 volume *Divine Comedies*, in which the first part of the *Sandover* trilogy appeared.

Merrill would have enjoyed the coincidence that Hammer's first mention of AIDS occurs on page 666. As with all AIDS-related declines, the bare constituent elements of Merrill's desperation, stoicism, resignation, and self-concern make for a progressively grueling read. He nonetheless completed *A Different Person* (1993) and ensured its publication in the face of outright hostility from his mother Hellen, who would outlive her son, and whose embrace of his creative gifts was marked by a refusal to confront or discuss his sexuality.

Hammer has done a wonderful service, mining every conceivable archive for this mammoth undertaking, but also tracking down as many of Merrill's peers, friends, and lovers as are now to be found. Hammer comments that his subject "enjoyed people, and needed lots of them. His friends were arranged around him like an opera cast: the principals, supporting singers, fabled stars with cameos, comic relief, an ingénue or two, and the full chorus behind." A Yale English professor, Hammer is also a fine critic who is notably sensitive to the particularity of Merrill's allusions, his choice of symbolism, and his selection of experience.

The novelist Allan Gurganus told Hammer that Merrill's privileged background paradoxically gave him the opportunity to measure out and improvise a very different, non-material way of living, and to find new ways of writing out of that lifestyle: "He approached life as an experiment. It was a possibility, not just an entitlement." Merrill's embrace of constrained form gave service by binding securely the free, chaotic, unpredictable, and even sometimes dissolute life he made his own, and for so long shared with Jackson. Auden once defined poetry as "memorable speech," a turn of phrase that nicely reflects his own and Merrill's achievements. Hammer has succeeded in illuminating Merrill's indisputable legacy as one of America's most important postwar poets through this adept and memorable biography. 

The Killer with Something Extra

VIOLENT GAY CHARACTERS have a long tradition in American theater. Their presence reflects both the homophobia of the era in which they flourished and the growing awareness of gay people as a social reality. It's easy to dismiss these figures today as horrible relics of an earlier time. But there might be more going on in these characters and the plots they inhabit than we assume, for both the playwrights who created them and the audiences who came to watch.

Such is the premise of Jordan Schildcrout's original, well-researched, and immensely readable book. Looking at what he terms the "homicidal homosexual" in the history of American theater, Schildcrout asks us to rethink the links between deviant sexualities and murderous plot lines. While attentive to the threads of homophobia that shaped many of these characters, particularly in the pre-Stonewall years, Schildcrout offers historically nuanced readings of the murderous queer from the 1920s to today. His aim is to explore the "forces that create the homophobic paradigm" making sexual and gender deviance dangerous and destructive. More intriguingly, he also considers how queer artists have "rewritten and radically altered the significance of the homicidal homosexual" in more contemporary theater. This is an ambitious task within this slim book, but Schildcrout manages well in balancing history and analysis in this fast-paced work.

Beginning with Mae West's melodrama *The Drag* (1927), Schildcrout situates the play within the Wales Padlock Law passed in New York the same year, which prohibited the staging of a play "depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy, or sex perversion." *The Drag* did both, and added a homicidal homosexual for good measure. But as Schildcrout's reading shows, the many homosexual figures in the play—as well as its cabaret-style drag ball lifted from the many real balls of the era—underscore how the play made non-normative sexualities a theatrical subject. David Caldwell, the murderer in the play, had a failed relationship with the married Rolly Kingsbury, which quickly turned deadly. While the play's tension rests on the trope of the spurned lover, Schildcrout argues it is Rolly's duplicitous and narcissistic nature that's the real problem. In the end, David's violence seems a justified purging of the lies within a heterosexual marriage. *The Drag* only showed in an off-off Broadway production in New Jersey and never crossed the Hudson for its debut. Along with Mae West's very successful Broadway hit *Sex*, it was the victim of the Wales Padlock Law. West was sent to jail for ten days and fined \$500. Soon after, she went to Hollywood and found success in film.

Throughout the book, Schildcrout asks us to think beyond the

JAMES POLCHIN

**Murder Most Queer:
The Homicidal Homosexual
in the American Theater**

by Jordan Schildcrout
University of Michigan Press
268 pages, \$34.50

dialectics of good versus bad representations, directing us to the contradictions and complexities of the particular works. For example, in his discussion of the many stage and film adaptations of the real life murderers Leopold and Loeb, he shows how these retellings reflect larger shifts in cultural attitudes about homosexuality and criminality. In 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, highly intelligent college students from wealthy Chicago families, murdered four-

teen-year-old Bobby Franks. Their crime and subsequent trial became a national story, and their sexual desires, real or imagined, were an unspoken undercurrent of the newspaper reports. We feel this sexual tension in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rope* (1948), which was adapted from an English play by Patrick Hamilton. In both, two clever college students concoct a plan to enact the perfect murder as they gleaned it from their Nietzsche-inspired professor. But the boys' murder of a classmate is eventually uncovered, and, as in any good murder mystery, the killers are arrested and presumably imprisoned or executed, and social (and sexual) order is restored.

The story is rendered much differently a decade later in *Compulsion* (1958), a film based on Meyer Levin's book about the murder case. The two college-age protagonists are more sympathetic killers, their crimes part of a constellation of juvenile delinquencies that were the mainstay of much of 1950s popular culture. The film doesn't simply end with the murder solved but with a dramatic courtroom scene where the killers' lawyer, played by an earnest Orson Welles, successfully argues against the death penalty, showing how the boys' crime was a problem of social and psychological factors rather than an inherent moral degeneracy. By the 1990s, the gay director Tom Kalin appropriated the story in his atmospheric film *Swoon* (1992), creating a love story between the killers, their crime a mere plot device for the tensions in their relationship. In Schildcrout's careful readings, he shows how the meanings of these retellings go beyond the facts of the killers and victim, and, like any good murder story, reflect larger themes beyond the murder itself.


The more intriguing chapters concern the post-Stonewall plays where the trope of the homicidal queer is reinterpreted by gay and lesbian playwrights. The camp experimental works of Charles Ludlam and his Ridiculous Theatrical Company, for example, were often both praised and ridiculed by his audiences. Ludlam's *Conquests of the Universe, or When Queens Collide* (1967) and *Bluebeard* (1970) each presented an array of violent and campy characters that encouraged the audience to root for "queer villainy." Ludlam recounted how some gays and lesbians in the '70s disapproved of some of his plays because they didn't present a "respectable gay image," adding: "in my plays, people exhibit terrible behavior because it's showing the ridiculous side of life."

Such performances filled with monstrous (and often campy) queer characters would emerge in popular and experimental per-

James Polchin teaches writing at New York University and is a frequent contributor to this magazine.

performances alike (think *Rocky Horror* or most of John Waters' movies). It was this campy excess that infused earlier images of homicidal homosexuals. *The Secretaries* (1993), by the collective Five Lesbian Brothers, dramatized a familiar trope in theater: the murderous woman. The play transforms the violence of one woman into a larger critique of contemporary associations of lesbianism with criminal acts. For Schildcrout, the uses of camp broke down dominant ideas about the dangers and fears of homosexuals by mocking the image of the queer monster. These characters and plots allowed audience members "to engage in visceral expressions of both sexuality and murderous rage." In this sense, Schildcrout brings an age-old idea about the cathartic power of theater to the images of killer queers who offer their own emotional release (and campy revenge) against

a homophobic culture beyond the theater walls.

There are many other murderers in this book: one-man shows based on serial killers (Bill Connington's *Zombie*, based on a novel by Joyce Carol Oates for example); murders by the lovelorn staged with operatic excess (Terrence McNally's *The Lisbon Traviata* and Chay Yew's *Porcelain*). For Schildcrout, the diverse range of the homicidal homosexuals on the American stage reflects our "navigating the turbulent waters of uncertainty" about the place and meanings of homosexual desires in our culture more broadly. In pushing through these waters, the book not only recovers a history of homicidal characters, but also illuminates the social and psychic importance such characters have had in shaping and reshaping the meanings of gay and lesbian experience for much of the 20th century. 

The Earnest Generation

I'VE COME TO AN AGE (65) when I realize I live in an entirely different world than my students. Words like "jalopy" or "fuddy-duddy" mean nothing to them. My mother, who taught kindergarten, used to watch Saturday morning cartoons once a month to keep up with her students' chatter; this summer I have read Connor Franta's *A Work in Progress* to find out what gay millennials are up to.

