

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE FIRST GAY NOVEL

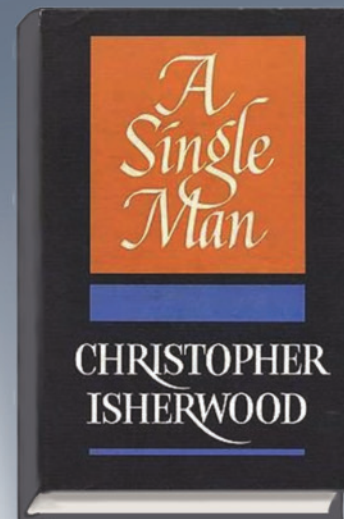
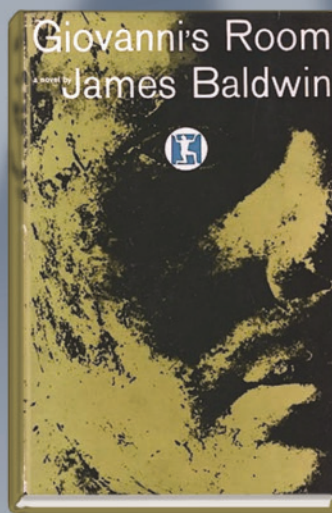
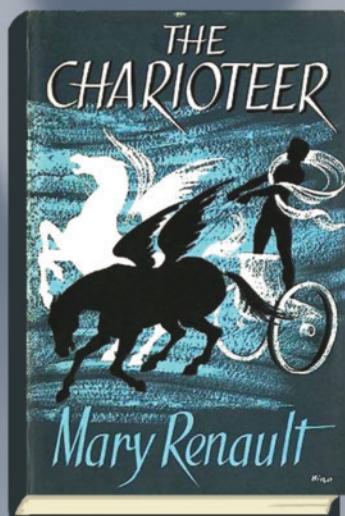
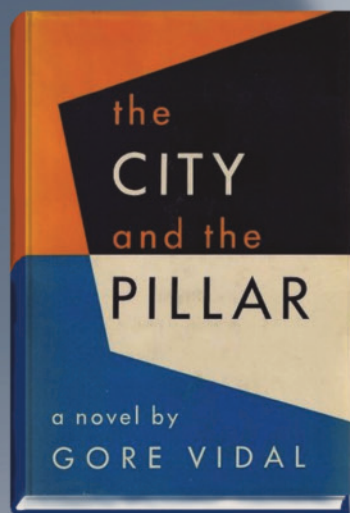
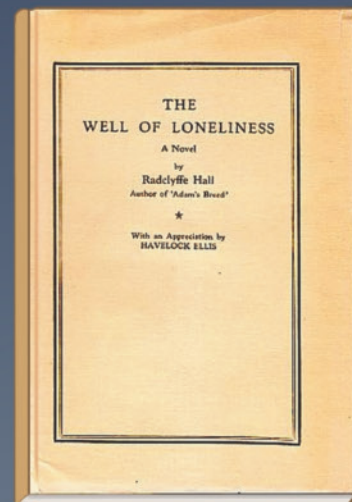
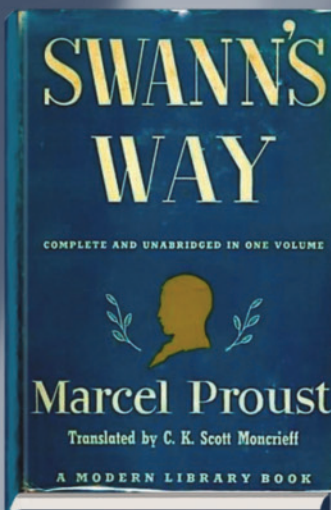
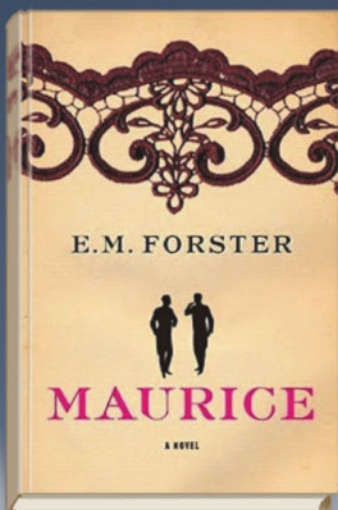
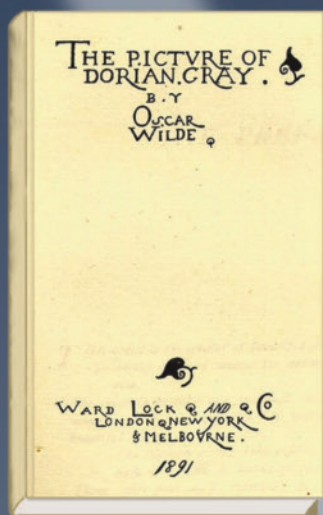
The Gay & Lesbian Review

WORLDWIDE

November–December 2014

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And the Nominees Are...



Oscar Wilde
MICHAEL HATTERSLEY
MARTHA E. STONE

E. M. Forster
DONALD GORTON
LEWIS DESIMONE

Marcel Proust
ANDREW HOLLERAN
JEFFREY ROUND

Radclyffe Hall
DIANA SOUHAMI
JEAN ROBERTA

Gore Vidal
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Mary Renault
ALAN CONRATH

James Baldwin
JAMES POLCHIN
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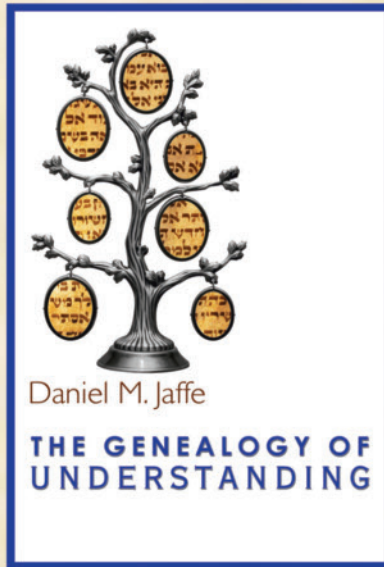


The fiction of Daniel M. Jaffe, acclaimed chronicler of gay-Jewish life

Daniel M. Jaffe's short story collection *Jewish Gentle and Other Stories of Gay-Jewish Living* was published by Lethe Press in 2011, and received rave reviews, especially from the Jewish Book Council. Jaffe's novel *The Limits of Pleasure* was a Finalist for one of *ForeWord Magazine's* Book of the Year Awards, and has been republished by the Bear Bones Books imprint of Lethe Press in 2010. Lethe Press released his new novel in stories *The Genealogy of Understanding* in 2014. His fiction has been taught in several college/university courses.

More than 100 of Jaffe's short stories, essays, and articles have appeared in anthologies, literary journals and newspapers such as *The Forward*, *Jewish Currents*, *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *The Florida Review*, *Christopher Street*, *The James White Review*, *Found Tribe*, and *M2M: New Literary Fiction*.

Jaffe currently teaches creative writing workshops online and in-person for the UCLA Extension Writers' Program, which awarded him the 2006 Outstanding Instructor Award in Online Writing Education. Jaffe is one of the authors profiled in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature*. He's read publicly from his work and lectured on creative writing and literary translation at universities, conferences, synagogues and Jewish community centers around the country. He holds degrees from Princeton University (A.B.), Harvard Law School (J.D.), and Vermont College (M.F.A.).



Is ancient Torah relevant to the social issues of today? In *The Genealogy of Understanding*, Matt Klein, a contemporary Jewish Scheherazade, questions whether Torah can illuminate and guide responses to such issues as gay marriage, infidelity, and prejudice that threaten to splinter families in the suburban New Jersey community of his upbringing. Each of the fifty-three stories in this novel responds to a particular weekly Torah reading, resulting in a work of fiction that explores Jewish spirituality, ethics, and community values, as well as the nature of human heart, mind, and soul.

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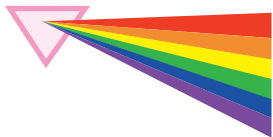


A year after the death of his Holocaust-surviving grandmother, Dave leaves Boston for Amsterdam, the home of Anne Frank, whom his Grandma revered.

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

- How Gay Was *Dorian Gray*?** 10 MICHAEL HATTERSLEY
Oscar Wilde's classic *almost* dared to speak a certain love's name
- While *Maurice* Slept** 13 DON GORTON
Forster's novel would have been a bombshell in 1914, but in 1971?
- Proust's Search for Things to Come** 17 ANDREW HOLLERAN
Quite explicitly gay, the *Recherche* is rarely credited as "the first"
- The Case for *The Well of Loneliness*** 22 DIANA SOUHAMI
Radclyffe Hall's novel hinted at a politics of sexual identity
- Gore Vidal's *Shot across the Bow*** 25 STEVEN F. DANSKY
The City and the Pillar presents a strong case—and yet...
- Mary Renault as the First Gay Novelist** 28 ALAN BRADY CONRATH
Starting with *The Charioteer*, same-sex love permeated her fiction
- The Baldwin of *Giovanni's Room*** 31 JAMES POLCHIN
His exploration of "the closet" anticipated the struggle ahead
- A Single Man We Can Relate To*** 34 CHRIS FREEMAN
Isherwood's 1964 novel gave us the first modern gay relationship

REVIEWS

- Claudia Bauer — *Frida Kahlo* 38 JEAN ROBERTA
- Gregg Shapiro — *Lincoln Avenue*; Rebecca Rotert — *Last Night at the Blue Angel* 39 DAVID MASELLO
- Suzanna Danuta Walters — *The Tolerance Trap* 40 MARCUS AURIN
- Vincent Cianni — *Gays in the Military* 42 ROSEMARY BOOTH
- Jon Derek Croteau — *My Thinning Years: Starving the Gay Within* 43 JOHN R. KILLACKY
- Alain Mabanckou — *Letter to Jimmy* 44 CHARLES GREEN
- Lynn Sherr — *Sally Ride: America's First Woman in Space* 44 KAT LONG
- John Browne — *The Glass Closet: Why Coming Out Is Good Business* 45 HEATHER SEGEL
- David Greven — *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire...* 46 DALE W. BOYER
- Francine Prose — *Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932: A Novel* 47 IRENE JAVORS
- Judith Frank — *All I Love and Know* 47 TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER
- David McConnell — *American Honor Killings* 48 CHRISTOPHER LEE COCHRAN
- Jalil Lespert, dir. — *Yves Saint Laurent*; Martin Provost, dir. — *Violette* (Films) 49 ALLEN ELLENZWEIG
- Stephen Silha, dir. — *Big Joy: The Adventures of James Broughton* (Film) 51 JIM FARLEY
- Neon Trees — *Pop Psychology* (Music) 53 COLIN CARMAN
- An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle* (Art) 56 JAMES CASSELL
- Reel to Real: Portrayals and Perceptions of Gays in Hollywood* (Art) 58 CHRIS FREEMAN

POEMS & DEPARTMENTS

- CORRESPONDENCE** 6
- In Memoriam* — Nancy Garden, Pioneer of Young Adult Fiction 7 MARTHA E. STONE
- BTW** 8 RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.
- Art Memo* — The Man Who Was *Dorian Gray* 12 MARTHA E. STONE
- Art Memo* — Forster's *Maurice* and the Birth of a Genre 14 LEWIS DESIMONE
- Art Memo* — Proust's Way Home 20 JEFFREY ROUND
- Art Memo* — Why We Wished at *The Well of Loneliness* 24 JEAN ROBERTA
- Art Memo* — That Scene in *The City and the Pillar* 26 DAVID MASELLO
- Poem* — "The Mockers" 30 MARY MERIAM
- Art Memo* — The Sloth of Sadness 36 ANDREW HOLLERAN
- Poem* — "Snow Ghazal" 41 CHARLIE BONDHUS
- Poem* — "Let It Stay" (Translated by William Leo Coakley) 46 CONSTANTINE P. CAVAFY
- CULTURAL CALENDAR** 54

Special Issue: “The First Gay Novel”

THIS ISSUE, which comes out as we complete our twentieth year, started out as a “best of” issue but developed into something more. It does bring back about fifteen pieces from the past, but the authors have offered new introductions and in some cases other new material. And while it is still a “best of” issue, there’s a focus now—a query that GLBT readers have been known to debate at cocktail parties: What was the first gay novel?

The matter is far from open-and-shut, and the debate quickly devolves into a more basic discussion of what is meant by “gay” (or LGBTQ, queer, etc.). Since the word “gay” itself only came into general use in the 1960s, the question arises whether it can be retrofitted to novels that were written long before that time. Thus, for example, the first nominee in the series is Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, whose central character sure *seems* gay to us but who clearly doesn’t think of himself in that way. The last of the eight, Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man*, published some 75 years later, is preferred by those who insist on a more restrictive definition of “gay” to denote a personal identity based on sexual orientation.

And so, the nominees. Let me just say a little something about why I saw fit to include each one. I should note that we’re probably talking here only about the English-speaking world, and in fact seven of the eight nominees are British or American novels.

In his piece about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the late Michael Hattersley offered a spirited defense of it as “a homosexual novel,” written by a gay man who scarcely bothered to

conceal the sexual orientation of his central character. But conceal it he did, detailing Dorian’s affairs with women while offering only vague allusions to flings of another kind. Doubtless part of what gives *Dorian* its status as a “gay novel” is the subsequent fate of its author, who was tried and convicted on charges of “gross indecency” and has become—for us—a kind of gay liberation hero. Taken by itself, however, the novel reads like the sort of quaint period piece for which Wilde’s plays are famous.

Ah, *Maurice*, and what might have been. Completed in 1914, E. M. Forster’s novel seems curiously modern by Wildean standards, its central characters far more simpatico than Wilde’s queeny showboats. The two-year affair between Maurice and Clive is presented for what it is, and even though Clive ends up marrying a woman, Maurice finally settles into a long-term relationship with a gamekeeper named Alec. If only the novel had been published in 1914! Alas, Forster suppressed the book until after his death, so it wasn’t published until 1971, just in time for the dawning of the gay liberation era.