Perhaps you, too, have missed the Connor Franta phenomenon. At 22, he is a YouTube video blogger with millions of subscribers. I've watched only one—his coming-out video—and he is adorable, with a charming boy-next-door appeal. He radiates a sweet, Midwestern wholesomeness, and you can see why in high school he was elected Homecoming King. With his swimmer's body and hair streaked blond from lifeguarding in the brief Minnesota summer, who would guess there was a homo lurking just beneath the surface? He is just the boy you would trust your daughter with. You'd think that, as the doctor's son, he would put on airs, but not Connor. He wants to be everybody's friend even if he *is* one of the cool kids. Now that he's living in L.A., he retains his humility—stardom means nothing to him. It's all about the love and support he gets from his crowd of well-wishers. He tells us in the close of the book when he addresses his readers directly that "the amount of support I receive on a daily basis is heartwarming, and I wouldn't be where I am today without it." Connor is not afraid to show his vulnerability. He needs a daily tub of love to keep him fresh and clean.

But being 22, Connor doesn't have a whole lot of experience to put into a memoir. He's a small-town boy who has been isolated from economic worry, social hostility, or parental abuse. His luck is part of his charm, but it also gives him a vacuousness that makes him a popular teen "vlogger." One of the telltale chapters is about an incident when he was in the ninth grade. He

David Bergman, poetry editor for this magazine, is professor of English at Towson University in Maryland.

DAVID BERGMAN

A Work in Progress
by Connor Franta
Atria/Keywords Press
212 pages, \$16.99

wanted to get a laptop, but he wanted a MacBook instead of a PC like the rest of the family. He also wanted his father's approval even though he didn't need it; he had the necessary \$1,000 saved up, and his father's advice that another brand would cost half as much fell on deaf ears. The lesson for the reader is not that he got his own way, but that you need to "know what you want and

follow your gut." I am delighted that at fourteen he had \$1,000 of his own money to buy his heart's desire, but it begins to throw light on a privilege he has no awareness of possessing. It's all right for Connor to follow his gut and get what he wants, because he's nicely cushioned from the consequences if things go wrong. But there are lots of kids who might follow their gut and not have loving parents and an indulgent police force to set him straight. (Connor tells us he was pulled over twice in high school for speeding. In parts of Baltimore, where I live, that might lead to a bullet in the head.) The MacBook taught Franta a lesson for life: "You are your own individual with your own particular set of dreams, desires, and aspirations. ... So know what you like, know what makes you happy, stick to your guns, and state it with confidence. You'll walk taller, and as long as you follow your gut, you won't stray far in life."

But then we learn that for years he's been lying to himself about his sexuality. He's been ignoring his gut or another part of his anatomy. From a business point of view, it must have been difficult coming out to his millions of video friends. Yet, from my one and only viewing of his blog, I can't imagine that it came as much of a surprise to his fans. Connor is pretty fey as well as corn-fed. The first person he tells is his mother, who doesn't miss a beat: "Oh, honey, it's okay. It doesn't matter to me. Are you seeing anyone?" I can guess what she was thinking: "Thank god, he's figured it out at last!" But his mother pushes him in ways he is not willing to go, at least with the reader. She wants to know whether there's a boyfriend, because you need to form relationships. At the very least, you need to suck some dick.


I'm not suggesting that Connor go porno, but you'd think he

would mention kissing a guy after repeatedly chronicling a passionless embrace. In the chapter, “Where I Find Happiness,” he teasingly speaks of “Playing with, petting, holding, or cuddling a cute animal. *Any*. It just has to be cute.” This is about as close as he comes to suggesting sex. Connor’s sexuality stays relentlessly disembodied, an idea that viewers can ignore as long as they understand the bigger lesson: “to help others in a similar position.” Because he feels that “with a large audience, I often feel a certain sense of responsibility to guide, inform, and nurture whenever possible.” And what has he taught his young viewers? It is all right to label yourself as long as you keep it abstract, unphysical, disembodied. Not the lesson I would have taught.

The other lesson that Connor markets is “Don’t allow yourself to settle for just anything in your life. Strive to obtain your every want and desire, as long as you’re not hurting others.” Failure is always your own fault. People only fail because they didn’t work hard enough, didn’t persist for long enough, didn’t

want it enough. Never mind that this creed of self-reliance goes counter to his expressed need for his millions of fans. Consistency is not one of Connor’s strengths.

There is something pernicious in this conservative philosophy. It blames the victims. It’s your fault that you couldn’t get over being raped. If you’d worked a little harder, you wouldn’t have ended up on the street. Studies have shown that college graduates who have trouble getting jobs don’t blame the economy; they blame themselves. Well, it *is* the economy, stupid! There are systemic inequalities that stump the best efforts of everyone but the exceptional. Of course, Connor wouldn’t know it. The crosses he has had to bear in life are being a middle child, having a bump on his forehead, and winning the god-awful Homecoming King contest. His success on YouTube has shown him that with a little hard work and patience, even he can be famous.

Where are our young gay voices today? You don’t want to know. 

B R I E F S

Fantasies and Hard Knocks: My Life as a Printer

by Richard-Gabriel Rummonds
Ex Ophidia Press. 813 pages, \$45.

This exhaustive memoir by the “first openly gay American hand press printer” is, not surprisingly, a beautifully designed if somewhat self-indulgent tribute to the 42 works that Rummonds published with his Plain Wrapper Press and Ex Ophidia Press, mostly between 1966 and 1988. Because of the book’s format, there’s a bit of repetition, with a tribute to each of his printed works interspersed with stories and anecdotes from his very eventful life (he’s now over eighty) and with several dozen recipes. There’s also a generous supply of charming photographs of friends, family, and hand presses. The oldest of four boys, born and raised in California, Rummonds kept extensive notes about his life from his earliest years, when his interest in printing began—along with his interest in sex with men. After being kicked out of college for perpetrating a literary hoax, he had a successful career as a set and costume designer at regional theaters, fell in with the San Francisco Beats, purchased his first printing press, and went to Quito, Ecuador, where—between affairs—he decided to become a Trappist monk (in Argentina). He eventually changed his mind, and off he went to Rome, Verona, and New York—in breathless, episodic paragraphs. Descriptions of boyfriends, books designed for famous writers, technical difficulties with presses, and financial matters all vie for prominence. Rummonds ended his printing career in Europe and returned to the U.S. to found and direct an MFA program at the University of Alabama.

MARTHA E. STONE

Nothing Looks Familiar

by Shawn Syms
Arsenal Pulp Press. 184 pages, \$15.95

In eleven short stories, author Shawn Syms offers glimpses of slice-of-life incidents that may or may not change a character’s outlook. For instance, in the first story, “On the Line,” a woman named Wanda would rather work anywhere than in the slaughterhouse—but a job’s a job. She does have standards, however: she won’t sleep with someone from the kill floor, though she’ll happily take lovers from anywhere else. She believes she’s being discreet until she sleeps with a man whose wife is a co-worker. The story ends abruptly, as do almost all within the covers. In “Four Pills,” a young man who’d “never been good at keeping friends” meets someone who, curiously, wants to hang out. They never really make plans; their nights are filled with spontaneous mayhem; but when one of them scores drugs, we’re left with an unsettling ending that fills the imagination and begs the question: what next? Reading this collection is a little like watching half a horror movie or getting wrapped up in an eavesdropped drama on the bus just before the riders get off. We can easily picture many possible outcomes, some of which could be ugly. To be sure, these brief stories will make you squirm. And yet, the characters in these stories aren’t particularly likeable, so we may even feel a bit of satisfaction when things don’t go well for them. But outcomes are never tied up into a neat package. These are stories that will continue to tap you on the shoulder days after you’ve finished the book.

TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

Some Desperate Glory: The First World War the Poets Knew

by Max Egremont
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 352 pages, \$16.

Coinciding with the centennial celebrations of World War I, this collection features eleven of the major English poets of the period, including some of the best known, such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and some lesser-known poets, such as Edward Thomas and Edmund Blunden. Rather than assemble a simple “best of” collection, editor Max Egremont—who offers a thoughtful essay about each writer—has focused on highly graphic poems that tell the war story through the poets’ own eyes. Many were from privileged backgrounds, and the images they had of war were idealized notions based on classical examples, which quickly darkened when met with the brutal realities of the war. Egremont covers the war year-by-year and details not only the military and political events, but also tracks the movements of the poets themselves. What’s intriguing about this study is how many of its subjects were gay, or had at least some sort of homosexual experience. These include Owen, Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Rupert Brooke. Egremont’s essays explore how shifting perceptions and tastes over time have variously elevated and lowered appraisals of figures such as Brooke and Owen. For example, Owen has come to be viewed as the most modern of the bunch. It’s also interesting to reflect on how non-combatants like Eliot, Joyce, and Pound moved in the opposite direction—toward abstraction—in contrast to those who served and had the kind of experiences that couldn’t easily be put aside.