And on to Marcel Proust. The first of the seven volumes of *À la recherche du temps perdu* was published in 1913, but Moncrieff’s translation into English didn’t appear until the ’20s. Andrew Holleran points out that the same-sex relationships in the *Recherche* are unmistakable, yet it’s never thought of as a “gay novel,” so dominant is the theme of Swann’s obsession with Odette. Still, it’s hard to overlook the fact that one of the books is called “Sodom and Gomorrah” and details the Baron de Char-

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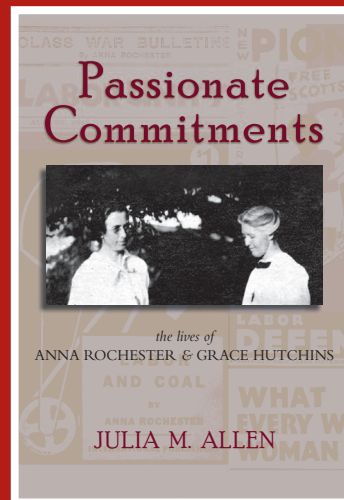
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lus' affairs with other men, not to mention his disquisitions on the topic of "inverts."

The 1920s also saw the publication of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), by Radclyffe Hall, which tracks the unambiguously same-sex relationships of Stephen Gordon, a butch woman, with her female lovers in England and Paris. That Hall's central character, like Hall herself, thinks of herself as an "invert" and eventually links up with a subculture of fellow inverts represents a breakthrough toward our concept of a stable sexual identity. On the other hand, the author buys into the notion that inversion is a pathological condition, albeit one that cannot be helped or undone, and ends up pleading for tolerance: "Give us also the right to our existence!"

If an actual vote for "the first" were taken among GLBT readers, my money would be on Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948), which is all about the gay life and times of Jim Willard, who has affairs of both the heart and body with other men from the late '30s until after the War. What prevents the book from being a fully realized gay novel is that there's always so much resistance to the thought of being "that way," so much denial and self-loathing. Then, too, there is Vidal's lifelong insistence that there's no such thing as a "gay identity" apart from sexual acts. Thus to take Vidal at his word would be to concede that the guys in *The City and the Pillar* are not, in fact, gay.

Mary Renault wrote many novels with gay themes, most of them set in ancient Greece. Often overlooked is an early (1953) novel called *The Charioteer*, which is set in modern times and features a love affair between two men in World War II. *The Charioteer* and its successors were bestsellers that brought same-sex relations to the general public, including a large homosexual readership. While no one novel by Renault is generally given primacy among gay novels, I think a case can be made, based on her steady output of novels with same-sex themes, for Renault as the first gay novelist.

James Polchin remarks in his essay that James Baldwin was "the first global American writer"—and I think this is especially true if we consider his reputation as a gay writer. Indeed if we ponder the "first gay novel" problem from the standpoint of the world outside the U.S.—or, indeed, outside a literate elite of GLBT readers—it is quite possible that *Giovanni's Room* (1956) would be the first book to come to mind. One could argue that it presents a kind of homosexuality that is more European than American, less self-consciously "gay" and more about shifting relationships and slippery sexualities.

Published five years before Stonewall, Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964) is the preferred "first" for those on the social relativist end of the spectrum, who hold that our concept of "gay" is a recent construct which finds no real equivalent in earlier times. George and Jim are adult men in a partnership of equals, and they clearly define themselves according to their sexual orientation, which they neither deny nor conceal. What's more, they are in love—or were, as the younger man has recently died (hence the title); much of the narrative is flashbacks about their life together. And perhaps this is what really separates *A Single Man* from, say, *The City and the Pillar*—the fact that its protagonists are not in denial or hiding from society or themselves, but able to partake of a kind of love that heterosexuals have been writing odes, and novels, about for centuries. Isherwood's book embraced a new kind of self that was about to be born.

RICHARD SCHNEIDER JR.

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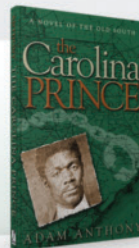


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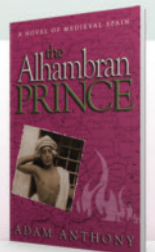


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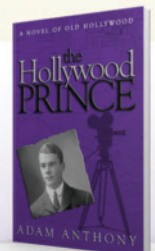


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In Defense of Grindr

To the Editor:

It's great to see a Marxist analysis of gay life in the *Review* ["Grindr's Lonely Crowd," September-October 2014 issue]. Unfortunately, Fox's comment reminds me of the lingering puritanism in Marxism, and the recourse to abstract language, which is particularly unhelpful when one is talking about intimate life.

His starting point is just wrong: he states that identifying as gay "means that you engage in a particular set of sexual activities." That may describe someone called homosexual or, in AIDS language, MSM, but being gay suggests a conscious identity based on homosexual desires—which means you could be a celibate gay (as is the claim of some priests) or, alternatively, you could engage in all sorts of homosexual acts and reject any gay identity. The further claim, that Grindr undermines gay community, would be far more persuasive if Fox wrote out of personal experience or referred to the now quite extensive research that is based on talking with guys who use the Internet to hook up.

Okay, I am one of those guys—and I am currently involved with a guy whom I met through Grindr. One of my closest friends is also someone I met on-line; his reaction was that thanks to sex apps, he now knows many of his neighbors. I know activists who use the apps to tell their sex buddies about political rallies, and many guys use them as much for social connections as for sexual ones. (Look at the chat rooms on Gaydar as evidence, though admittedly they're not as used as much in the U.S. as in Australia and the U.K.)

Yes, ours is an "ephemeral" community, but it is held together by far more than sex. Indeed, as I argued in my last book, *The End of the Homosexual?*, what's striking is that community institutions have survived, sometimes in different forms, despite huge shifts in social attitudes and on-line possibilities for hook-ups. Events like the various gay games, the strength of gay religious groups, business associations, publications like this one, gay political organizations, et al. attest to this. Even while G/L

bookshops are collapsing (as are other bookstores), there is a growing on-line presence of queer life that goes far beyond just wanting quick sex.

I too yearn, in principle, for "the liberatory force of self-abolition"—hence the reference to a gay liberation utopianism in the title of my last book. But in practice I recognize that in the search for meaning and belonging a site like Grindr may be a lot more fun than the slowly disappearing world of hidden bars and toilets. Unlike Fox, I accept that Grindr's founder Joel Simkhai is doing what the Gay Activists Alliance did forty years ago when it organized dance parties at the Firehouse in New York. Now, however, everyone can join in.

Dennis Altman

La Trobe University, Australia

Title Disparaged an Estimable Man

To the Editor:

Regarding the title of a piece in the July-August issue, "More Adventures of a Gay Roué," anyone who knew Claude Fredericks—or, for that matter, anyone who has read any of his long journal—can attest to the fact that in no way can he even remotely be described as "roué." Gentle and courteous to every sentient being, Claude lived a most ordered—and virtuous—long life. Yes, he pursued life—and art—passionately, but in a self-disciplined and thoughtful way; in fact, *The Journal of Claude Fredericks* is nothing if not a document of this pursuit over the course of more than eighty years.

The review that you published will, I hope, speak for itself, but the decision of the *GLR* to change the review's original title, "An Examined Life: The Journal of Claude Fredericks," to one with such a salacious headline (without even consulting the its author) is bewildering. I am deeply offended to see my dear and beautiful—and so recently dead—husband described in such a way.

Marc Harrington, Director, The Claude Fredericks Foundation, Pawlet, VT

Editor's Note: Must confess my exposure to the word "roué" is mostly through crossword puzzles (the Times, of course), where it seems to have acquired the sense of "seducer" or, at worst, "playboy." But the word apparently connotes a lecherous

old man, making my use of it quite infelicitous indeed, as the diaries under review describe the author's amorous adventures while a young student at Harvard. Mea culpa! — RS

CA Marriages Not Annulled in '08!

To the Editor:

Regarding the film *The Case Against 8*, Ziyad Saadi writes [in the September-October 2014 issue]: "The film's subjects are all skeptical about Prop 8's chance of success, so it comes as quite a shock to them when the referendum passes and their marriages are annulled."

Not so! My husband Kurt and I are among the 18,000+ couples who married during "the window," and those marriages were never annulled! There may have been some talk toward that end, but if the couples involved (or, worse yet, their attorneys) believed that their "window" marriages were ever annulled, then they were quite mistaken.

Now, what *might* have happened is that the plaintiff in question was informed by the powers-that-be that her 2004 marriage (from the "Winter of Love" in San Francisco) had been invalidated. There were about 4,000 of those, and they were indeed overturned. One reason why Kurt and I married in 2008 was that California couples wanted to make it as difficult as possible for the state to overturn the large number of marriages that took place. So, even when the state stopped issuing marriage licenses for same-sex couples after the November 2008 referendum, they never went back and invalidated those marriages.

Paul D. Cain, Reno, NV

The First Gay Movie on TV

To the Editor:

Back in the May-June issue, a review of the movie *Dallas Buyers Club* (titled "Close Encounters of the Unexpected Kind") claimed that *An Early Frost* (1985) was the first prime-time TV show to feature gay leads. This is off by a long shot. In 1972 there was a made-for-TV movie called *That Certain Summer* with Hal Holbrook and Martin Sheen as lovers, which preceded *An Early Frost* by well over a decade.

Ken Furtado, Phoenix

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Nancy Garden, Pioneer of Young Adult Fiction

MARTHA E. STONE

LITERATURE aimed at teenagers has been around since the 1940s, but it really came into its own only in the 1970s. The popular and never out-of-print *Annie on My Mind*, published in 1982 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, is well-known for its portrayal of teenage lesbian love, and it is one of the first gay or lesbian young adult novels to hold the promise of a happy ending. Its author, Nancy Garden, died of a heart attack on June 23, 2014, at her home in Carlisle, Massachusetts, at the age of 76.

Antoinette Elisabeth Garden (she changed her name to Nancy) was born in Boston and had planned to become an actress. After receiving a BFA from Columbia and working off-Broadway and in summer stock, she received a master's in speech from Columbia Teacher's College. She published her first books in 1971 and worked as a writer and editor for the rest of her life, going on to write about three dozen books for children, teens and adults, in a wide variety of genres. Garden also wrote two more lesbian-themed novels: *Good Moon Rising* (1996) and *Holly's Secret* (2000).

But she made her name with *Annie on My Mind*. Growing up, she had been unable to find books that reflected her life experience, only novels with lurid covers sold at drugstores or bus stations, books that ended unhappily for the gay or lesbian characters. This is the situation that she set out to rectify. *Annie on My Mind* is told in the voice of MIT freshman Liza, who reflects on her love affair with Annie during their senior year at separate high schools. Liza is one of two children in a professional, well-established family and attends a private high school in Brooklyn Heights; Annie is a native Californian, an Italian-American whose father drives a cab and whose multi-generational family lives in a tenement and attends a rough-

and-tumble high school. They'd met by chance while visiting the Metropolitan Museum, fell in love, and carried out a discreet affair, aided by a fortuitous house-sitting gig during a school vacation.

The house, owned by closeted lesbian teachers, is the site of some of the most dramatic moments of the book. (The lesbian teachers, who are outed by some uptight parents, make the best of the fact that they are forced out of their jobs.) The girls, both of whom are close to their families, are inveterate



Cover of the 1982 edition

museum-goers and readers, giving Garden the opportunity to mention several classic lesbian novels, such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Isabelle Miller's *Patience and Sarah* (1972). Liza and Annie struggle with their sexual identities, looking up the word "homosexuality" in the dictionary with much trepidation and purchasing "a couple of gay magazines and newspapers."

In 2000, *School Library Journal* named *Annie on My Mind* to its list of 100 books that shaped the 20th century, and Garden received many book awards and honors. But *Annie* was also burned in Missouri and banned in a school library in Kansas. The book became the subject of a federal censorship case when a suit, supported by the ACLU and the American Library Association, resulted in a ruling that the removal of the book was unconstitutional, and it was returned to the library.

Garden's *The Year They Burned the Books* (1999) focuses on this event. In an on-line interview with writer Cynthia Leitich Smith, Garden is quoted as saying: "One teacher wrote me that he was sure Annie had kept one of his students from suicide—that's perhaps the most moving comment of all."

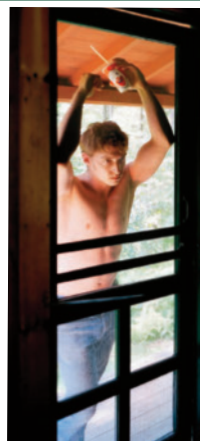
Nancy Garden is survived by Sandra Scott, with whom she was together for over forty years. The two were married in Massachusetts in 2004.

— HARVARD AFFILIATES —

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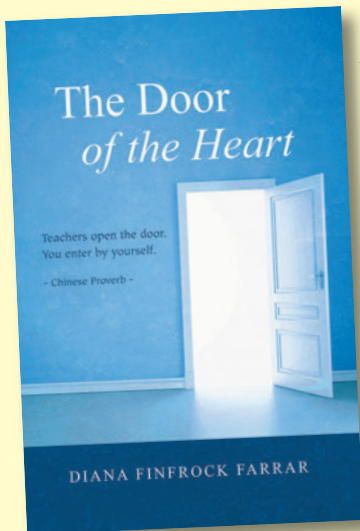
Keep the Well in Greenwell There was once a country singer named Josey Greenwell who had a following and was openly gay (as reported by queerty.com). But then he sort of dropped out of sight for a while—it happens—and after six or eight months his fans noticed that even his Facebook page and Wikipedia presence had evaporated. Meanwhile, there's a new country singer on the block named Nate Green, who's *totally* heterosexual and... it didn't take long for someone to notice that Josey Greenwell and Nate Green are one and the same. In fact, Nate did surprisingly little to alter his appearance, but now that the jig is up, he's threatening to sue anyone who asserts that he's gay, and he's aggressively banning gay men from interacting with him on social media. What makes this presto-chango odder still is that Greenwell had come out very publicly and proudly just a few years ago, and the Internet is rife with photos of the handsome hunk cavorting with his boyfriend (Brazilian model



Rodiney Santiago) in his underwear for *DNA* magazine. Green/well's total denial of his former self leads one to wonder if he knows what century he's living in. Dude, we know what you look like, and those photos aren't going anywhere!