DALE BOYER

Alexander's Persian Side

GEORGETTE GOUVEIA

Darius in the Shadow of Alexander

by Pierre Briant. Translated by Jane Marie Todd
Harvard University Press. 579 pages, \$39.95

HISTORY is written by the winners, but in recent years there's been a trend toward considering history from the viewpoint of those who found themselves on its losing side. Such an approach is announced in the very title of *Darius in the Shadow of Alexander*, a 2003 work newly translated into English. Here, Pierre Briant, emeritus professor of ancient history at the Collège de France in Paris, seeks "to explain why Darius, along with so many others, is condemned to haunt the realm of historical oblivion." The result is a fascinating meditation on the nature of power and the role of words and images in shaping and maintaining it.

Introducing the book and elaborating on its title, Briant acknowledges that his subject is not only Darius III, the last of the Achaemenid rulers of Persia, but also Alexander the Great, the bisexual Greco-Macedonian king whose conquest of the Persian Empire in 331 BCE at the age of 25 ushered in an age of Hellenistic influence and a geopolitical sea change that reverberates to this day. The fact that we call Jesus "Christ," a Greek word, is a result of the export of Hellenism to regions conquered by Alexander, whose empire stretched from the Balkans to northern India. Before Alexander, civilization had generally flowed from east to west; Alexander reversed its dominant direction for the next few centuries.

Alexander had been trained by Aristotle to think on his feet and to have a "Plan B." From his father, the crafty Philip II of Macedonia, he inherited a superb fighting force, the hegemony of the Greek city-states, and the dream of Persian conquest that was born some 150 years earlier when the Persians destroyed the Athenian Acropolis—Greece's 9/11. Enter Darius, who proved to be a for-

midable obstacle to Alexander's irresistible force. By all accounts, Darius was a loving husband and father whose thoughts in wartime were for the safety of his family. After his victory over Persia, Alexander treated the royal family well, marrying Darius' eldest daughter Stateira and marrying off Stateira's sister Drypetis to his soul-mate and right-hand man, Hephaestion.

Alexander was a military genius, perhaps the greatest field commander the world has known, who could read a battlefield as a grand master reads a chessboard. Of course Darius was outwitted, but it's more complex than that, Briant observes. Unlike the dynamic Macedonian kingdom that nurtured Alexander, Persia was a cultivated, centralized, and relatively static empire. When Darius quit the battles of Issus and Gaugamela, leaving the Persians to fight vainly against Alexander and his men, he wasn't acting the coward. Instead, Briant says, "he was obeying the rules of the Persian monarchy, which stipulated that the survival of the king and of the state had to be ensured first of all."

Compounding our difficulty in understanding Darius—and Alexander—are the Persian and Greco-Roman texts upon which our understanding is based. Those that survive, including later accounts, are not history or biography in our sense but tracts with their own agendas—ones that don't necessarily break along east-west lines. Some Roman authors, such as Curtius, were critical of what they saw as Alexander's increasing decadence, evinced not only by his adoption of Persian dress and customs but also by his love for Bagoas, Darius' influential eunuch. On the other hand, later Persian works like the *Shahnameh* ("Book of Kings") explained Alexander's success by imagining him to be half Persian.

There may be another reason for Darius' eclipse relative to Alexander: the dearth of visual representations of Darius due to the fact that Persian art remained stylized and decorative at a time when Greece was producing dazzlingly realistic representations of the human form, often idealized but increasingly individuated. Writing of the ceremonial Persian capital that Alexander burned to the ground, probably in retaliation for the mutilation of Greek prisoners and the destruction of the Acropolis, Briant notes: "It is not particular kings who are represented in Persepolis and elsewhere but kingship in all its glory, accompanied by impersonal and intangible attributes." In contrast, there's nothing impersonal or intangible about the gorgeous, lifelike images of Alexander—painted by Apelles, sculpted by Lysippos, and carved in gemstones by Pyrgoteles.

It's hard to argue with the book's exhaustive treatment, but one source of disappointment is the absence of any update to the original text, which was published twelve years ago. Even if there were no new discoveries in ancient sources, it would have been instructive to have Briant weigh in on Oliver Stone's much-maligned, underrated film *Alexander*, which uses "The Alexander Mosaic" in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples as an inspiration for its depiction of Darius. This work alone offers ample evidence for the cultural sophistication that the Greeks had achieved and that Alexander brought to the rest of the known world.

Blood and Sand

On soundstages big as caverns
passion is played out on shining floors,
Tyrone Power swept to his doom by Rita Hayworth
as Linda Darnell pastes clippings into a scrapbook,
and I'm more alive than ever, grateful
to them all, spellbound in the dark by artifice
raised to the height of barely controlled hysteria,
nonsense brilliantly engineered to make us swoon
to the sound of castenets and flamenco guitar,
and the sight of Anthony Quinn being dangerous, dancing
in geysers of color and shadow, in Hollywood Spain.

JOHN HARRIS

Georgette Gouveia is the author of Water Music and the forthcoming The Penalty for Holding.

A Week in the Life

HEATHER SEGCEL

Adult Onset

by Ann-Marie MacDonald

Tin House Books. 388 pages, \$25.95

ADULT ONSET spans one week, but from within that boundary it frequently comes unstuck in time. Its fictional world presents a calm outward surface, but there's turmoil churning just underneath. These contrasts build and clarify, stretching into a portrait of how we live today while acknowledging that change is really the only constant.

Mary Rose MacKinnon struggles to answer an e-mail from her father; he's learned to use the computer just to tell her he watched her "It Gets Better" spot on YouTube. This is a miracle on many levels: above all, because the parents who once reviled her for being a lesbian now embrace her along with her wife and two children. Mary Rose is a stay-at-home mom, which allows her to put off writing the third book in her successful young adult trilogy. At 48, she still gets stopped for autographs, and she's perpetually exhausted. But what seems like a wonderful if overstuffed life keeps veering toward terror. Mary Rose's temper can turn abusive, and she's beginning to connect the dots about an illness in her early childhood that may be influencing her now.

The story is set in Toronto, where author Ann-Marie MacDonald lives with her wife and two kids. One hopes the scene in which Mary Rose idly spots Margaret Atwood driving around on errands in the neighborhood is drawn from life. Long-term couples will nod in recognition at the arguments between Mary Rose and wife Hilary, who's working on a play and checks in by phone. Affection can turn into recrimination, then flirtation, then build toward World War III before both parties realize it's getting late and lay down their arms. When she can't be reached by phone, Mary Rose worries that Hilary's been in an accident or that she's having an affair. "Does she have Mary Rose down as next of kin? Of course she does, they are married. As long as Hil is killed in Canada, Mary Rose will be the first to hear." By the time you read this, that list may have grown longer still. This is a world in which the ground is always shifting, leaving us to grasp for facts that we once knew to be true, then waiting for the brain to buffer and update.

Dolly, Mary Rose's mother, is showing signs of dementia that frequently echo Mary Rose's own exhausted disorganization. Some reflexive cruelties remain despite her mellowing in other respects. Dolly's history is marked by numerous losses: Mary Rose is one of three surviving siblings when there should be eight in total. She is in fact named for one of her unfortunate predecessors, now referred to as "other Mary Rose." Grief runs bone deep in the family, and as Dolly's thoughts become less grounded in reality, it's hard to distinguish what might be nonsensical rambling from admissions of guilt, and whether they refer to real or imagined crimes.

MacDonald handles her material gracefully, never letting things slide into excessive sentiment or horror. Many scenes are

darkly hilarious: a woman Mary Rose idealizes reveals a psyche just as bruised as her own by parenthood; the syncing of events between datebooks and calendars becomes a slapstick ballet; and just as things begin to get better, Mary Rose steps out to buy flowers and blithely looks at potential bridges to jump from. Flashbacks to her childhood that begin to make more sense over time and scenes from the first two books in her young adult series air out the narrative while also offering up clues as to what's behind Mary Rose's breakdown.

If a week inside Mary Rose's head feels like a long time, it's only because it's so painfully familiar. Anyone who has ever looked into a kitchen junk drawer and seen a perfect metaphor for her own mind will greet her as a kindred spirit. The spouse, the kids, the dog, the aging parents only turn up the volume of what is already frightening in its chaos. The happy moments feel like Polaroids that didn't quite turn out. *Adult Onset* is a contemporary slice of life that speaks to how far we've come—as women, as lesbians, as parents—while acknowledging how often we impede our own progress.

Heather Seggel is a writer loosely based in Northern California.

The Tears in Mortal Things

DALE BOYER

Deep Lane

by Mark Doty

W.W. Norton & Company. 96 pages, \$25.95

DEEP LANE is Mark Doty's eighth collection of poetry. It books as wide-ranging as *My Alexandria* (1993) and *Turtle, Swan, and Bethlehem in Broad Daylight* (1999), along with memoirs such as *Heaven's Coast* (1996), Doty (who long ago was a professor of mine) has explored life, love, and loss, particularly during the AIDS era. His poems have always been thoughtful and reflective, but this collection has an autumnal, melancholy tone that's new to his work.

Deep Lane (which appears to be the name of a road) is Doty's rumination on mortality. The opening poem finds him digging in his garden. Looking at the various tubers and grasses he encounters, he begins to speculate on the inevitable fate of us all. This theme of inquiry continues as he walks with his dog Ned past a graveyard and finds himself literally with one foot in a newly dug grave. While this may sound contrived when summarized, Doty's best poems have a simplicity and an immediacy that make such situations seem totally organic. Indeed, it is the searching, intimate quality of his poetry that gives his work much of its power, and makes each one seem like a journey in which the reader is personally involved alongside the poet.

"Don't you wish the road of excess/ led to the palace of wisdom, wouldn't that be nice?" Doty asks in one of the sections of his new poem. This is the first time, I believe, that such a melancholy note of weariness has entered the poet's world view. Encountering a pond whose fish are emerging from hibernation, he spots one lone fish and notes, "A heron ate his mate." Those fa-

miliar with the poet's history might make a connection here to his partner Wally, who died of AIDS many years ago. Here and elsewhere he seems to be asking: What does a lifetime of perception lead to? Where does consciousness go? If everything and everyone is ultimately consumed by darkness, what's the point?

In one poem, Doty makes a wounded deer a symbol for an entire generation ravaged by AIDS. He sets this up swiftly and economically by calling the deer "The King of Fire Island." The deer is an echo of Elizabeth Bishop's great poem, "The Moose." But whereas Bishop's poem was all about a sudden, bewildering encounter with wildness and the other, Doty identifies with the deer. "Where else could he have lived?" he asks. Because of his wounded nature, the deer is literally dependent upon the kindness of strangers in order to survive. Like Doty, the deer is a survivor. But the deer is ultimately doomed like everything else: his consciousness, too, lost to time.

There is both forgiveness and restlessness in these poems, as Doty seems ready to embrace himself now, not only as a gay poet, but as a person who is growing older. For those who've shared his journey over the years, *Deep Lane* is an essential installment, the latest missive from an extraordinarily gifted and giving poet.

Dale Boyer is a poet based in Chicago.

Doin' What Came Naturally

IRENE JAVORS

Irrepressible: The Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham

by Emily Bingham

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 385 pages, \$28.

AN OLD TRUNK, a cache of letters, and revelations about the life of a great aunt whose secret was buried by her family for decades provide the backdrop for Emily Bingham's biography of Henrietta Bingham (1901-1968). She was the daughter of Robert Worth Bingham and Eleanor Miller Bingham. Her father was a well-known Kentucky newspaper publisher and politician. He was made American ambassador to the Court of St. James from 1933 to 1937. When she was twelve, while en route with her mother to her grandmother's country house, there was an accident at a railway crossing and her mother was killed. According to Emily Bingham, the family never recovered from

the loss. The father became very dependent on his daughter and exerted an undue influence on Henrietta that at times might be classified as emotionally incestuous.

All of this is back story to the main narrative, which is Henrietta's big secret: that she was bisexual and lesbian during the course of her life. The book examines her complicated and often conflicted feelings about her sexuality. Her first affair was with her professor at Smith College, Mina Kirstein (sister of Lincoln Kirstein, co-founder of the New York City Ballet). Mina exerted an enormous influence on Henrietta, convincing her to go to England to undertake psychoanalysis with Ernest Jones (Sigmund Freud's official biographer). So began her lifelong attempt to "straighten" herself out.

Despite all the hours on the psychoanalytic couch when she would be told that her sexuality was "immature" and needed to develop into a healthy, adult heterosexuality, Henrietta managed to carve out quite an amazing roster of lesbian and bisexual friends and lovers: Mina Kirstein; the actors Peggy Lehmann, Tallulah Bankhead, Hope Williams, and Katherine Cornell; members of the Bloomsbury literary crowd, Dora Carrington, John Houseman (actor, collaborator with Orson Welles, author of *The Cradle Will Rock*); and the tennis player Helen Jacobs.

Irrepressible details Henrietta's "wild" life in the 1920's and 1930's—the endless parties, travels, and psychoanalysis. All this changed in 1937 when her father died and she lost a major emotional and financial supporter. Subsequently she became increasingly depressed and alcoholic and suffered the first of many nervous breakdowns. In 1948, her condition was so severe that a lobotomy was recommended by her physician, but it was not carried out. She underwent electroshock therapy for the depression, but her condition continued to worsen until her death in 1968.

Raised in a world of wealth and privilege, Henrietta's unfortunate decline can be traced to the sexist and homophobic attitudes of the times. Her world was pre-Stonewall—gays and lesbians were seen as sick and in need of "conversion" to normalcy. Her experiences in psychoanalysis further reinforced her self-hatred. Unfortunately, she died a year before Stonewall and too early to benefit from the effects of the Women's Movement. And she paid dearly for having openly lesbian relationships, losing countless family members and friends due to her "unspeakable secret." Her great niece Emily Bingham has written a biography that has brought her great aunt out of the shadows and into the light; in so doing, another lesbian's lost story has been brought back into the annals of "herstory."

Irene Javors is a psychotherapist in New York City.


"In the midst of delicious scandals, authentic lives of grace shine through." - David Kundtz, *A Quiet Mind*

LOVE
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LUST
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LIFE

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DENNIS PAUL STRADFORD

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Cultural Calendar

Readers are invited to submit items at no charge. Must have relevance to a national (US) 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

- Long Beach, CA** Qfilm Festival, Sept 10-13.
Austin, TX LGBT Film Fest. Sept. 10-13.
Palm Springs, CA Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Sept 17-20.
Chicago, IL Reeling: LGBT Int'l. Film Fest. Sept. 17-24.
Atlanta, GA OUT on Film Fest. Oct 1-8.
Tampa, FL Int'l. Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Oct 2-10.
Portland, OR Queer Film Fest. Oct 3-9.
Sacramento, CA SIGLFF, Oct 8-10.
Rochester, NY Image OUT Fest. Oct 8-18.
Albuquerque, NM Southwest Gay & Lesbian Film Fest. Oct 9-18.
Dayton, OH LGBT Film Fest. Oct 9-11.
Pittsburgh, PA LGBT Film Fest. Oct 9-17.
Seattle, WA Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, Oct 9-19.
Winnipeg, Manitoba Reel Pride Film Festival, Oct 13-18.
Milwaukee, WI LGBT Film/Video Fest. Oct 15-25.
Louisville, KY LGBT Film Fest. Oct 16-18.
New York, NY NewFest Oct 22-27.
Ottawa, Ontario LGBT Film Fest. Oct 22-26.

EVENTS

- NLGJA Media Summit** National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Assn. will convene in San Francisco, Sept. 3-6. Visit: www.nlgja.org.
- Women's Week** in Provincetown offers a week+ of panels, workshops, entertainment, social events, and much more. Oct. 12-18.
- LGBT Leaders 2015** Int'l leadership conf. of the G&L Victory Institute will be held in Las Vegas, Nov. 19-22. Focus is on electing GLBT people to public office. Visit: www.VictoryInstitute.org.
- LGBT Tourism and Hospitality Conf.** Dec 9-11, in Ft Lauderdale. Focus on Internet marketing to the LGBT community. FMI, visit: www.communitymarketinginc.com.