Prophecy Fulfilled Antonin Scalia is often cited by circuit judges when they're striking down state bans on same-sex marriage—a huge irony in that Scalia is a staunch opponent of marriage equality. It was in his dissenting opinion to 2003's *Lawrence v. Texas* case, which struck down all anti-sodomy laws, that Scalia couldn't resist issuing a dire warning that the floodgates were now open for all manner of pro-gay decisions. Acknowledging that the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause must apply to gays, Scalia argued in *Lawrence* that the only thing separating gay people from full equality was society's moral disapproval. This is the argument that preserved anti-sodomy laws in *Bowers v. Hardwick* in 1986, and the very one that the majority rejected in 2003. Wrote Scalia in *Lawrence*: "State laws against same-sex marriage ... are likewise sustainable only in light of *Bowers*' validation of laws based on moral choices." This is the passage that has repeatedly been cited by judges ruling against gay marriage bans—most recently by a U.S. District Court in Florida. In this respect, Scalia has all the trappings of a biblical prophet, not only predicting doom but enumerating the exact sins for which the Hebrew people are about to be punished. One always wonders, maybe if these guys had just kept quiet, God might not have noticed. Too late now!

Change comes from within.



After two decades of marriage, Tammy and Ed Sloan suddenly find themselves deeply divided by the gay rights issue. A story of being true to oneself, of marriage and commitment, and of individual responses to change, *The Door of the Heart* is also a story about polarization and how it limits the emotional and spiritual growth of individuals.



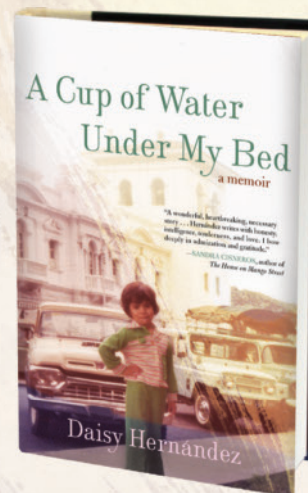
Diana Finrock Farrar brings gay issues home and depicts the mental and emotional work people must do to change their views and learn to accept themselves and each other. Born into a family that taught her how to live a life of love and relationship, her novel is rooted in faith from a range of perspectives and shows how Christianity can both harden and open people's hearts. This is an emotional and open-minded read, appealing to friends and family who may be struggling to understand the intersection between LGBT issues and their beliefs. Diana and her wife, Charlotte, were married in Ontario, Canada in 2010.



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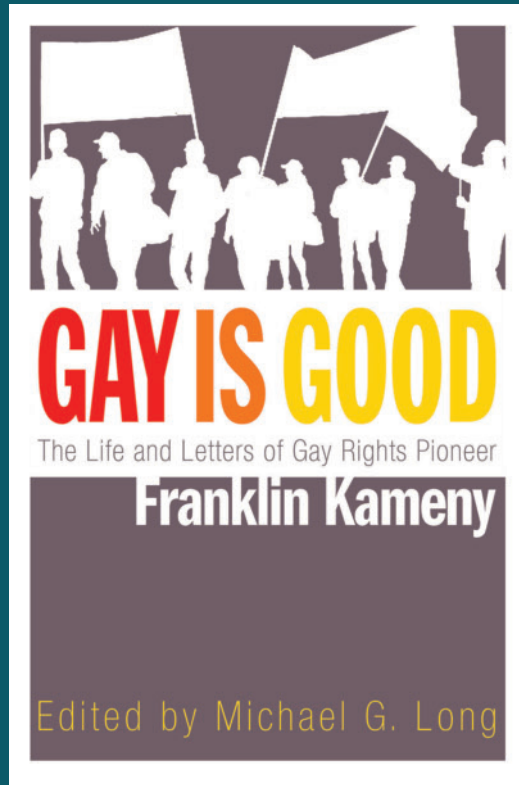
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Demonic Circle The “ex-gay” movement has collapsed as a therapeutic concept, but that hasn’t stopped a rump faction of NARC and Exodus International from lingering at the trough, as there’s still funding to be had. Virtually all of the leading evangelists of “reparative therapy” have repudiated its efficacy, admitting that no one was ever “cured” of being gay, much less transformed into a practicing heterosexual. And now the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) has quietly revised its Code of Ethics to advocate not reparative therapy but simple abstinence for gays. So the ex-gay groups are reorganizing with slightly modified names, claiming *not* that they can make you heterosexual, but merely celibate. Um... isn’t that what Christian churches of all stripes have been preaching about illicit sex—whether premarital, adulterous, or homosexual—from pretty much the dawn of Christianity itself? So we’re right back where we started from before all this “ex-gay” nonsense began. Still, this movement probably did more than anything to demonstrate that sexual orientation is pretty damn stable, if not immutable. Those of us who had lingering doubts, who held fast to some Freudian notion of universal bisexuality, have to be impressed by the stubborn resistance of sexual orientation to change, however strenuous the effort.

Putting the X in Ex-Gay We can’t report on every run-of-the-mill sex scandal involving a fundamentalist preacher or anti-gay politician, but every so often one comes along that seems to harbor a deeper meaning. Take the case of Steven Barnes, a former teacher at the Bethel Baptist School in Wills, Mississippi, who stands accused of raping a student once a week for three years starting when the kid was fourteen. Jeff White is suing the teacher, and his accounts of what happened are pretty specific. One thing he remembers vividly about the weekly ordeal is Barnes’ insistence that the rapes were an “ex-gay” technique designed to cure the boy of his homosexuality by causing him “to hate men.” And perhaps Barnes truly believed this line: his explanation is consistent with other reports that there’s something fishily homoerotic—or outright homosexual—about ex-gay therapy itself, whose practitioners are mostly gay men who’ve been “cured” of their homosexuality. Or not.

File under Poetic Justice Pundit and lobbyist Jonathan Saenz had always been stridently anti-gay as president of the group Texas Values, whose mission it is to fight gay rights and promote traditional marriage (reported by LoneStarQ.com). Thus it was a major blow to his creds when his wife Corinne walked out on him in 2011 and filed for divorce. But the fact that she left him for a woman was another kind of humiliation. Saenz’ all-too-human response was to inflict revenge upon his ex-wife: he tried to have her jailed for failing to undergo a psychological evaluation, attempted to bar her partner from being near their three children, and filed a counterpetition for divorce accusing Corinne of adultery. But he also shifted his anti-gay crusade into overdrive, forming an extremist group called Liberty Legal Institute that seeks to re-establish anti-sodomy laws and to fund “ex-gay therapy” in Texas. In interviews he always recites the mantra that all gays are pedophiles who prey on children, and he claims that gay activists want to put Christians into concentration camps. It’s as if Ahab had determined to destroy not just Moby-Dick but all of whaledom.

NEW THIS FALL



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MICHAEL G. LONG is the author and editor of several books including *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin’s Life in Letters* and *Beyond Home Plate: Jackie Robinson on Life after Baseball*.

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How Gay Was *Dorian Gray*?

MICHAEL HATTERSLEY

THE AUTHOR of this piece passed away in 2011, having contributed many articles to this publication over the years, including this feature-length review of a book with the somewhat salacious title, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2005), by Neil McKenna. While Hattersley doesn't directly address the question of *The Picture of Dorian Gray's* primacy as a gay novel, he does venture that it was, "while cautious, implicitly homosexual"—at least for cognoscenti who knew what to look for.

This obfuscation is what makes *Dorian Gray's* place in the gay canon so open to debate. The novel's very coyness on the matter of same-sex desire, its not daring to name "the love," is what prevents it from being a shoo-in as the first gay novel in English. Wilde is not to blame, of course (and notwithstanding that a few of the most suggestive sentences were excised by his publisher): late Victorian society simply did not allow for a more explicit exploration of the love whose name could not be spoken, much less elevated to a central role in a novel. Thus *Dorian's* affairs are all with women, starting with the actress Sibyl Vane, for whom he professes his undying love—before it promptly dies; and on he moves to a series of affairs of increasingly short duration with decreasingly respectable women.

And yet, there's something about *Dorian*. The way that his beauty is openly admired by Basil and Lord Harry in chapter one, the voluptuous adjectives by which it is described, *Dorian's* longing to remain forever young—our gaydar is never long at rest. Then there are all those vague references to corruption and sensualism and unspecified nighttime activities that eventually incur the condemnation of his erstwhile friends. (And what about those friends, whose arch conversations on art and manners, if not gay, are certainly high camp?) The character of *Dorian* may well have been as far "out" as any literary fiction could be in its time, making Wilde's novel the gayest to date.

A slightly longer version of the following first appeared in the November-December 2005 issue.

—RS



OSCAR WILDE WAS PROBABLY the first major modern personality who was famous for being famous well before he produced any work of consequence aside from great conversation. He self-consciously personified "decadence" while still at Oxford, and soon after graduating had the honor of being satirized as the archetypal fop in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience*. The play's huge popularity in the U.S. led impresario D'Oyly Carte to book Wilde on a U.S. lecture tour that would prove wildly successful: Wilde acted the aesthete, dressed outrageously, struck languid poses for the photographers, and was especially popular with Western cowboys and miners. His success was assured by his first comment to the American customs inspectors, widely reported by the New York press: "I have nothing to declare but my genius."

Wilde published nothing major for nearly a decade after this early triumph. By his late twenties he was famous on two continents for little more than an attitude. He married a woman but pursued boys, mostly of the lower classes, relentlessly and successfully; and kept himself in the public eye through speaking tours filled with quotable epigrams and provocative public appearances in London society. Then, starting in his mid-thirties, he produced one of the most startling bursts of inspiration in English literature since Keats composed his entire body of work in the six years before his death at age 25. From 1890 to 1895, Wilde published or produced *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *The Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, as well as a large body of poems and reviews. Neil McKenna mines this work for analogies to Wilde's life and writes acutely about its relation to the contemporary political and social scene, but it is not his purpose to explore Wilde's considerable impact on Western literature and culture.

Wilde had suddenly inundated late-Victorian society with a highly visible body of homoerotic literature, and there was bound to be a reaction. *Dorian Gray*, while cautious, was im-

PLICITLY homosexual, and the hugely successful plays contained coded references that were obvious to the initiated. His poetry and public comments were often more explicit. He orchestrated startling and risky demonstrations, such as posing his gay friends and acolytes at play openings ostentatiously dressed and sporting artificial green carnations. Comments Neil McKenna in his recent [2005] *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*: “Oscar lived in an age when the only intellectual and historical justification for love and sex between men was the tradition of Greek *paiiderastia*. But the trouble with Greek love was its emphasis upon love rather than sex. Sex was a conditional, subsidiary part of love. This was not enough for Oscar. He was interested in the shadow, not the song, in the body, not the soul, in lust and sex, not love.” McKenna shows that it was the pursuit and conquest of the beautiful youth—the “having” of him (in Wilde’s phrase), not the love and nurturing of him—that was central to Wilde’s agenda, and this is what got him into serious trouble. While he did eventually fall truly in love with Lord Alfred Douglas or “Bosie,” their relationship was based less on mutual lovemaking than on a relentless pursuit of young boys, whom they often traded off to each other or to other gay friends. As McKenna writes, “As they played out their drama of great love, both Oscar and Bosie were having as much sex as they could with boys and young men.”

When challenged about the homoerotic content of his work, Wilde had a ready answer: “It is only when we realize the influence of neo-Platonism on the Renaissance that we can understand the true meaning of the amatory phrases and words with which friends were wont, at this time, to address each other. There was a kind of mystic transference of the expressions of the physical world to a sphere that was spiritual.” This was true of Plato’s philosophy, partly true of Renaissance homosexuality, and not true at all about Wilde’s actual practice. As he said later, “I used to be totally reckless of young lives. ... I used to take up a boy, love him ‘passionately’ and then grow bored with him and take no notice of him. That is what I regret in my past life.” His regret did not prevent him from taking up the same pattern again and pursuing it to the end.

Not surprisingly, Bosie’s mad but shrewd father, the Marquis of Queensberry, disapproved of his son’s passionate and public relationship with Oscar Wilde. Astonishingly, the Marquis simultaneously discovered that his older son and heir, Viscount Drumlanrig, was regularly being sodomized by Lord Rosebery, the sitting Prime Minister of England. Soon after being promoted to the peerage by Rosebery, and apparently learning that the Prime Minister was receiving threatening letters from his father, Drumlanrig committed suicide in a staged fox-hunting accident. Queensberry traveled to Germany, where the Prime Minister was on vacation, and tried to draw him into a boxing match, but the local authorities hustled the Marquis out of town at the request of the British government. He then turned on Wilde, leaving a note at his club accusing him of “posing as a sodomite [*sic*].” Egged on by Bosie and the rest of his family, who hated Queensberry, Wilde sued for libel.

Young Alfred Douglas was a master of the temper tantrum and had long since learned the he could get Oscar to do any-

thing he wanted by making a scene and then vanishing. For a period during his imprisonment, Oscar blamed Bosie bitterly for dragging him into the scandal that had destroyed him. This was an unfair burden to place on a young man whose hatred for his father was no secret. Throughout this period, Alfred Douglas behaved with ruthless selfishness and predation, even seducing the pubescent son of family friends while the scandals were unfolding. As Bosie explained to Oscar on a joint vacation when the latter was very ill, he couldn’t take care of him because it would interfere with his pleasure.

After a parade of rent boys and suborned friends testified against him, Wilde lost his case against Queensberry. As he knew would happen, he was immediately arrested and tried for “indecent acts.” It’s clear that the government could have prosecuted him on the more serious charge of sodomy—Queensberry had rounded up plenty of evidence, down to sheets stained with grease, semen, and excrement. McKenna makes the clearest case yet that, faced with Queensberry’s hold over the Prime Minister and other senior figures in the Liberal Party, the already shaky government decided to sacrifice Wilde but

to try to avoid sending him to jail for life. The British aristocracy was perfectly tolerant of public school homosexuality, but there was a limit, and Wilde had clearly crossed it.

The evidence against Wilde in the first trial was overwhelming, and he damaged himself greatly when he flippantly told Queensberry’s barrister that he had not kissed a particular boy because he was

“very ugly.” But he rallied when the barrister asked him to explain a line in one of Bosie’s poems about “The love that dare not speak its name.” Wilde said:

In this century it is such a great affection of an elder for a younger man as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art like those of Shakespeare and Michelangelo. ... It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as “Love that dare not speak its name,” and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. It

The Picture of Dorian Gray set the tone for gay literature for much of the ensuing century—what would be called a “gay sensibility” or “camp.”

**With whose ashes were
Marlon Brando’s
mingled and then scattered?**

is intellectual, and it repeatedly exists between an elder and a younger man, when the elder man has intellect and the younger man has all the joy, hope, and glamour of life before him. That it should be the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it.


These were fine words, and partly true of Oscar's feelings for Bosie. Many of the highest achievements of Western culture were products of Plato's "Heavenly Eros." But perhaps Wilde never understood that for Plato the boy led to the ideal, not the ideal to the boy. Probably as a result of this speech, the first trial resulted in a hung jury. But in the immediate second trial, Wilde was rapidly convicted and sentenced to two years of hard labor.

In short order Queensberry died, Rosebery's government fell, and the former Prime Minister retired permanently to Naples, where he lived out his life in a series of homosexual affairs. Wilde could have fled England several times during the trials and was repeatedly urged to do so, but, like Socrates—and perhaps in direct imitation—he chose to drink the hemlock.

Wilde suffered dreadfully from filth and mistreatment during his first year in prison. He attempted a reconciliation with his wife, promised to renounce his "diseased and debased passions," and engaged in so much masturbation that the prison chaplain feared for his sanity. He petitioned senior officials of the new Conservative government for leniency and treatment for "erotomania." They complied, appointed a new warden, and Wilde was provided with better conditions, books, and the means to write. The result was *De Profundis*, a 50,000-word letter to Bosie that migrates from bitter accusation to a profes-

sion of undying platonic love. Unbeknownst to Wilde, the exiled Bosie labored ceaselessly to contact and help him.

Once released, Wilde was sent to France, where he wrote his last powerful work, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which detailed his suffering in prison and proposed a new alliance with society's underdogs. He and Bosie resumed their intense but sporadic relationship; Wilde spent most of his time in Paris drunk, pleading for money, and hiring "boulevardier" boys. Wilde's decision to risk conviction in court did the emerging gay culture no good in the short run. Napoleon had legalized homosexuality in France a century before, and early gay liberationists in America, Britain, and Germany had been making some inroads. The results of Wilde's trial—and the lurid sexual practices they exposed—reversed the halting movement toward greater tolerance and made any progress on the legal front politically impossible.

The Picture of Dorian Gray had prefigured all that and set the tone for gay literature for much of the following century. It is tempting to wonder whether there wasn't a way that someone of Wilde's genius and social standing could have managed this crisis so as to advance, rather than set back, gay and lesbian emancipation. On the other hand, as the first public homosexual since Classical times, he gave the world a way to be openly gay. He bequeathed what would be called a "gay sensibility" or "camp" to the wider culture. In an age rife with repressed class tensions and individual alienation, his genius was to know that nothing was healthier than laughing at hypocrisy. In his last days, he told his old friend George Ives: "I have no doubt we shall win, but the road is long, and red with monstrous martyrdoms." Here, as in other matters, Wilde would prove to be prophetic. 

ART MEMO

The Man Who Was Dorian Gray

MARTHA E. STONE

WAS THERE a real-life model for Dorian Gray? Opinion among Wilde scholars is divided, but Jerusha Hull McCormack, who has written a book titled *The Man Who Was Dorian Gray* (2006), is quite sure there was. His name was John Gray, a minor British poet about whom she has written a number of works. And she backs up her theory with some convincing quotations from Wilde and his contemporaries, as well as from newspaper reports.

John Gray was born in 1866 as a poor lad, the oldest of eight. Ambitious and intelligent, he worked hard, fell in with the right crowd, worked his way up the Civil Service ladder to become a librarian in the Foreign Office, published some poetry, and made it into Wilde's inner circle before being overthrown by Lord Alfred Douglas. His first published work, a translation of a Verlaine poem, appeared in 1890 in a "uranian" periodical called *The Artist and Journal of Home Cul-*

ture. He was a friend of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, who published his fiction in their literary magazine, *The Dial*.

Gray's writing abilities—and his handsome looks—impressed Oscar Wilde, who underwrote the cost of publishing Gray's first collection of poems, *Silverpoints*. In a 1994 reprint by Woodstock Books, Ian Small and R. K. R. Thornton describe the book as an "icon of the 1890s." Thirteen of its 29 poems were translated from the French, and several are dedicated to movers and shakers of the *fin-de-siècle* era. Its epigraph was a line from Verlaine.

In a dramatic second act, John Gray reinvented himself as a priest. For a number of years he had maintained an apparently Platonic relationship with André Raffalovich, once a friend of Wilde, a poet and neglected son of a wealthy Russian-Jewish family, who was often mistreated in anti-Semitic England. Raffalovich quietly subsidized Gray, some of Gray's siblings, and a number of other impecunious writers and artists, notably Aubrey Beardsley. In 1896, Raf-

falovich suddenly decided to convert to Catholicism (perhaps emulating the example of the beloved Scottish governess who'd taken care of him since childhood), became a lay member of the Dominican Order, and took the name Brother Sebastian. Gray followed suit, but went further and became a Roman Catholic priest, assigned to an Irish slum in Edinburgh. (McCormack asks, perhaps rhetorically: "Was there some infection at Oxford, a diseased longing for ritual and candles and beautiful young priests?")

Raffalovich would soon erect a church for Gray in a smart neighborhood. They lived together in a nearby house, their friendship supervised by Raffalovich's now elderly governess, who treated both men as her own children. Gray had long since repudiated *Silverpoints* and reportedly tried to buy up and destroy any remaining copies that he could find. Gray and Raffalovich died within a few months of each other, in 1934.

This piece by literary editor Martha E. Stone first appeared in the May-June 2001 issue.

While Maurice Slept

DON GORTON

A COMPELLING CASE can be made for E. M. Forster's *Maurice* as the first gay novel. Completed 100 years ago this year, Forster's boldness lay in his revolutionary decision to adapt the discourse of the marriage novel to a moving depiction of same-sex love. He was the first to do so, even if his novel wasn't published until 1971. At the time there was no concept that same-sex could love could form the basis for a stable and happy lifetime commitment, so Forster was genuinely innovative to imagine such a possibility.

But, of course, there is the stubborn fact of Forster's failure to publish *Maurice* during his lifetime, as his gay liberationist message remained buried until two years after the Stonewall Riots had announced the coming revolution. When writing *Maurice*, Forster was preoccupied with the legal and cultural ramifications of the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895, and censorship remained an obstacle practically until the time of Stonewall. The book's publication in 1971 brought it to the attention of a newly awakened audience that could find in it a vision for actualizing the dreams of gay liberation.

Following is a slightly trimmed version of a piece that appeared in the November-December 2009 issue. — DG

WRITTEN IN A BURST of inspiration in 1913 and '14 and set in the England of the Edwardian Age, E. M. Forster's *Maurice* was "dedicated to a happier year," though the author had no conception of when that might be. Forster shared the manuscript with trusted friends, including D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T. E. Lawrence, Lytton Strachey, and Paul Cadmus, but would not publish the novel during his lifetime. Only in 1971, a year after Forster's death, would the novel appear in print.

A hybrid of the traditional marriage novel and the Bildungsroman genre, *Maurice* was revolutionary for its presentation of same-sex love culminating in a "happily ever after" ending. Forster later declared that the "happy ending was imperative. I shouldn't have bothered to write [it] otherwise." In

the Edwardian Age the suggestion that gay people were capable of forming loving unions to last a lifetime was blasphemous, subversive, and probably criminal.

Even in 1971, it was the happy ending, dubbed the "greenwood idyll," that came in for the severest criticism when the novel was finally published. Indeed the notion of *Maurice* abandoning his family, friends, and career to build a life for himself and Alec in the primeval woods of England, like Robin Hood's merry men sheltering in Sherwood Forest, stretched the imagination of even the newly arisen gay liberation movement. Although difficult to defend as plausible fiction set in the years leading up to World War I, Forster's insistence on the triumph of same-sex love, reflected in his hopeful dedication to "a happier year," forms the foundation of *Maurice*'s significance for the modern GLBT civil rights movement.

Maurice is the prototypical gay-affirming, coming-of-age novel. The title character, a conventional upper-middle-class Edwardian in every respect, confronts unconscious desires that begin to make themselves felt in adolescence. It is not until his second year at Cambridge University, when he meets Clive Durham, that *Maurice* begins his long, arduous climb to self-understanding. His realization that he's attracted to other males, weeks after Clive confesses that he has fallen in love with him, comes only after vehement denials and a bout of "madness."

Maurice differs strikingly from post-Stonewall gay novels in that the protagonist lacks a ready vocabulary with which to frame his same-sex desire. In the aftermath of the highly publicized trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895, English society doubled down on the view that "the love that dare not speak its name" was something so vile that it couldn't even be mentioned. Whether *Maurice* looked to education, law, medicine, or religion, homosexuality was spoken of only elliptically, in the merest "scraps of language," which made the condemnation of it all the more baneful. An unreflective man ill-equipped to comprehend this challenge, he spends most of his time in a "muddle."

The theme of *Maurice* can be described as essentially the search for a compatible social construct by which the protagonist can understand himself and go on to self-actualization. At Cambridge, *Maurice* becomes acquainted with a character named Risley (based on Forster's Bloomsbury friend Lytton Strachey), who challenges the compulsory silence imposed on unconventional subjects by insisting that people should "talk,



Don Gorton is a Boston lawyer and longtime activist.

talk, talk.” Risley stands as an antidote to the repression of authentic feelings, including those that are taboo, and it is through Risley that Maurice meets Clive.

Clive had found a model of homosexual affirmation in the culture of ancient Greece and the writings of Plato, and adhered to the stylized ideal of male bonding acclaimed in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Clive assists Maurice’s self-discovery by giving him the referent he seizes upon when he says “I have always been like the Greeks and didn’t know it.” Clive extols homosexuality as a higher form of love, a spiritual connection that must be left physically unconsummated to uphold its surpassing nobility. Yet a love so beaten down by over-intellectualization will starve for lack of sustenance. Maurice is left to burn, while Clive, according to the narrator, somehow becomes attracted to women. Commentators have labored to make sense of the cryptic and enigmatic report of Clive’s re-orientation, with the view that he is yielding to proscription and class pressure being the most favored. To give Clive’s sudden change context, Merchant and Ivory added a scene to their film version in which Risley is entrapped by a handsome police decoy and convicted of “gross indecency” in a case parallel to that of Oscar Wilde. The fear spawned by Risley’s ruin motivates Clive in the film version to recant his love for Maurice and seek a wife.

The loss of Clive devastates Maurice, who’s left to struggle with his homosexuality without his partner and mentor. Three sexual encounters with other men alarm him. In hope of chang-

ing, he confides to his doctor that he’s an “unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort,” but is told his situation is “rubbish” and must not be discussed. He turns to an American psychiatrist, who coolly labels his condition “congenital homosexuality,” which can be “cured” in half of the cases he sees. Hypnotic suggestion is this doctor’s methodology, but the treatment is doomed once Maurice has his first sexual liaison with Clive’s lusty young under-gamekeeper, Alec.

Alec energetically pursues Maurice as he continues to visit Clive’s country estate, Penge, chasing after his carriage, grabbing him to get away from the local rector, and then watching the window of the room where Maurice is sleeping. Scarcely aware of what he’s doing, on two separate nights Maurice calls out his window: “Come!” On the second invitation, Alec climbs up the conveniently available ladder and joins Maurice in bed.

To find their way to fulfillment, Maurice and Alec must get past the class difference. Alec thinks Maurice is treating him disrespectfully by not answering his letters, while Maurice grows fearful that he’s being set up for blackmail. The climactic encounter tellingly occurs in the Bloomsbury section of London, at the British Museum, where the two thrash out powerful and warring emotions flanked by Assyrian winged bulls. Spending the night together afterward, they progress toward understanding their love, with the “flesh educating the spirit,” as Forster describes it. Maurice formulates a plan, and the men make heroic sacrifices to be together. At last glimpsing

Maurice is the prototypical gay-affirming, coming-of-age novel whose title character confronts unconscious desires that begin to make themselves felt in adolescence.

ART MEMO

Forster’s Maurice and the Birth of a Genre

LEWIS DESIMONE

IN MY YOUTH, I had a strong gaydar when it came to literature, reveling in the homosexual undertones of the classics. Looking back now, it’s hard to believe that anyone could be blind to the essential gayness of *Moby-Dick* or *Songs of Myself*, but at the time, reading such works aroused no suspicion. When I finally came out to someone else—an older man with whom I had unexpectedly, overwhelmingly, fallen in love—he gave me more books, as a substitute for himself (he was taken; I was young and naïve). The reading list was huge and exciting—Christopher Isherwood, Andrew Holleran, Edmund White. Here were novels that didn’t mask sexuality behind the safety of symbolism. I didn’t have to read between the lines to find the messages meant for me and my kind. It was all right there on the page, just as I would soon discover it in the world.

Of all those books, the one that has remained most profoundly with me is the

one written before the genre of the coming out story even had a name: E. M. Forster’s posthumously published *Maurice*. In one summer, I devoured all of Forster’s novels—in order of publication, so that *Maurice*, though not written last, was the final one I read. In it, the themes that seemed submerged in the other works came to the surface. If other characters—the dandyish Cecil in *A Room with a View*, Freddy in *Howards End*—had struck me as having a gay sensibility, here at last was a protagonist who acknowledged that sensibility in himself and who, over the course of the novel, chose to accept and act upon his homosexual feelings.

Written in 1913–14, *Maurice* follows its hero through all the stages of a kind of coming-out process. He has these sexual feelings, which he’s puzzled by and tries to submerge. He goes off to college and meets a like-minded guy, Clive, with whom he falls in love, albeit platonically. Clive, though comfortable with affection, is not as eager as Maurice to let the relationship go further. When Clive finally

breaks it off, believing himself to be “cured” of homosexuality, Maurice has a breakdown, questioning his own feelings, denying them, resolving to change. Only a new love—this time, Maurice is the pursued—saves him and brings him to full acceptance of his sexuality.

Knowing he couldn’t publish the novel at the time (if ever), Forster dared to give *Maurice* a happy ending—a romantic escape from society with his new lover Alec. The irony was not lost on the author. In a “terminal note” to the novel, he acknowledges that the ending is somewhat unrealistic: “A happy ending was imperative,” Forster writes. “I was determined that in fiction anyway two men should fall in love and remain in it for the ever and ever that fiction allows.”