Feature Films

- Best of Enemies** (directed by Morgan Neville & Robert Gordon). Documentary goes behind the scenes in the Gore Vidal-William F. Buckley showdown during the 1968 presidential election.
- Do I Sound Gay?** (David Thorpe) Documentary traces the director's attempt to figure out why his speech is recognizably "gay."
- Everlasting Love** (*Amor Eterno*. Marçal Fores) Drama about a teacher who encounters his young student in Barcelona's cruising scene.
- Fourth Man Out** (Andrew Nackman) Drama about an auto mechanic who comes out to his unsuspecting blue-collar friends.
- The Glamour and the Squalor** (Marq Evans) Documentary about the life and times of Marco Collins, a gay DJ who was one of the last great tastemakers of the FM radio era.
- Grandma** (Paul Weitz). Lily Tomlin plays a trash-talking lesbian, newly single, who takes her granddaughter on a wild road trip.

Magic Mike XXL (Gregory Jacobs) While not explicitly gay, the hunk factor alone justifies a mention for male readers.

The New Girlfriend (*Une Nouvelle Amie*. François Ozon) Drama about a man who begins to assume the identity of his deceased wife, befriend her best girlfriend, who has mixed feelings.

Sangaile (Alanté Kavaïté) Drama about a girl, 17, whose only love is stunt planes—until she meets another girl at an aeronautics show.

A Sinner in Mecca (Parvez Sharma). The director of *A Jihad for Love* secretly documented his Hajj to the Holy City as a gay man.

Those People (Joey Kuhn). A young gay painter in Manhattan is torn between an obsession with his infamous best friend and a promising new romance with an older pianist.

Theater / Dance

2nd Annual PlayPride LGBT Festival, a competition of one-act plays, will be in Dallas, TX, Sept. 3-13. Visit www.artandseek.org.

The Boys in the Band Classic drama about a gay birthday party in 1960s New York. Boston Center for the Arts, Sept. 11-Oct. 3.

Tennessee Williams Festival in Provincetown. The 10th annual event runs from Sept. 24 to 27.

The Nance Comedy about a gay actor in the age of burlesque. At the New Conservatory Theatre Ctr. in San Francisco, Oct. 1-Nov. 2.

My Big Gay Italian Midlife Crisis Third in the series—*MBGI Wedding* and *Funeral* are still running Off-Broadway. Anthony faces the end of youth. Opens at Saint Luke's Theatre, on Oct. 4.

Dada Woof Papa Hot Drama examines the complications of gay fatherhood. Opens Oct. 15 at the Newhouse Theater, Lincoln Center.

Bright Half Life Telescopes forty years in the relationship of Vicky and Erica through a series of vignettes. At the Diversionary Theatre, San Diego, Oct. 29-Nov. 29.

Allegiance, a new American musical starring George Takei (of *Star Trek* fame), will open on Broadway at the Shubert Theater in Nov.

Fun Home Broadway musical is based on Alison Bechdel's graphic novel about discovering her sexuality and that of her father.

Art Exhibitions

On the Domestic Front: Scenes of Everyday Queer Life raises the historical question, "What do gay people do when they're not having sex?" At the Leslie-Lohman Museum in NYC, Aug. 14-Oct. 25.

The Lisa Unger Baskin Collection, a vast archive of books and artifacts on women's cultural history, is now at Duke Univ. Some items will be on display at the Rubenstein Library.

30 Years of Collecting Art That Tells Our Stories displays gay and lesbian art produced from the 1960s to the 1990s. At the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco. Visit: www.glbthistory.org.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS – THE GLR

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:

- What Is "Gay"? Essentialism vs. Constructionism revisited
- Beyond Marriage Equality: What's next for the movement?
- The Dance: The GLBT influence from classical to contemporary

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

Almost Revolutionary

CHRISTOPHER CAPOZZOLA

Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity

by Robert Beachy

Knopf. 336 pages, \$27.95

THE GERMANS “are not satisfied simply being pederasts, like the rest of the world,” sighed French writer Octave Mirbeau in “Berlin-Sodome,” his 1907 travelogue. “They have to invent homosexuality.” Robert Beachy’s comprehensive history of gay Berlin from the 1870s to the 1930s shows that the emergence of gay and lesbian cultures in the modern West owed much to what Mirbeau identified as Berlin’s pederasty and invention—its practice and theory—and Beachy makes a compelling case for the “German invention of homosexuality.”

This is a book of startling firsts: the first openly gay man, the first legislative debate over sodomy law repeal, the first gay rights organization. Not in Paris or New York or San Francisco, but in Berlin, a sprawling metropolis that tripled in population during the period Beachy describes. It was Karl Heinrich Ulrichs who first identified the “*Urnig*” as an individual—and as a category of persons who had been discriminated against. “We are justified to exist in human society, just as you are,” he wrote in 1862. Try as he might, Ulrichs could not stop the promulgation of the North German penal code’s Paragraph 175, criminalizing sex between men. (The well-known law takes on new light here as we learn that legislators adopted it in the face of an incipient homosexual rights movement.)

In a city of strangers, gay men and lesbians (about whom Beachy writes very little) lived just slightly out of view, gathering in bars and tea shops, meeting in organizations, publishing in a press far freer than elsewhere in Europe or North America, and engaging in lively debates with a medical and scientific community that was fascinated by sexual variation. The Berlin police turned a surprisingly blind eye or even, through its Department of Homosexuals and Blackmailers, actively protected the sexual respectability of middle-class men. Official indifference became more difficult after 1907, when the Eulenberg scandal revealed a ring of influential homosexuals surrounding Kaiser Wilhelm II, and the smallish world of political pamphlets, medical dictionaries, and bars tumbled into the spotlight, forcing Germans to face the homosexual question directly.

Germans also had to confront Magnus Hirschfeld—rather obviously the hero of Beachy’s book—whose Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (SHC), established in 1897 with the motto “through science to justice,” was the first gay rights organization in the world. While Hirschfeld was sexual equality’s most articulate advocate, he was not without critics. Beachy smartly traces these divisions, especially between members of the SHC, who cast their lot with scientific research, legal reform, and alliances with left political parties and feminists, and proponents of an alternate, more rightist vision. Most notable was Adolf Brand, who in 1896 began publishing *Der Eigene*, the first gay magazine.

Most memorable is the story of Hans Blüher, whose *Männerbund* organization concocted a heady brew of nudism, anti-Semitism, and nostalgia for the homosocial *Kameradschaft* of World War I—dangerously appealing to the Nazis until, in July 1934, Ernst Röhm and a handful of other gay Nazis lost their heads in the Night of the Long Knives. Hirschfeld, who spent the last years of his life in exile in Paris, fared little better: the library at his Institute for Sexual Science, raided in May 1933, ended up kindling a massive book-burning at the city’s Opernplatz three days later.

There’s very little in *Gay Berlin* that is truly new; but if the overall arc is familiar, Beachy writes clearly and with a seriousness that links his newest finds from police reports and organizational records with familiar stories and characters. Even W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood (you knew they would show up at some point, didn’t you?) appear here in a new context, just two ordinary participants in Berlin’s interwar sex tourism industry.

Gay Berlin left a legacy outside Europe, in exile communities: in Chicago in 1924 through the brave and solitary efforts of Hirschfeld disciple Henry Gerber to establish the Society for Human Rights; and in southern California after World War II. A postwar struggle of endurance and revival rebuilt West Berlin which functioned as a Cold War gay mecca. Since 2000 the reunited city has made a new claim to the status of global gay capital that it held a century ago. A sense of doom pervades every page of Beachy’s book, which ends with the Nazi rise to power, but if there’s a volume two, the gloom will lift.

Christopher Capozzola is an associate professor of history at MIT.

Unfinished Business

STEPHEN HEMRICK

It’s Not Over: Getting Beyond Tolerance, Defeating Homophobia, and Winning True Equality

by Michelangelo Signorile

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 272 pages, \$27.

A CELEBRATORY MOOD filled the nation after the Supreme Court’s ruling on same-sex marriage, and we are still basking in the afterglow as I write. A longtime supporter of marriage equality, Michelangelo Signorile celebrated with everyone else, but his joy was tempered with a cautionary tone that’s captured by his new book’s title: “It’s Not Over.” For all our recent victories in the courts, there’s still a huge amount of work to be done.