If this ending was unusual for its time, publication of the book was out of the question. In 1914 England, such exposure would have destroyed Forster’s reputation—and perhaps led to a fate similar to that of Oscar Wilde, whose shadow is palpable in the novel. (In one of the most

self-realization, Maurice takes his leave of Clive, and he and Alec disappear into England's "greenwood," never again to separate. In a counterpoint to the happy ending, we catch a glimpse of a wistful Clive, toward the end of his life, haunted by a mystical vision of his lost lover beckoning him from an eternal Cambridge spring "to come."

When Maurice declares his love for Alec to Clive's "thin sour disapproval," he speaks with such an uncharacteristic clarity that Clive asks him, "who taught you to talk like this?" Maurice's reply, "You, if anyone," begs the question, because Clive himself has never attained this kind of self-awareness. In fact, the unmentioned source of Forster's idea for an enduring love "outside class, without relations or money" was the relationship of proto-gay-activist Edward Carpenter and his working-class partner George Merrill, who lived at Milthorpe in rural Derbyshire. Carpenter, in turn, took his inspiration from Walt Whitman and the ideal of a democratic "love of comrades." We know this connection only from Forster's "terminal note," in which he described an affectionate touch on the backside by Merrill at Milthorpe as the spark for *Maurice*.

"Muddled" Maurice would have been unfamiliar with Carpenter or Whitman, so the four corners of the novel do not fully explain how he came to the insights that enabled him to plan a lifelong relationship with Alec. With an inspired push from the author, Maurice travels the last leg of his metaphoric journey from valley to mountaintop in an unseen leap. Through this brilliant authorial intrusion, *Maurice* foretells a post-Stonewall liberationist sensibility. It affirms gay self-acceptance and same-sex love that can thrive despite social reprobation and as-

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evocative moments, when Maurice goes to a doctor for help, he refers to himself as "an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort.") *Maurice*, like the rest of Forster's explicitly gay-themed works (including a number of short stories later collected under the title *The Life to Come*) remained unpublished until after his death in 1970 at age 91.

Maurice is very much a product of its time, a vivid portrait of British life just before World War I. From a modern standpoint, the setting also lends an air of romanticism that may explain the book's continuing appeal. When I first read it at 22, just barely out of the closet, I felt a kinship with Maurice's innocence and uncertainty. Like Evelyn Waugh's similarly idyllic *Brideshead Revisited*, written three decades later but setting its initial chapters around the same era, *Maurice* draws much of its energy from its depiction of college life—a somewhat cloistered time when anything seems possible, before the so-called real world has had a chance to dash one's illusions.

Let's not get too cocky about our current state of enlightenment, it is well for us to remember that it wasn't until 1967—just three years before Forster's death—that

the homosexuality was legalized in the U.K. This historical reality check makes Forster's achievement even more remarkable. It seems quite fitting, actually, that *Maurice*'s publication followed so closely upon Stonewall. For a novel composed more than fifty years before that seminal event, *Maurice* offers a surprisingly astute depiction of the psychology of the closet. Indeed, part of *Maurice*'s appeal to me is as a counter to the prevailing pre-Stonewall notion that homosexual life was inherently pathetic at best, tragic at worst.

In the novel, Forster dares to show that liberation can be found through simple self-acceptance. At the book's end, embracing his natural impulses at last, Maurice frees himself from the chokehold of society: he goes happily off into the fabled greenwood with his lover by his side and his integrity intact. Clive, on the other hand, who continues to suppress his sexual feelings—and thus, his true self—emerges as the novel's tragic figure. Thus, it is not homosexuality that creates tragedy, but its repression.

Forster took this point to heart, at least as far as his writing went. After *A Passage to India* (1924), when he was only 55, he

stopped publishing fiction—not because he had lost interest in writing per se, but because he had lost patience with the literary closet. From that point on, his efforts at fiction were limited to homosexual subjects, which he never intended for publication, at least not in his lifetime. In a late diary entry, he expresses some regret about the circumstances of his writing life: "I should have been a more famous writer if I had written or rather published more, but sex has prevented the latter."

With the realism of its painful story and its admittedly fanciful ending, *Maurice* feels as if it were as a modern fairy tale. Like *The Wizard of Oz*, it speaks to us of our own struggle and gives us hope for overcoming it. And in the end, we realize along with the hero that the only change we need to effect is acceptance of ourselves as what we are. I like to think that Forster would be gratified to know that the happy ending he imagined—"the ever and ever that fiction allows"—is no longer so fantastic.

Lewis DeSimone is the author of the novel Chemistry. This piece first appeared in the May-June 2007 issue.

serts the truth that gays cannot become fully human, fully alive, unless we embrace who we are. Forster bears witness to the centrality of coming to terms with one's homosexuality in the formation of character for gay people. In the England of Forster's construction, acceptance of being gay can take one outside of the dreary, suburban conventions that stifle authenticity. Homosexuality offers an escape from the suffocating English class system, anathematized as toxic to healthy relationships and human happiness.

Forster exposes the willful ignorance of his times when he has Clive announce that "[a]s long as they talk of the unspeakable vice of the Greeks they can't expect fair play." Elsewhere, he lays bare scientific backwardness of earlier medical understandings of homosexuality, arguing that it's pointless to try to change someone's sexual orientation. With subtle irony Forster pillories the pretentiousness of established religion and deftly exposes the incongruities pervading society's attitudes toward sex. His fiction provides a gay-positive discourse for individuals needing a framework to comprehend who they are, the idea of same-sex relationships, and a place for themselves in society.

Of course, the positive impact of his revolutionary portrayal of gay love was withheld for 57 years due to Forster's decision to publish the book only posthumously. Forster has been chided by gay commentators for failing to publish *Maurice* during his lifetime, though his fears of censorship, defamation, and even prosecution were not unwarranted. Consider the experience of the less gay-affirming portrayal of lesbianism in *The Well of Loneliness*, published in the 1920s, which was censored and used to stigmatize its author, Radclyffe Hall.

The focus of the happy ending on Maurice and Alec suggests that Forster's artistic purpose was carried through with the completion of their relationship. Associated with the free-spirited Bloomsbury group, Forster was a disciple of philosopher G. E. Moore, who assigned transcendent value to "the pleasures of human intercourse." In *Howards End*, with its famous epigram "only connect," Forster seems to say that the right personal relationships can sort out larger social tensions, namely in the Schlegel-Wilcox alliance. The resolution in *Maurice* comports with the Bloomsbury group's emphasis on personal feelings and defiance of repressive social conventions as the path to fulfillment in life, unaccompanied by a program of wider social and political change. For Forster, it was enough that "when two are gathered together majorities shall not triumph."

It is safe to assume that the author had no concept of how

What did the police discover under Stella of the Strand's low-cut scarlet dress?

the larger society could be transformed to free GLBT people from repression. Parliament appears in the novel only as another setting where Clive's drift into heterosexual conformity will play itself out. Of course, there was no plausible model of political agitation for the atomized gay population of Forster's time to draw upon. While a nascent gay rights movement was emerging in Germany in the early 20th century (snuffed out by the Nazis in the 1930s), there was no correlate in the English-speaking countries until much later.

It was amid the rapidly evolving subculture of gay liberation in 1971 that *Maurice* finally appeared. Emancipation had not progressed so far that *Maurice* was welcomed without controversy. Even after Stonewall, the novel was ahead of its time. A forthright portrayal of gay love that ended rapturously for the protagonists was more than some critics could stomach. Typical of the initial negative reviews was that of Philip Toynbee, writing in *The Observer*, who pronounced *Maurice* to be "novelettish, ill-written, humourless and deeply embarrassing." Toynbee maintained that Forster's literary gift depended upon the sublimation of his homosexual feelings, evident in the novels he published during his lifetime. Other early commentators were even more bluntly homophobic: the flavor of Julian Mitchell's scathing review in *The Guardian* was captured in its title, "Fairy Tale." The convention that fictional gay relationships must end badly for the protagonists was still regnant at the time.

In the 1980s, *Maurice* was gaining some prestige among critics. Robert Martin undertook a reassessment in a 1983 article, the first significant reading of the novel by a gay reviewer, in which he emphasized the protagonist's progress from a "false solution" to the challenge of being gay with Clive, to more authentic self-actualization in the consummated relationship with Alec. By 1990, Maurice was being hailed as the "first gay liberation masterpiece" by Claude Summers. Even as he criticized what he referred to as "Forster's self-erasure"—assuming Clive was the character the author most resembled—commentator John Fletcher stated in 1992 that *Maurice* "should now be recognized as the one classic portrayal of 'masculine love' ... and the one explicitly homosexual bildungsroman produced within the mainstream of English literary tradition by a canonical author." Meanwhile, in 1987, Merchant and Ivory released a sumptuous feature film adaptation of *Maurice* that brought the story to the rapt attention of gay and lesbian audiences worldwide.

Perhaps there is something of what psychologist Jung termed "synchronicity" in the fact *Maurice* was published at a time, soon after Stonewall, when it could dovetail with events that Forster never imagined. By 1971, society had progressed far enough and GLBT people had entered mainstream discourse with (still subversive) demands for equality, so that the novel was no longer in danger of censorship. Gay people were coming out in large numbers, hungry for a literature which would acknowledge and validate our existence. Maurice and Alec's departure from the hiddenness of the greenwood and Forster's own posthumous self-outing symbolized our collective emergence from history's dark closet. In the years since its publication, *Maurice* has made significant contributions to gay self-actualization, not as a political treatise but as an inspiration for individual readers.



Proust's Search for Things to Come

ANDREW HOLLERAN

NO ONE SPEAKS of À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time) as a gay novel; it's a novel about fin-de-siècle Paris, about the rarefied world of duchesses and princesses. It's the story of a man who dips a madeleine (a sort of French cookie) into his tea and is instantly transported, via involuntary memory, back to his childhood. It's the saga of Swann, a Parisian aesthete obsessed with Odette, a cocotte who, he marvels at the end, was "not even my type," a novel about love, jealousy, and snobbery. True. But it's also about homosexuality, so much so that Proust was worried as he was trying to get it published that someone else would beat him to the punch—because he knew he was writing about a world no one else had described before.

But what about the Satyricon—Petronius Arbiter's much earlier novel about a young man pursuing his boyfriend through ancient Rome? Isn't that the world's first gay novel? Maybe. But in the Satyricon, same-sex desire is not the subject; it is not even abnormal. In Proust's time, homosexuals were social outcasts, men who lived, in Proust's metaphor, with a secret vice so isolating they might as well be living on Mont Blanc. Reading Proust, the modern homosexual recognizes everything about this underground world of cab drivers, footmen, aristocrats, and bellhops, never before or better described than in Proust's novel, so brilliantly that if it's not the first gay novel, it is still arguably the most profound.

What follows is excerpted from the September–October 2006 issue.

— AH

WILLIAM CARTER begins his 2006 biography *Proust In Love* with a schoolboy trying to persuade, via letters written in geography class, his classmates to have sex with him. The classmates all refuse. "There was something about him we found unpleasant," one of them said about Proust years later. "His kindnesses, his tender attentions, his caresses

... we often labeled as mannerisms, poses, and we took occasion to tell him so to his face. ... We were rough with him. The poor wretch!" Poor wretch, who never stopped trying. "What number did you give him," asked Proust's philosophy teacher, on seeing Marcel with yet another new friend, "when he passed through the door of your heart?"

Gide accused Proust of portraying only grotesque homosexuals in his novel, and of not only gender-changing his characters but of giving the charming features to the heterosexuals. Proust conceded the point. Of course, no one in the entire novel,

hetero- or homosexual, manages to find much happiness in the attempt to possess another human being; but Proust knew his portraits would anger some homosexuals. He also felt he was risking his career by writing about homosexuality at all. But he went ahead with it—because the subject was not only new but central to his book, and life.

No one is more brilliant on this topic than the Narrator of Proust's novel—though he views the "accursed race" in a way that our more therapeutic culture might find, well, a bit dire. Proust subscribed to the scientific view of his time that inverts were women trapped in men's bodies, and lesbians the reverse (though he told Gide that he knew the man-woman was only one kind of homosexual). The Narrator also points out that homosexuals are trapped by a paradox: they are attracted to men who are virile, but such men can have no interest in sleeping with them for any reason other than cash. He describes homosexuals who remain outcasts



from society to the day they die, even though they constitute a widespread subculture made up of people from every social class. Indeed, Proust's great homosexual character is an aristocrat who has a taste for footmen and cab drivers. Jorge Luis Borges claimed Charlus was the only real character Proust created, and if truth be told, the book is most alive when he is on the page. That may be because through him Proust was discharging the anguish and hilarity of his own predicament.

In *Proust In Love*, we soon learn that Proust's attempt to persuade his favored classmates to have sex with him using brilliant arguments summoned from ancient Greece was just the start. Although Carter mentions Proust's androgyny and child-

Andrew Holleran, author of many novels starting with *Dancer from the Dance* (1978), has been a regular GLR contributor since Issue 1.1.

hood crushes on female playmates, and Davenport-Hines claims Proust slept with the mistress of one of his friends (in a sort of erotic triangulation), Proust's father worried so much about his son that he sent the young Marcel to a prostitute—a customary initiation for sons of the French bourgeoisie around age sixteen. During Proust's visit, however, he seems to have experienced a sort of homosexual panic, and all he did was break a chamber pot.

It was not till he was a young man out in society that Proust acquired a lover in the form of a man his own age: the Venezuelan composer Reynaldo Hahn. But he ruined this relationship by his demands for total devotion, and then fell himself for the young Lucien Daudet. This did not last long. When Proust's first book, *Pleasures and Days*, came out, a homosexual journalist named Jean Lorrain implied that Proust and Daudet were lovers, and even though this was no longer the case, Proust still fought a duel with Lorrain to deny the charge. In short, being homosexual was something Proust always denied his entire life.