Signorile, currently editor-at-large for *Huffington Post*’s “Gay Voices” column, has written a number of other books over the past two decades that serve as calls to action for the GLBT movement, including 1996’s *Outing Yourself: How to Come Out as Lesbian or Gay to Your Family, Friends and Coworkers*, and 2003’s *Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power*. What all of his books have in common is a reminder of the pitfalls of the closet and a plea for all GLBT people to be honest about their sexuality. It’s a theme he has pursued in nu-

merous articles for *The Advocate* and *Out* magazine, and on his radio show, *The Gist*, which airs weekdays on Sirius XM radio in the U.S. and on-line globally.

Despite victories in the Supreme Court culminating in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, we still don't have a national Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), so gay people can still be fired from their jobs for being gay in most states. In many states they can be evicted from their dwellings or denied service at public accommodations. Signorile reports that transgender and gay youths have experienced an uptick in violence and bullying in many parts of the country, where homophobia has become more public and more violent in response to the increased visibility of gay and transgender people in the news and in everyday life. There's still fierce opposition to GLBT equality in many religious communities, notably evangelical Protestantism, not to mention the Republican Party, whose gaggle of presidential candidates almost all oppose gay rights. There was a huge backlash after *Lawrence v. Texas* legalized same-sex sex in 2003. The backlash to *Obergefell* has begun as many states have begun to pass "religious freedom" laws that allow anti-gay discrimination as a

matter of "personal conscience."

Following the *Obergefell* ruling, there seemed to be general agreement among GLBT activists that the next item on the agenda should be passage of an ENDA-like piece of legislation at the national level. That ENDA was first introduced in Congress more than twenty years ago, that it's no closer to passage today than it was back then, underscores Signorile's point that there's still formidable resistance to GLBT equality out there. And because it splits almost perfectly along party lines, passing a national civil rights bill—or amending the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include "sexual orientation," as has been proposed—will prove challenging. For this reason, progress in the short term is likely to come at the state and local levels, and Signorile applauds grassroots efforts to this end.

And there's much more to be done beyond the ENDA front. Signorile lays out a kind of laundry list of unfinished business—creating safe schools for GLBT young people, working to change the atmosphere for gay athletes, fighting anti-gay sentiment in politics and the media, and encouraging the latter to cover our issues more responsibly—and he offers suggestions on how these goals might be achieved. 

ARTIST'S PROFILE

Michelle Tea Comes Out As a Grown-up

JIM FARLEY

LIKE a latter-day Jean Genet, Michelle Tea is a writer whose work has always been closely associated with the queer demimonde. For almost two decades, she has produced a series of memoirs and autobiographical novels about her growth as a working-class artist and sexual maverick, beginning with *The Passionate Mistakes and Intricate Corruption of One Girl in America* (1998). A picaresque novel based on her blue-collar upbringing in Chelsea, Massachusetts, her subsequent coming out as bisexual, and her stint as a twenty-something prostitute, it was the book that would cement her reputation as an enfant terrible of GLBT literature.

Since that time, Tea has been extremely prolific. In addition to the numerous books, zines, essays, and blogs she's created, she has worked tirelessly as an editor and literary organizer, most notably as the founder of RADAR Productions and cofounder of Sister Spit, a lesbian-feminist art collective that's now an imprint of City Lights Publishing.

Her new book, *How to Grow Up*, is part memoir and part self-help book. It opens with Tea in her late thirties, newly sober, and recovering from an eight-year relationship with a poetry slam champ who's also an addict and ten years her junior. When she moves into a grungy San Francisco apartment with a bunch of twenty-somethings and discovers a swarm of flies and maggots in the refrigerator on Thanksgiving, she realizes the low-rent bohemian lifestyle she'd grown accustomed to has lost its charm. In her customary dry

humor she muses: "If I turned forty while still living there, I was going to have really low self-esteem." As the title suggests, the book is full of sage advice on becoming an adult, which Tea manages to dispense without sacrificing any of her bohemian credibility.

This interview was conducted on-line last May.

Jim Farley: First, congratulations on becoming a mother! That news may come as a shock to fans of your earlier work. Can you talk about how this momentous turn of events came about?

Michelle Tea: Thank you. The process was pretty epic. I just hit forty and realized that if I was ever going to explore the possibility of children I had to jump on it, no waiting around for some fantasy better situation involving more money and a partner. I found a really amazing gay boy to help out with sperm—he's an artist, an activist, and a phenomenal drag performer—and then I met my now-wife Dashiell, and everything sort of took off because having a family was a long-time dream of hers. After finally breaking down and going to a fertility clinic, I learned my eggs were already too old, but she's nine years younger than me, so I wound up carrying her baby. Which was dreamy.

JF: *How to Grow Up* is a collection of fifteen personal essays. Some read like traditional memoirs, while others are more like self-help. What are you trying to achieve with this hybrid structure?

MT: I wasn't tripping on the structure too

much, I just had sort of a list of topics I wanted to get into, and I just felt it out and let each essay take its own shape. It's a lot different than my other memoirs, which I wrote deliberately to read like fiction. This book was very influenced by the years of blogging I'd been doing at xojane.com, where I'd been documenting my pregnancy attempts in a blog called "Getting Pregnant with Michelle Tea."

JF: Your reflections on sober living in the new book are helpful and often hilarious, which makes me think you'd be great to listen to at twelve-step meetings. Did sharing at meetings help you develop the material for *How to Grow Up*?

MT: Oh god, no! It's not really the type of environment to try out new work! Surely, though, years of sharing at twelve-step meetings helped me understand my story and the complexity of addiction in general, and the book benefited from that store of knowledge. I actually don't share very often at meetings, and I think it is because outside that world I am so often on a stage, talking about myself. And I'd done it *so* often while drunk! Talking about myself sort of felt sickeningly like a continuation of my alcoholic ego trip when I first came in, though I know it is more complicated than that. Still, it's been mostly a place for me to be quiet and listen.

JF: Like me, you grew up in a working-class suburb of Boston. As I read *How to Grow Up*, which delves into various aspects of your unconventional adolescence, I was reminded of another autobiographical writer from Boston,

Sylvia Plath. Were you consciously thinking of *The Bell Jar* while you were working on *How to Grow Up*, or am I reading too much into it?

MT: Isn't everyone always consciously thinking of *The Bell Jar* a little bit, all the time? I'm joking, but—I love *The Bell Jar*. I love Sylvia Plath. I have a whole part in a book I am editing right now about how I was dying to get locked up at McLean like Sylvia and Anne [Sexton] and all the crazy, sad poets—not to mention the wealthier of my teenage Goth friends—but I was too working-class to get to go crazy in that way. I had to find other ways. However, *The Bell Jar* never once occurred to me while writing *How to Grow Up*. It might have been a stronger influence on my other memoirs, which were written as straight prose, as *The Bell Jar* was.

JF: Eileen Myles is another working-class queer writer from Boston whom you've cited as a major influence. What was it like traveling with her on the Sister Spit tour after being such a big fan?

MT: It was sort of insane. It was definitely like having Prince in the van, or Kurt Cobain or something. She was that big to me. I'd hung out with her a couple times, and it was frankly hard for me to keep my shit together, so I was concerned about how I would maintain my cool being packed in a van with her for a solid month. But I think I did pretty well. It was a vast improvement from the first time I met her, when I actually declined an invitation to grab a burrito with her and some mutual friends because I simply couldn't cope with being in such close proximity to her. Now we have a solid friendship, but there are still moments when we're hanging out when this veil of deep awkwardness descends upon me, and that's why.

JF: You're known for writing candidly about your transgressive sexual experiences and your substance use. Were you concerned about alienating your fan base with *How to Grow Up*, which explores your sobriety, your marriage, and your decision to have a baby?

MT: I was aware of it; I guess I was concerned. In the simplest, stupidest way, I just didn't want anyone to be mad at me. It's sort of silly—nobody can live my life but me, and of course I believe in my life and all the choices I've made, but after spending so much time equating coolness with like being the most crazy fucked-up person or the most fuck-you radical, I was definitely a little uncomfortable writing so honestly about how different I am from that person today. I always had this underdog bravado in my memoirs, too, and I think it is very easy to be on the side of some broke-ass twenty-something dyke with a fucked-up family and sharp rhetoric who is also a drunk and will fight you. I mean, who doesn't love that? But writing about how awesome my conven-

tional life is now, and how it turned out, I actually wanted these very specific things that are more traditional, even conservative, from some points of view: marriage, children, a college degree, etc. I was concerned that it sounded like I was bragging or something. Or insinuating that everyone should want such things. But the majority of feedback I've gotten so far has been very positive. There's always something to be afraid of when a book is coming out, and that's what this one had me worried about.