But that's what he was, and in *Proust in Love* we follow a string of crushes from schoolmates to society figures like Bertrand de Fénelon, an aristocrat whose bisexuality Proust did not learn of, alas, until after Fénelon was killed in World War I. The great passion of Proust's life, however, was a chauffeur he hired after his parents died: Alfred Agostinelli, a confirmed heterosexual who, Proust said, "with my mother, my father, is the person I loved most." ("I really loved Alfred," he wrote to Reynaldo after Agostinelli's death in an airplane accident. "It isn't enough to say I loved him, I adored him. And I don't know why I write that in the past tense, for I love him still.") Eventually, Proust turned to waiters at the Ritz, including Henri Rochat, who moved in with Proust but so bored him (and his housekeeper Céleste) that Proust spent two years trying to get him a job. When one finally came through, it was in a bank in Buenos Aires. Then there were the bellhops: Henri Bardac, a friend of Proust's, said the novelist would be washing his hands when the bellhop was summoned to his room, whereupon Proust would say, "My friend, I have a tip for you, but I can't give it to you because my hands are wet; please get it out of my pants pocket."

Finally, there was the male brothel that Proust helped furnish with pieces he'd inherited from his parents. In the novel, Charlus goes there during a World War I blackout to be whipped by a young butcher boy. Proust's own tastes were somewhat different. According to the testimony of an employee, Proust would first gaze through a glass pane into a room of young men playing cards, make his selection, and then go upstairs to a room. "A quarter of an hour later, I knocked on the door, went in, and found Marcel already in bed with the sheet drawn up to his chin. He smiled at me. My instructions were to take off all my clothes and remain standing by the closed door while I satisfied myself under the anxious gaze of Marcel, who was doing the same. If he reached the desired conclusion, I left after having smiled at him and without having seen anything other than his face and without having touched him." If Proust did not climax, "he

Proust in Love

by William Carter

Yale University Press. 252 pages, \$26.

Proust at the Majestic: The Last Days of the Author Whose Book Changed Paris

by Richard Davenport-Hines

Bloomsbury. 358 pages, \$24.95

While In Search of Lost Time is never called a "gay novel," the subject of homosexuality is central to it.

would make a gesture for me to leave and Albert would bring two cages," each one with a starving rat, and as the two rodents fought each other to the death, Proust would finally achieve release.

The rat story has been part of Proust's legend for years, although—in the recent biography by Jean-Yves Tadié, and here, in *Proust in Love*—there is no proof that it's true. While there *is* evidence that Proust was caught at the brothel in a police raid,

Proust's housekeeper Céleste denied the rat story. ("Richard Gere and the gerbils!" said the friend to whom I told the tale, which made me think, Maybe that's all it is. People who wish to believe strange things about celebrities for some reason turn to rodents.) Nowadays, it's no longer shocking—not nearly so shocking, say, as learning that Albert Nahmias, one of Proust's friends, killed a child while racing in his motorcar to keep an appointment with Proust, because he knew how upset Proust got when someone did not show up.

Cocteau, however, favored the rat story—and added a photograph of Proust's mother, which had to be profaned before orgasm was achieved. Profanation of the mother, Cocteau felt, was key to Proust. In *Swann's Way*, the composer Vinteuil's daughter makes her female lover spit on a photograph of her doting father before they make love. In real life, if we are to believe Maurice Sachs, a dubious protégé of Cocteau, Proust had the boys at the brothel spit on photographs of society women whose salons Proust frequented while yelling, "Who's that whore?" Well, we're all conflicted.

Carter argues that *In Search of Lost Time* is really a love letter to Madame Proust. There is certainly plenty of evidence for this in the novel. Some of the most tender, most moving moments in it deal with the decline and death of the grandmother (the novel's stand-in for Proust's mother). The moment when the Narrator hears his grandmother speak on the telephone and realizes suddenly how sick and weak she has become is infinitely more touching than any of the cerebral observations about losing Albertine, the woman with whom the Narrator becomes obsessed (a woman, said Cocteau, who was obviously a man). The passages dealing with the Narrator's remorse over having been unkind to his grandmother so cut to the heart that a gay reader might suspect that *In Search of Lost Time* is an apology to his mother for being homosexual. That she was dead seemed to be the chief fact of his life by the time he wrote his novel. "If I were sure to meet my mother again," Proust told Céleste, "in the Valley of Jehosaphat or anywhere else, I would want to die at once."

Indeed, in the novel, maternal love seems to be the only valid kind. Love between adults is ruined by jealousy, possessiveness, and the impossibility of "the act of physical possession (in which, paradoxically, the possessor possesses nothing)." The trouble for Proust was that in life he was not only the detached artist producing brilliant aphorisms, he was also the possessive, obsessive, jealous lover. It was his own failures that enabled him to describe Swann searching for Odette, the Narrator spying on Albertine, Charlus going to the brothel. When the incredibly intelligent Proust pursued someone, he acted in the

stupidest possible way, alienating Hahn with his demands for intimacy, hiring a detective to spy on Agostinelli, admitting that his passion for someone never lasted more than a year and a half. With Proust, we seem to have a case of someone so hungry for Love that he drove people off. Lucien Daudet told Cocteau that Proust was “a gigantic insect.” Proust accused himself of an “incapacity for happiness.” The great love of Proust’s life, Agostinelli, was a straight man from the working class whose family, when Proust sent flowers to the funeral, was disappointed that they were not plastic.

“Looking back over his love life,” writes Carter, “it seems fair to say that Proust never had a sexually fulfilling relationship with a companion whom he loved. If he did, one finds no definite trace of such affection in his letters and writings. It seems unlikely that he could have found a partner capable of satisfying his great longings or with sufficient patience to endure his endless and unreasonable demands. In the end, he became disillusioned about erotic love.” Reading Carter’s book, one has to wonder: who could have met Proust’s needs for exclusive submission, when anyone who did agree to that (Henri Rochat, for instance) bored him silly? There seems to be a contradiction here. But contradiction is the essence of Proust’s view.

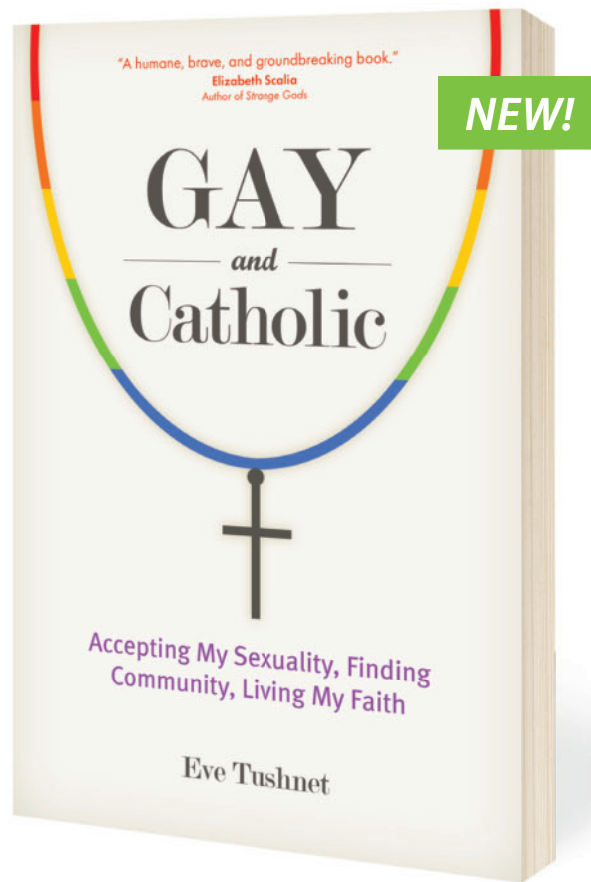
One of Proust’s ideas that Carter relies on in his book is the theory of multiple selves. We change so constantly, Proust felt, that when a dear friend announced he was being assigned to a diplomatic post in Istanbul, Proust wrote that he was not sad, because the self that loved this friend was already ceasing to exist. (A nice theory, one suspects, but no help for Proust’s sense of abandonment.) Even when someone we love dies, Proust wrote, it’s not their cessation but our own that brings oblivion. “It is not because other people are dead that our affection for them fades; it is because we ourselves are dying. ... My new self, while it grew up in the shadow of the old, had often heard the other speak of Albertine; through that other self, through the stories it gathered from it, it thought that it knew her, it found her lovable, it loved her; but it was only a love at second hand.”

This mercurial quality of human nature nearly induced Proust to call his novel by a title that now belongs to just one section: “The Intermittences of the Heart.” The last chapter of Carter’s book takes as its epigraph this quote from Proust: “Only love is divine.” But a more famous sentence of Proust’s compares falling in love to succumbing to a bacillus. Love in *Swann’s Way* is a disease triggered by the germ called Jealousy. It comes into being only when we lose someone. When we have

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the person, we don't want them. (Proust felt this about longing in general: Life grants us everything we want, he said, on one condition—that we no longer desire it.) We are, in other words, hopelessly fickle. But so is the universe: How, in a world in which everything is constantly changing, including our selves, can anything last, including Love?

In *Proust at the Majestic* (2006), by Richard Davenport-Hines, we are reminded, for starters, that Proust did not die before he could savor his greatness; he fully enjoyed the considerable success that the first volumes of his book brought. If sales were not huge (Proust said he wanted “to reach a wider audience, the sort of people who buy a badly printed book before getting into a train”), the people who read him made up in quality for what they lacked in quantity. It was the elite of London and Paris and New York, as exemplified by Violet and Sid-

ney Schiff, who became obsessed. Given this success, Davenport-Hines says it took courage to publish *Sodom and Gomorrah*. Indeed, some people (both homo- and heterosexual) were offended—but even Sidney Schiff, the rich amateur who saw himself in the character of Charles Swann, admitted that Charlus, not Swann, was Proust's greatest creation. While *In Search of Lost Time* is never called a “gay novel,” the subject of homosexuality is central to it; and in Davenport-Hines' view, the nerve it took to write about inversion was the same courage Proust showed in fighting his duel with Jean Lorrain to deny the imputation that Proust and Daudet were lovers.

We imagine we are beyond all that now, but read the great essay on the “accursed race” in the opening pages of *Sodom and Gomorrah*—read any scene in which Charlus appears—and see if it doesn't still ring uncannily true. Proust's brilliance was such

ART MEMO

Proust's Way Home

JEFFREY ROUND

“PARIS IS WHERE the 20th century was,” declared that eccentric raconteur and occasional aphorist, Gertrude Stein. Writers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Stein herself, artists like Picasso, Dalí, and Matisse, musicians and singers such as Stravinsky, Maria Callas, Edith Piaf, and even Jim Morrison, all lived here. Paris was a flashpoint of both world wars but managed to survive them both relatively unscathed.

It's a city where grandeur and beauty are everyday. The monuments are immense, the views spectacular, and the history rich and diverse. There is very little about Paris, or Parisians, that's understated. It's also a city in which you can walk in the footsteps, as I have done, of Marcel Proust (1871–1922), author of the grandest, most outsized prose epic of them all: the seven-volume *À la recherche du temps perdu* or *In Search of Lost Time* (traditionally translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*). The city itself is filled with Proustian moments of crystallized time, if you know where to look.

For instance, on leaving a party at the Ritz Hotel one evening in honor of Stravinsky's latest ballet, Proust shared his cab with James Joyce. Of course we're tempted to imagine what passed between the two greatest writers of their day—what extraordinary writers' shop talk must have flown between them! According to reports, however, Joyce rolled his window down and lit a cigar, terrifying the hypochondriac Proust, who got out at his apartment and instructed the driver to take Joyce to his destination. But perhaps it's not so surprising that the pair had little to say to one another, neither having read a word of the other's

writing. (Both were competent in the other's language.)

The beautiful Basilique du Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre presents another Proustian moment. The grand cathedral was reviled by Republicans of the time at the time of its construction around the turn of the 20th century, who saw it as a reminder of the domination of the Vatican and an insult to the ideals of the Republic. Proust felt compelled to write a series of articles defending Sacré-Cœur—not as a church, but as a work of art, claiming that art superseded both religion and politics (and who could disagree?). Cathedrals, he wrote, “are the highest and most original expression of French genius.”

With time and tolerance (the latter something Parisians can be notably short on), the basilica has come to be seen as a symbiosis of old and new ideals. This, in fact, was very much in evidence when I was there recently. Inside, a choir of nuns sang a plain-song, while outside on the steps young songsters harmonized a different sort of hymn, Oasis' “Wonderwall” (“Maybe, you're gonna be the one that saves me”), each bringing together the faithful of a different sort.

It's fleeting moments like these that make the city real for me, as much as its solid monuments and landmarks. Today the apartment at 44 rue Hamelin, where Proust ended his ride with Joyce and the cigar, is an elegant hotel. A sign marks Proust's one-time tenancy on the fourth floor, where he spent the last years of his life obsessively writing and rewriting his great work. Sadly, as Proust fans know, he did not live to complete the final revisions, leaving it to his brother Robert to cobble them together as best he could. Even so, *À la recherche de temps perdu* ranks as one of the greatest

works of literature ever created.

There is no signage at 9, boulevard Malesherbes, where Proust spent the first thirty years of his life. Perhaps the current residents in the mini-mall below are sick of all the Proustian devotees who come to gawk at their windows, but not to buy, marveling that real people move in the space where their god once ate and slept and practiced his multiplication tables like any mere mortal. They certainly glared at me as I lurked about, munching my baguette while taking photos of the place. Oscar Wilde is said to have visited Proust here and left complaining about the décor and the bourgeois appearance of Proust's parents.

A few streets away, on rue du Havre, stands the Lycée Condorcet, once attended by the young Marcel. He's not the only famous alumnus—Henri Bergson, Jean-Paul Sartre, and aviation pioneer Marcel Dassault also walked these halls. It's hard to imagine what today's students think of these famous predecessors, if indeed they remove their iPods for long enough to reflect on such things.

Before he started publishing the *Recherche*, Proust was thought of as a dilettante rather than a real writer. The work he was best known for was a series of disconnected essays called *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, in which, among other things, he denounced a renowned French literary critic's obsession with the social standing of writers over the quality of their work. At the same time, however, Proust was writing a popular society column for *Le Mensuel*, a résumé of the past month's social and political happenings. He also translated John Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens* without actually mastering English. “I don't claim to know English,” he declared. “I claim to know Ruskin.”

Neurasthenic, asthmatic, obsessed with

that when he died people could scarcely believe this consciousness could be extinguished. Davenport-Hines describes the funeral that wound through a shocked Paris so solemnly and slowly that Cocteau and Raymond Radiguet had time to slip away to eat pancakes at Le Boeuf sùr le Toit before rejoining the hearse at the cemetery. Reading about people's reaction to Proust's demise, one has a weird feeling that we're witnessing the founding of some new religion: the religion of art. (Ravel's *Pavane for a Dead Infanta* was played at the funeral—not liturgical music—at Proust's request, and Catholic critics lamented the absence of God in his novel.) We read the story of his death as if following some sort of Passion. Partly this has to do with the times: our culture's unappeasable appetite for gossip, the Back Story. Partly it has to do with Proust's era, so vanished, and his personality, so rich in paradox.

Proust wrote the most brilliant observations about homosexuality ever, while challenging every imputation that he was homosexual himself; he claimed love was merely a disease, and the beloved merely a delusion—a creation of our own egos—while obviously loving certain people passionately; he heaped nothing but contempt on the idea of friendship, while saying of his first lover and lifelong confidante Reynaldo Hahn: “he's the dearest friend to me, the best, a brother. If he murdered someone I'd hide the corpse in my bedroom so that people thought that I had done the deed.” Proust wrote a book that is filled with the most mordant and hilarious depictions of human selfishness, and yet, as Carter points out, its final effect is one of joy. As for the rest—the sifting through everything we know about the author—when someone asked Proust, “For what fault have you the greatest toleration?” he responded: “For the private life of geniuses.”

emotions and aesthetics, Proust must have appeared as little more than an art nerd. Of course, he transcended all that once the first of seven volumes of the great work was published in 1913. The last thing any serious writer wants to be called is a dilettante (full disclosure: this writer is the author of comic mysteries), and the publication of *Swann's Way* began to disabuse the reading public of this notion.

The one thing Proust was serious about, of course, was his writing. He agonized over structure. He abandoned his first novel, *Jean Santeuil*, because he felt unable to resolve its plot issues (it was eventually published, unfinished, in 1954), though it contains the seeds of much of what he later developed in the septet. Intriguingly, Proust described his greatest work in architectural terms, likening its structure to the grand cathedrals of France that he had once defended.

It was at 102, boulevard Haussmann that Proust wrote the lion's share of his magnum opus, between 1909 and 1919, until his aunt sold the building to a bank and he was forced to move to the rue Hamelin. Still carved in granite over the entrance is “BANQUE M. VARIN-BERNIER ET CIE.” Oddly, Proust disdained what is easily the most attractive of his three notable residences, calling it “the ugliest thing I ever saw.” His famous cork-lined room in this apartment is now the bank's boardroom.

A collection of Proust's furniture can be found in the Musée Carnavalet at 23, rue de Sévigné. Dedicated to the history of Paris, the museum is located in the Marais district, currently the city's hippest and gayest quarter. Even better, the permanent collection is free to the general public. Here, actual items from Proust's bedroom are displayed in a full re-creation of the room in which he did much of his writing: his bed, his writing desk, and a five-panel Chinese screen.

Elsewhere in the city, there still exist many of the haunts frequented by the

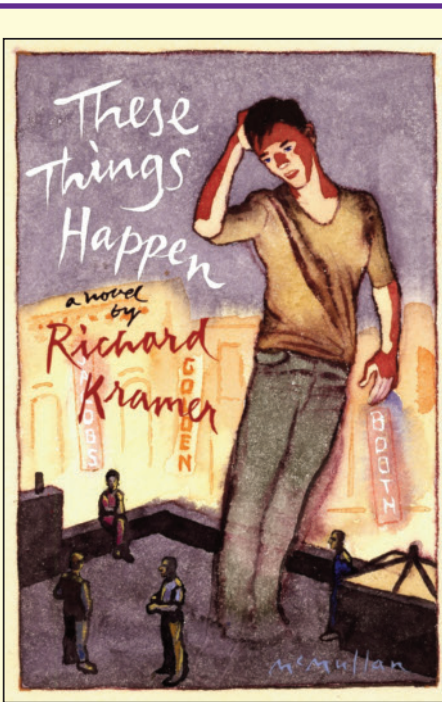
book's characters (of which there are more than 2,000, so this is inevitable). The subversive and sleazy Baron de Charlus was based on the real-life Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, who lived at 41, quai d'Orsay. Proust charmed the Count and pumped him for stories about his privileged social circle, then disingenuously denied any and all connection between the character and the Count when the book came out.

The Faubourg Saint-Germain was the domain of the aristocratic Oriane de Guermantes, and is still considered fashionable today, while Odette de Crécy, the beautiful courtesan who marries Charles Swann, is said to have been based on a well-known cocotte, Laure Hayman, who lived at 3, rue La Pérouse. She was Proust's uncle's mistress and one of Proust's muses. It was in this latter neighborhood that Proust com-

pleted his novel, and died.

For years, Proust had been predicting that he would die of pneumonia. He finally did so, at the age of 51, on November 18, 1922. His grave lies on the far side of town in the Cimetière du Père-Lachaise, division 85. The marker is attractive but unspectacular, considering the overall ostentation of the place. By contrast, four divisions over, in number 89, stands the massive tomb of Oscar Wilde with its modernist angel and missing genitalia. In any case, it is here where, along with his parents, his brother, and his sister-in-law, one can visit Proust's final haunt.

Jeffrey Round's most recent book, *Vanished In Vallarta*, is third in the *Bradford Fairfax comic mystery series*. This piece first appeared in the July-August 2010 issue.



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The Case for *The Well of Loneliness*

DIANA SOUHAMI

WHILE *The Well of Loneliness* has generally been granted pride of place as the first lesbian novel, can a case be made for it as the first “gay” novel, broadly defined to include both men and women? Published soon after Proust’s magnum opus was translated into English, Radclyffe Hall’s novel, unlike Proust’s, had an “invert” as its central character and dedicated itself almost exclusively to recounting her same-sex relationships. Whether Stephen Gordon was a “lesbian” in our sense remains an open question; some critics have argued that she would be considered a transgender person in today’s sexual taxonomy—which only means that Hall was pushing a different set of social buttons, those governing gender conformity.

What may be the Well’s most radical element is precisely Hall’s use of the categorical term “invert” to label her central character—and herself in real life. The suggestion is that a class of such persons exists who share certain characteristics and life experiences. In short, they partake of an “identity” that begins to satisfy the gold standard of what we mean by “gay” (or “lesbian,” “GLBT,” etc.). It isn’t a huge leap to imagine these folks banding together in common cause—not something the patrician Hall ever envisioned, though she did plead for tolerance and understanding of the inverts in our midst.

What launched the book into the public consciousness were the widely publicized trials on both sides of the Atlantic (conviction in the U.K., vindication in the U.S.), which gave *The Well of Loneliness* a notoriety that may have exceeded its literary merits. For many years after its 1928 publication, it was the go-to book for women, as well as for many men, who were questioning their sexuality or looking for fellow travelers. As a practical matter, it was undoubtedly the “first gay novel” to be encountered by countless readers from the 1930s to the ’70s.

This essay comes from the July-August 2008 issue. —RS

EIGHTY YEARS AGO, *The Well of Loneliness* was condemned by the English courts as an obscene libel and “burned in the King’s furnace.” The book was indicted and censored solely because of its lesbian theme, as its prose has no spice or sleaze at all. Nothing very sexy goes on in it. “She kissed her full on the lips” and “That night they were not divided” are as hot as its descriptions of lesbian lovemaking get.

Before the book was banned, reviewers praised its courage and criticized its solemnity and tendentiousness. None of them found it offensive. But the British government regarded the subject matter as inadmissible in fiction. To publish a book about

lesbianism, they said, would blight society’s morals and corrupt the young. Sir Robert Wallace, chairman of the court that censored the book, said it was “more subtle, demoralizing, corrosive and corruptive than anything ever written.” Summonses were issued against the publisher, Jonathan Cape, and the distributor, Leopold Hill. They were commanded to appear at Bow Street Court and “show cause why the said obscene book should not be destroyed.”

An extraordinary trial ensued. It showed up the contempt and outrage of the male establishment provoked by a reference to passion between women. At root, it was not Radclyffe Hall’s book that was on trial; it was her prosecutors’—or, as she called them, her persecutors’—attitude toward lesbianism. They thought it disgusting and they prejudged the case; the defense didn’t have a chance. The government and the judiciary connived to secure a conviction and ban the book. The Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Chief Magistrate, and the Attorney General all manipulated the procedures of law and disallowed any process, such as a trial by jury or a hearing of evidence and expert opinions, that might have served the interests of the defendants.

Radclyffe Hall was 48 when *The Well of Loneliness* was banned. She and Una Troubridge, who left her husband Admiral Sir Ernest Troubridge for Radclyffe, had lived together as a married couple for a decade. In many ways Radclyffe Hall was of the establishment that condemned her. She was right-wing, a patriot, and a mainstay of the Catholic Church, to which she gave a great deal of money. She owned a large London house, employed a liveried chauffeur, a secretary, and resident staff. Her clothes and manners asserted masculine authority. She wore neckties, a monocle, and diamond and sapphire cufflinks, and had her hair barbered fortnightly. Order, power, and control she perceived as masculine qualities, and she disliked doing business with women. Radclyffe was a member of the PEN club and a speaker at literary luncheons; she and Una were seen at first night of all the West End shows. When city life lost its appeal, they moved to her country house in Rye, Kent. Radclyffe rode horses, bred dachshunds, and won prizes at the major dog shows. She took her holidays in Italy and on the Riviera, sailed the Channel in a first-class cabin, and had the best suite in all the grand hotels. If men crossed her, she sued them in the (male) courts. When her watch gained a minute and a half in four weeks, she returned it for its imprecision.

It bewildered her to be branded obscene, corrupt, and depraved and to be indicted by the political party that she supported and the social class to which she felt she belonged. She coped badly with such calumny. It fed her fantasy of herself as a martyr on a par with Christ, and it made her ill. After the banning of her book, she vowed never again to live in England, and she never recovered her confidence as a writer.

Diana Souhami’s books include The Trials of Radclyffe Hall (1998) and the forthcoming Gwendolen: A Novel (2015).

Her hopes had been high for her “Stephen” novel, as she at first titled it. She wanted it read by schoolteachers, welfare workers, doctors, psychologists, and parents. She viewed it as a pioneering work with a threefold purpose, which she summed up as:

To encourage inverters to face up to a hostile world in their true colors and this with dignity and courage.

To spur all classes of inverters to make good through hard work, faithful and loyal attachments and sober and useful living.

To bring normal men and women of good will to a fuller and more tolerant understanding of the inverted.

She described herself as an experienced novelist “who was actually one of the people about whom she was writing.” These people were a “third sex,” men trapped in women’s bodies, she explained. Because she was dyslexic—her spelling was extraordinary—she found reading a struggle, so Una would read aloud to her from *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, by Havelock Ellis, and from *Psychopathia Sexualis*, by Richard von Krafft-Ebing. With disconcerting ease, Hall embraced their contentious theories about “congenital sexual inversion.” She took bits of their writing that appealed to her, mixed these with Catholicism, spiritualism—she was a member of the Society for Psychical Research—and oddball ideas on endocrinology, and came up with a theory of lesbian identity that has startled and dismayed readers of her classic novel down through the decades.

The Well of Loneliness fared better in the United States than in Britain. Covici Friede published the book in New York. The Society for the Suppression of Vice then complained about it, and Donald Friede was charged in February 1929 with “committing the offense of violating Section 1141 of the Penal Code by selling an obscene book.” His lawyer, Morris Ernst, brought to the courtroom a commonsense and much-needed sense of humor. The basis of his defense was America’s constitutional right to freedom of speech. To suppress *The Well of Loneliness* because of its theme, he argued, would “prevent the proper enlightenment of the public on an important social problem” and could have the collateral effect of condoning the suppression of hundreds of other works of literature. Who, he asked, should or could determine the dangerous social consequences of one subject rather than another? Would the “unorthodox emotional complications” of *The Well of Loneliness* cause more havoc than the sadism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, abortion in *The American Tragedy*, the adulteries in contemporary fiction, or the murders, robberies, and violence in crime novels?

What’s more, he averred, Miss Radclyffe Hall was an eminent British novelist. She was the recipient of prestigious literary prizes. It was the task of courts to suppress pornography and punish “purveyors of filth surreptitiously distributed,” not to ban literary works by acclaimed authors. *The Well of Loneliness* had moral fervor, social significance, and integrity of intention. It invited discussion and the exchange of ideas. It was a long book that took time to read. “No child, no moral defective, no impressionable seeker after prurient details would ever get far.”

The obscenity charge was not upheld in the U.S. court. Covici Friede brought out a victory edition and advertised it as “the most controversial book of the century. Suppressed in England and vindicated by an American court.” Orders from bookshops poured in, translation rights were acquired, and money was made. Una noted in her diary the book’s ever-spiraling sales. Radclyffe Hall received a royalty check for \$64,000—an enormous sum in those days—and an avalanche of letters. The book’s place in literature was assured. So was her fame, though it was not the sort of fame she had wanted. She felt degraded by the legal process and tainted by her notoriety.

Had the book’s heroine, Stephen Gordon, been a man, *The Well of Loneliness* might have passed into oblivion as an unremarkable piece of period fiction. Radclyffe Hall was no stylist. She disliked modernist innovations in literature and art. Devotional paintings, English landscapes, and portraits of her ancestors adorned the walls of her houses. She shunned the modernist heresies of Edith Sitwell, Hilda Doolittle, and Gertrude Stein. The prose in all her books is lofty and old-fashioned. She invokes “the Lord” with discomfiting frequency, and uses biblical pronouncements and words like “betoken” and “hath.”


Virginia Woolf found *The Well of Loneliness* unreadable. “The dullness of the book is such that any indecency may lurk there—one simply can’t keep one’s eyes on the page,” she wrote in November 1928. *Orlando*, her own virtuoso novel, was published that year to resounding praise. That book is about Vita Sackville-West, to whom it was dedicated, but its lesbian allusions were too ethereal and fantastic to invite scrutiny by the Home Secretary. (Hall, by the way, may have been in love with Sackville-West.) Hall’s subversiveness was that she dared to change pronouns, to write “she [not he] kissed her full on the lips.” Where other writers concealed themselves behind allusion and romans à clef, Hall spoke out.