JF: You made your reputation as a chronicler of the queer demimonde. Are there other worlds you'd like to explore in your work?

MT: I really love experiential journalism, getting to go out and immerse myself in some world and then write about it. I've done some pieces for *The Believer* like that, where I went to a taxidermy competition and Paris fashion week. But now with the baby it's hard to imagine being able to take off like that.



Michelle Tea. Photo by Lydia Daniller.

JF: Your life would make a compelling reality show. Is that something you'd consider?

MT: I'd rather have it be a scripted drama or dramedy. Reality TV is too manipulative, and I think I would burn out on it, since it would bring forth the more annoying aspects of my personality. But a fictionalized show, where you took my basic DNA and the landscape of my life and then played with it? That sounds really fun.

JF: One of my favorite chapters in *How to Grow Up* is "Too Cool for School," where you describe how you felt the need to get a college degree in your thirties despite having published several critically acclaimed books. Do you still worry about that?

MT: No, not at this point. Not with a kid. Now I have to worry about whether or not he's going to go to college. My wife is totally

not convinced college will exist by the time he's old enough. I think I was just having a moment where I realized I needed something to shift, and I made that shift happen by continuing to publish instead of going to school.

JF: Your thoughts on fashion and glamour in the book are a riot. You confess that one of your biggest regrets in life is that you didn't "claw your way into the fashion industry." What's stopping you from doing it now?

MT: Well, it's hard to start all over with a whole new career. I mean, I don't know how I would enact such a clawing, or what I would even do... I guess I could write about fashion. I was part of a fashion blog called Ironing Board Collective for about a year, blogging once a month, and the pieces are still out there. I'm a little less obsessed with fashion than I once was though. Part of that is being on Celexa, which made all of my obsessions come down a notch.

JF: Tennessee Williams once wrote that "all good art is an indiscretion," which might make a fitting epigraph for your body of work. To what, if anything, do you attribute your warts-and-all approach to writing?

MT: Hmm, certainly part of it is my nature, that I am not very shy and believe that in most cases shame is a problem. But I also began writing in earnest during a moment when so-called confessional poetry was on the rise, and I found it very interesting, inspiring, and liberating to use my own experience as material, and enjoyed pushing the boundaries of what was seen as appropriate or prudent to reveal. So many of my literary heroes were brave in speaking honestly about their lives—Jean Genet, Violette LeDuc, Diane di Prima, Dodie Bellamy, Chris Kraus, Cookie Mueller, David Wojnarowicz.

I was also aware of the political dimensions to this writing, coming from a marginalized place, as a girl and a queer one and a broke one. Also, this was on the heels of Riot Grrrl, where girls were getting on the mike at punk shows and speaking honestly about sexual abuse. This was on the heels of the zine explosion, which was very personal writing. So, these were the conditions my writing emerged from, all these influences that supported and pushed me toward being radically honest about my experiences.

JF: Is there anything you're currently working on that you'd care to tell us about?

MT: A lot of things are out there in the ether, and I'm waiting to get some feedback about them, including a finished novel that is part memoir, part apocalyptic fiction called *Black Wave*, which I really love. I'm saying that because I usually don't like my books when I finish them, not for a little while, but I dig this one.

Jim Farley is an associate editor of *The GLR*.

The Eccentricities of a Blue Dove

BORN Gerald Tyrwhitt, Lord Berners (1883-1950) was well known during his lifetime as a writer in several genres. His novels and memoirs were well received, and they've been reprinted over the years. He designed sets and costumes for a number of ballets and operas. A friend of Stravinsky, he was admired by Diaghilev and socialized with members of the Ballets Russes, for which he composed "The Triumph of Neptune" for its twentieth anniversary.

His contemporary, the writer Osbert Sitwell, said Berners was "addicted to wit or humor." A shameless jokester, he teased people to the point of cruelty. It was his custom to dye the white doves on his estate every color of the rainbow. He also had a gift for making and keeping friends and was known for his loyalty to them. Berners graduated from Eton but later failed his foreign service exams, became an honorary, unpaid attaché, and was stationed in Constantinople for a short time before World War I. He met "The Mad Boy," otherwise known as Robert Heber-Percy, in

MARTHA E. STONE

The Mad Boy, Lord Berners, My Grandmother and Me: An Aristocratic Family, a High-Society Scandal and an Extraordinary Legacy

by Sofka Zinovieff
HarperCollins. 448 pages, \$35.

the 1930s at a house party hosted by mutual friends. At that time, Berners was almost fifty years of age and Heber-Percy was almost thirty years younger. Heber-Percy was also probably (though not positively) the grandfather of Sofka Zinovieff, author of this very detailed biography—so overstuffed with gossip and scandal that it's impossible to read for long stretches without feeling as if one has gorged on too many cream puffs. It has to be put aside every once in a while to gather the strength to read about yet another party or pe-

ruse another guest book containing names of every other British aristocrat, movie star, writer, or hanger-on.

Soon after they met, Robert Heber-Percy, who was "only known for behaving badly," and Lord Berners began living together at the ancestral Berners home, Faringdon House, in what was possibly Berners' first intimate relationship. Heber-Percy had "the confidence of a hedonist and the fearlessness of a wild sexual opportunist." His "madness," apparently, was basically his own bad behavior and its influence on his friends, and his refusal to toe

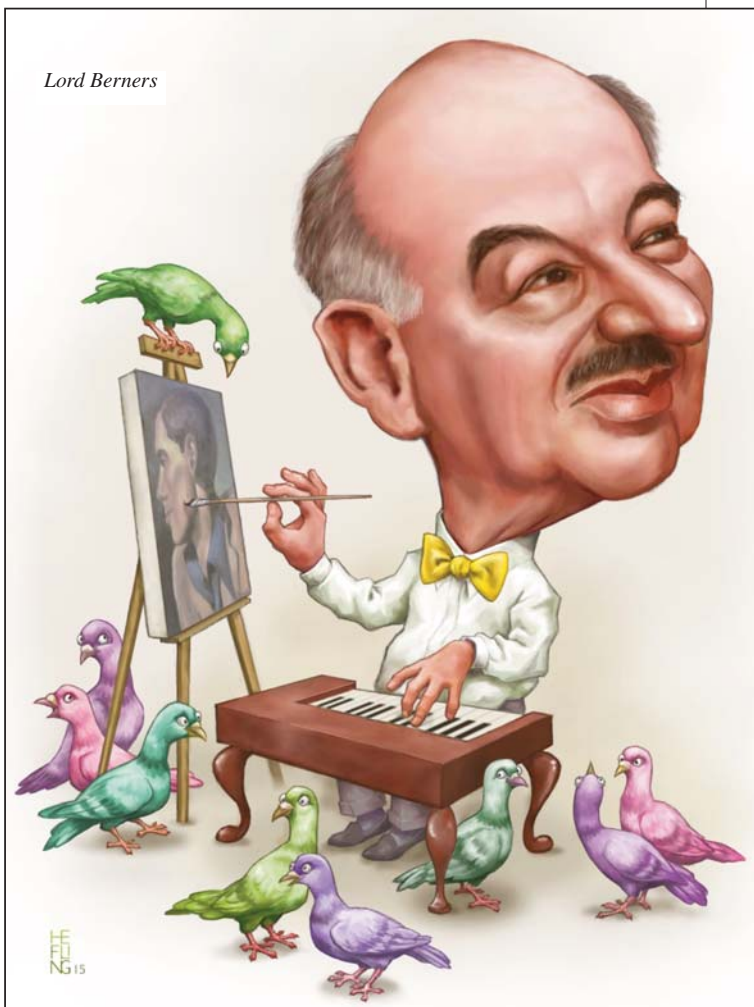
anybody's line. Berners took great pains to be sure that Heber-Percy would be able to inherit Faringdon House, known to be much more comfortable than many of the other great British mansions, and Heber-Percy, in turn, made sure that the author, his putative granddaughter, inherited the estate.

Zinovieff devotes a good part of the book to her grandmother and mother. Her grandmother, Jennifer Fry, had "occasional flings" with women but was basically straight; the author considers Heber-Percy to have been basically gay. Heber-Percy and Fry, who was possibly already pregnant at the time of their 1942 marriage, moved in with Berners at Faringdon House and divorced five years later.

While the casual anti-Semitism evinced by Berners and Heber-Percy was, sadly, typical of their time, Berners' undying friendship with fascist Diana Mitford Mosley does make one squirm. In her 2003 obituary, *The New York Times* stated that she never recanted her admiration for Hitler, who was a guest, as was Josef Goebbels, at her 1936 wedding in Berlin. She and her husband Sir Oswald Mosley were imprisoned in England during World War II for their anti-British activism. Berners visited her frequently throughout her incarceration, and both he and Heber-Percy loved her for her "willingness to go against the tide and not care what the world said." Despite this, and perhaps as a tribute to his gift of friendship, Alice B. Toklas included some of Berners' recipes in her 1954 *Cook Book*, and both she and Gertrude Stein were guests at Faringdon House—where they heard more than their fair share of anti-Semitic remarks.

The Mad Boy is a thorough, if not exhaustive, look into a long lost world. Its glossy pages, each one of which is decorated with the image of a blue dove, contribute to its heft, and there is a generous supply of photographs.

Lord Berners



BEYOND HUMANISM

Queer Inhumanisms

An issue of *GLQ* (21:2-3)

Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano, issue editors

This issue features a group of leading theorists from multiple disciplines who decenter the human in queer theory, exploring what it means to treat “the human” as simply one of many elements in a queer critical assemblage. \$18

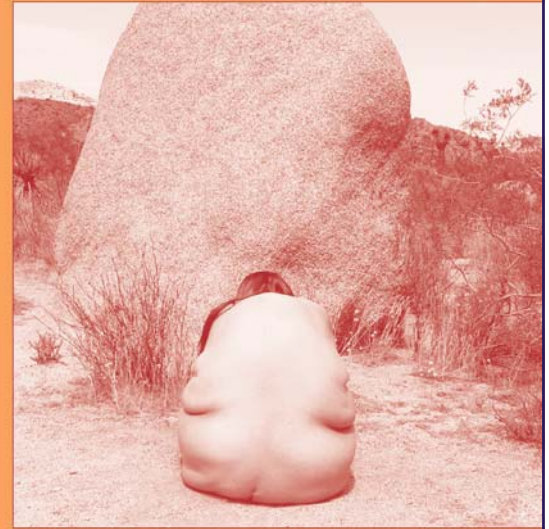
Contributors: Neel Ahuja, Karen Barad, Jayna Brown, Mel Y. Chen, Jack Halberstam, Jinthana Haritaworn, Myra Hird, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Eileen Joy, Eunjung Kim, Dana Luciano, Uri McMillan, José Esteban Muñoz, Tavia Nyong’o, Jasbir K. Puar, Susan Stryker, Kimberly Tallbear, Jeanne Vaccaro, Harlan Weaver, Jami Weinstein

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Queer Inhumanisms

Edited by

MEL Y. CHEN and DANA LUCIANO

TSQ

Tranimalities

Special Issue Editors
Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein

Transgender Studies
Quarterly

Volume 2 • Number 2 • May 2015

Tranimalities

An issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (2:2)

Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein, issue editors

This issue argues that the human/nonhuman distinction is inextricably tied to questions of gender and sexual difference, connecting that distinction to transgender studies’ investigation of the refusal of full humanity to transgender people. \$12

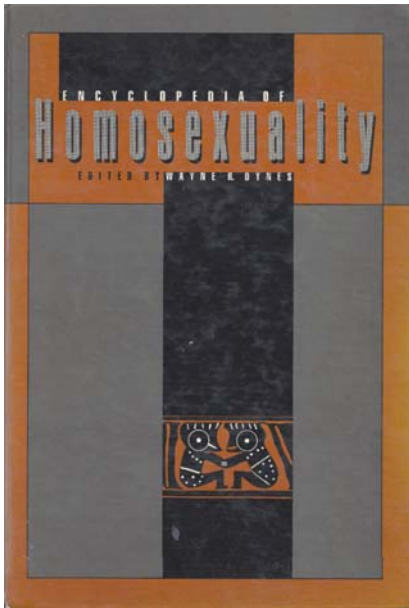
Contributors include Mel Y. Chen, July Cole, Claire Colebrook, Paisley Currah, Eva Hayward, David Huebert, Katie King, Camille Nurka, Nicole Seymour, Susan Stryker, Jami Weinstein, Cleo Woelfle-Erskine

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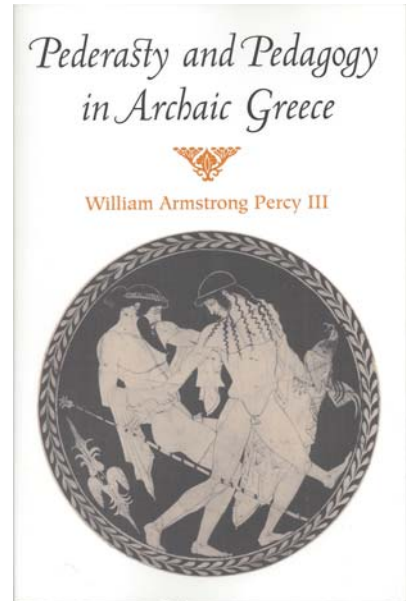


Garland, 1990. Routledge Reprints (late 2015)

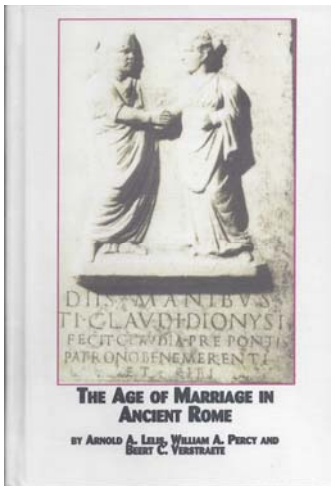
William Armstrong Percy

'55, AM '62, Ph.D. '64
Princeton

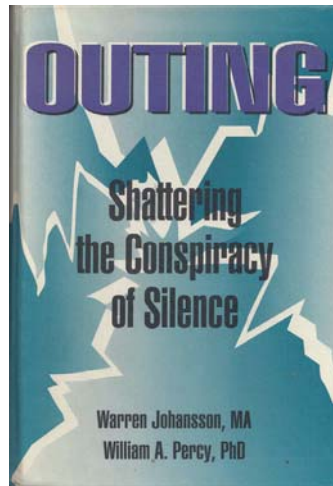
Taxation in the Kingdom of Sicily under Charles of Anjou (1266-1285) and the Vespers, Italian Quarterly 1976-81.



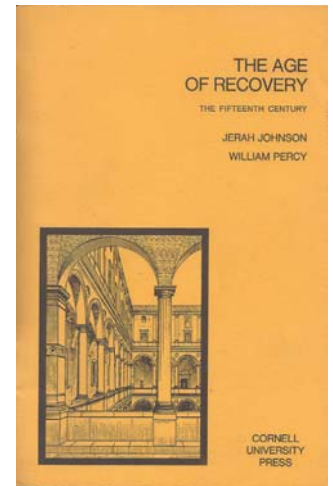
Edited by Donald Stone and never cited in *L'Année Philologique* for being too raunchy, *Pederasty and Pedagogy* (Illinois, 1996) was hailed by Paul Cartledge to be the first to go beyond Dover's *Greek Homosexuality*. Gore Vidal loved what I had done to Dover.



Demonstrated that Roman males first married around 18, not 28, and females at 14, not 19, contrary to the dogma of modern classicists for 30 years, enshrined by misguided epigraphers Saller, Shaw, and Scheidel. With Arnold Leis and Beert Verstraete. Stats by Geza Schay. Mellen, 1996.



During the heyday of Queer Nation, I offered bounties of \$10k for outing living American cardinals, four-star officers of any branch, and sitting Supreme Court justices. Now, after *Bowers* and repeal of "Don't Ask," limited to cardinals, but increased to \$30k. With Warren Johansson. Haworth Press, 1994.



With Jerah Johnson, Cornell 1970, the first American university to have a press. Europe in the 15th Century followed *Age of Adversity* in Edward W. Fox's prestigious series on Western Civilization which I helped to amend and complete.

My website, www.williamapercy.com, explains that, after 470 BC, silver replaced clay for Greek homoerotic vases, analyzes the importation of 250,000 slaves to the USA between 1807 and 1861, and criticizes today's classicists for belittling Greco-Roman achievements. My scandalous memoir follows my Uncle William Alexander Percy's *Lanterns on the Levee*, Knopf, 1941. The William A. Percy Foundation, www.wapercyfoundation.org, chaired by Thomas K Hubbard of UT Austin, is also named for Uncle Will.