Readers of the *Well* were and continue to be provoked by it. It has in it elements of autobiography, religious



parable, social propaganda, psychiatric case history, and Mills & Boon romance. “Lesbian” was not a word used by Radclyffe Hall, and no title could be less gay than *The Well of Loneliness*. It invited spoofs with titles like *The Sink of Solitude*. It now figures in countless dissertations and theses on censorship, sexual politics, gender dysphasia, and lesbian identity. The British government feared and suppressed the book. Feminists through the years have caviled at its patriarchal assumptions. Lesbians have objected to its depiction of them as aberrations, ersatz men, and unfortunates. Students of literature have analyzed how Radclyffe Hall actually deconstructed the theories she purports to uphold.

Because of its theme, *The Well of Loneliness* unleashed big-

otry and hypocrisy. Eighty years on, it is hard to believe that any reader has been corrupted by it. No self-respecting lesbian could want to emulate the gloom of Stephen Gordon’s failed love life. Society now refers more-or-less breezily to lesbians and gays as ordinary citizens, and the focus has shifted from breaking silence to issues of equality, expression, and lifestyle. But it was and remains a landmark publication, a pivotal work. Despite its naïveté, it survives in its own right. Its courage still calls out. Acceptance is never entrenched and can easily be pushed aside. *The Well of Loneliness* still invites a response from its readers to the tensions of being outside the norm—tensions painfully felt by its hero, poor Stephen Gordon. 

ART MEMO

Why We Wished at The Well of Loneliness

JEAN ROBERTA

I FIRST DISCOVERED *The Well of Loneliness* when I was growing up in my academic parents’ house full of books. I became aware that this book had been banned in England, and I believed this was because the English legal system of the time still enforced Victorian morality, unlike the legal system in the U.S., where I was growing up “free.” I didn’t read the novel again until I was a fifty-year-old English instructor in Canada, looking for something new to say about it. I was amazed at how much the book seemed to have changed.

By the time I approached Radclyffe Hall’s controversial novel for the second time, I knew that concern for impressionable young readers (especially girls) was the usual reason given for the censorship of reading matter in various Western countries from the late 18th century through the Victorian Age and into the 20th century. Supposedly, the impressionable young were more deeply affected by what they read than most of their elders. Remembering my own responses, I could see some truth in this assumption.

Hall’s tragic story of a persecuted “invert” (essentially a lordly butch personality in a female body) who seeks social acceptance in vain never seemed like a realistic slice of lesbian life to me. What’s more, the book is written in a language that seems formal and archaic even compared to contemporary novels, and especially compared to sassy jazz lyrics of the 1920s, which refer more openly to Sapphic love—or, to be more precise, sex. The characters in Hall’s book didn’t resemble anyone I ever met in the real world. And yet, I found the story gripping.

Hall’s central character, named Stephen by her father, who insists on giving her the saint’s name he chose before her birth, is described in a self-consciously biblical style as a noble martyr who is born to suffer. She has a “Celtic” emotional sensitivity that she in-

herited from her Irish mother, the “fair Anna,” who reminds village peasants of the Virgin Mary. No one understands Stephen, including those closest to her, and her pain is excruciating. But never does she become hardened or bitter, since she was born to be a gentleman, and she continues wanting to offer shelter and protection to the ones she loves.

What teenager could fail to identify with a character like this? And there’s more. At age twelve, Stephen is given her own horse, and she forms a deep bond with him, promising that she will always care for him as he conveys through horsey sounds and body language that he will serve her faithfully. What an irresistible relationship for impressionable youth! This was several years before the publication of 1935’s *National Velvet* or the release of the movie with Elizabeth Taylor in 1944. When Stephen (the logical person to inherit the family estate from her father) falls in love with a human being, she falls as hard as any young reader could imagine. Her first girlfriend is a straight and treacherous blonde who sends a love letter she received from Stephen to the latter’s widowed mother, who banishes her only child from the family home. Such behavior looks familiar to anyone who has studied Renaissance history or survived high school, or both.

Stephen goes on to become an earnest novelist and the chivalrous lover of an innocent orphan named Mary, whose Welsh blood gives her a “Celtic” sensitivity like Stephen’s own. The gender roles in this relationship are downright medieval, but somehow I could overlook this aspect while focusing on their mutual devotion and their adventures as a couple in the Bohemian demimonde of Paris (shades of *La Bohème*). When Stephen is greeted by a queeny Frenchman in a nightclub as “ma soeur” and responds with a heartfelt “mon frère,” I was hooked. Surely there was a place in the

world even for outcasts like me—never mind that my unpopularity always seemed to result more from my love affair with books than from any sign of chivalrous Celtic butchness.

While defying conventional classifications, *The Well of Loneliness* is typically placed in the “young adult” genre today. This seems quite ironic considering that the book was tried for obscenity in the U.S. soon after being banned in England, and was only acquitted on appeal. However, the novel wouldn’t fit comfortably on a shelf with most other banned books. Those who would remove it from “lesbian literature” (where it was soundly trashed by lesbian-feminist critics in the 1970s) and rehabilitate Stephen as a forerunner of modern transgendered characters, such as the hero of Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, are usually embarrassed by the hagiographic tone of Hall’s narrative. Defenders of the book’s old-fashioned writing style still have to cope with her descriptions of hereditary social class and people’s “racial” characteristics, plus the notion that gender and sexual orientation are determined by an “Inscrutable Will.” And then there is the grand finale, in which Stephen prays to God for mercy on behalf of her “children” and all the “inverts” of the future. Does anyone now identify as one of those?

The novel is the literary equivalent of an opera: large and loud, robustly vulgar despite its pretensions to gentility. Like opera, which I also started loving in my impressionable youth, it still has a certain emotional appeal. Should sensitive queer youths be protected from this trash for their own good, as supposedly “normal” young readers were once protected from it? Nah. I’m looking forward to a movie about the colorful author.

This piece was first published in the July-August 2007 issue.

Gore Vidal's Shot across the Bow

STEVEN F. DANSKY

GORE VIDAL died in 2012, at 86, and The New York Times obituary reluctantly conceded that his claim of having been blacklisted by the newspaper for writing *The City and the Pillar* “may have been right.” The publication of an explicitly gay novel was unprecedented in 1948. The arc of Vidal’s life was circumscribed by the book. Until his mid-20th-century arrival, no public person in the English-speaking world had identified himself as a sexual nonconformist since Oscar Wilde. (Of course, Vidal persistently rejected the label “gay” as a matter of personal identity throughout his life.)

Because our culture is both reductionist and sensationalistic, Vidal is contemplated posthumously as he was during his lifetime. First, he was defined by those with whom he had sex, which might include sailors in New York’s Times Square, a Sardinian hustler in Ravello, working-class men anywhere, underage boys in Bangkok (or so he was accused), or Hollywood movie stars. Evidently, his body type was male. Second, he was defined by those with whom he did not have sex, principally Howard Austen, his life-long companion.

Vidal said, “You don’t write *The City and the Pillar* unless you think there’s something eternal sitting there that needs to

be said.” He wrote 25 novels, 26 nonfiction works, fourteen screenplays, and eight stage plays. But he never again wrote a gay-themed novel, arguably a genre he created. The cost may simply have been too great.

The following is excerpted from an essay that appeared in the March-April 2010 issue. — SFD

WHEN GORE VIDAL wrote his breakthrough novel *The City and the Pillar* in 1948 at the age of 22, it marked him as arguably the first openly gay American novelist. *The City and the Pillar* was controversial when it was published. It wasn’t reviewed by *The New York Times*, which refused to take any advertising for the novel, and the *Times* didn’t review any of Vidal’s work for nearly a decade. Vidal believes he was blacklisted for purely homophobic reasons. Summing up reaction to the novel, Vidal remarked: “It was believed in right-wing circles that I invented same sexuality in 1948 with *The City and the Pillar*, that nothing like that had ever happened in the United States until my book. I feel like Prometheus having brought fire from heaven.” When Vidal announced his candidacy for U.S. Congress in 1960 to represent the Southern Tier region of New York, he received an anonymous call warning him that if he continued to run, a million copies of *The City and the Pillar* would be distributed from Fishkill to Hudson. “Make it two million and I’ll draw out.”

Vidal has stated that “*The City and the Pillar* has nothing of me in it” and, on another occasion, that “I’m the least personal of writers.” But one can’t help but notice that the protagonist, Jim, is a young man from Virginia who joins the Navy and goes to war, where he meets Bob, his sexual and spiritual “twin,” falls in love, and broods a great deal about the affair. Thematically, it’s essentially an early coming-out novel. Jim progresses through predictable, same-sex developmental stages, from acknowledging confused sexual feelings through sexual and social experimentation to exploration and involvement in sexual relationships. The novel is dedicated to JT, acknowledged by Vidal in *Palimpsest* to be Jimmie Trimble, who died at nineteen on Iwo Jima. A photo of Trimble appears twice in *Snapshots*. There’s a clear parallel between the Vidal-Trimble and the Jim-Bob pairings in real life and in the novel. In *Palimpsest*, Vidal declared Trimble “the unfinished business of my life.”

Vidal looks with disdain upon queer studies, rebukes same-sex identity politics — “There is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person. There are only homo- or heterosexual acts” — and disdains notions of a “gay sensibility.” Notwithstanding his reluctance to be labeled as gay, any reasoned account will place Vidal in the foreground of gay intellectual history. Decades before the founding of the modern GLBT



Steven F. Dansky, a political activist, writer, and photographer for nearly a half-century, is a frequent contributor to this magazine.

movement, he admonished: "You have got to keep going as far out as you can, as far as your imagination will take you."

FEW INTELLECTUALS in our society have lived in the klieg-lit glare of public notice the way Gore Vidal has. The son of an aviation pilot who dated Amelia Earhart and the grandson of an Oklahoma founder and its first senator, Vidal shares a stepfather with Jacqueline Kennedy, is cousins with former President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Al Gore, and was friends with Tennessee Williams, Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman, and Christopher Isherwood, among many others. A 2009 "visual memoir" titled *Gore Vidal: Snapshots in History's Glare* contained images of Vidal with friends and acquaintances such as Marlon Brando, William Burroughs, Truman Capote, Christopher Fry, Allen Ginsberg, Mick Jagger, and Andy Warhol, to name but a few.

Vidal has famously engaged in personality-driven debates for decades throughout his career, boasting that "I never miss a chance to have sex or appear on television." He and William F. Buckley were infamous opponents. During the 1968 Republican Presidential Convention in Chicago, they appeared together on ABC-TV. Vidal opposed the Vietnam War and Buckley supported bombing North Vietnam into oblivion. The dialogue became ferociously contentious. Vidal: "Shut up a minute. As far as I'm concerned, the only crypto-Nazi I can think of is yourself." Buckley: "Now listen you queer. I'll sock you in the goddamn face and you'll stay plastered."

In a 1971 *New York Review of Books* essay, Vidal went after a trio of men he dubbed "M3" for Henry Miller, Norman Mailer,

and Charles Manson, suggesting that each "has been conditioned to think of women as, at best, breeders of sons; at worst, objects to be poked, humiliated, killed." He and Mailer appeared together on *The Dick Cavett Show* and had the following exchange. Mailer: "You're a liar and a hypocrite. ... Are you ready to apologize?" Vidal: "I would apologize if it hurts your feelings. Of course I would." Mailer: "No, it hurts my sense of intellectual pollution." Vidal: "As an expert you should know about that."

His feuds have been interminable, legendary, and sometimes litigious. He admitted that "litigation takes the place of sex at middle age." His conflict with Truman Capote, whom he once

thought of as a "bright wit [with] sweet charm," turned into open warfare. He instituted a million-dollar lawsuit because of a 1975 *Playgirl* interview in which Capote charged that Vidal was physically ejected from a White House party given by John F. Kennedy because of drunken and obnoxious behavior. Currently Vidal is engaged in an ac-

rimonious battle with Edmund White. He once wrote, "I like Edmund White, particularly *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*—a lovely book." But, now he thinks White is "a filthy, low writer." And White called Vidal an "awful, nasty man." The dispute arose because of White's play *Terre Haute*, which was inspired by correspondence between Vidal and Timothy McVeigh, who was executed in 1995 for the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. "That play implies I am madly in love with McVeigh. ... I'm more interested in the Constitution and McVeigh than the loving tryst he saw. It was vulgar fag-ism." The films *Capote* (2005) and *Infamous* (2006) allude to a psy-

No public person in the English-speaking world had identified himself as a sexual nonconformist since Oscar Wilde.

ART MEMO

That Scene in The City and the Pillar

DAVID MASELLO

AT A TIME in the 1970s when talk at the playground was of the sex scene on page 36 of *The Godfather*, I was perpetually reading page 47 of *The City and the Pillar*. Of course, I read Mario Puzo's wet, sticky rendering of a prenuptial encounter for comparison with the passage that had come to enthrall me. And while Vidal's scene was vaguer, even flirting with euphemism ("lights glittered in circles behind his closed eyelids, their eyes [were] shut and seeing for the first time"), it was far more realistic to me, as it involved two young men.

For months, every day after school, I would sit in a worn leather chair in the small library of my parents' house and reread the passages about Jim Willard and Bob Ford in a Book-of-the-Month-Club edition of the famous (infamous, to some) 1948 novel. While I knew what happened between the teenage characters on their camping trip, I also didn't—and so I read and reread trying to learn how they arrived at the point of

their encounter and what exactly happened. I wanted to be prepared for something as thrilling and life altering. As the protagonist, Jim Willard, realized at the moment of embrace with his friend, "This was his world and he was alive."

A few years after I had first found and read the book, my senior-year high school English teacher gave us a writing assignment in which we had to assume the first-person identity of someone currently in the news, and reflect on that person's most important role model. It was a way to combine the current nonfiction world with that of fiction, proving that both were equally real.

My teacher was a progressive, tolerant, straight man who didn't wear neckties and sometimes rode his bicycle home after school with a group of students who lived in his neighborhood in Evanston, Illinois (for some of us, he was our Miss Jean Brodie). Friends and I even dropped by his home one weekday night, at 11 p.m., to chat with him, something I still wince about—and without betraying any annoyance, he came down-

stairs in his bathrobe and pajamas and talked. Little could shock him. I was in the teenage phase of reckless self-revelation, testing the tolerance boundaries of friends, all in the pursuit of love, at a time when it seemed most of my peers were finding it. As each of them hooked up with a girlfriend, they slunk away into their relationship, leaving behind those of us who were unattached.

Already, at a kind of "true confessions" session with friends one Saturday night around a rec-room pool table, I had admitted that I was "bisexual"—although both the "bi" and the "sexual" were untrue. But the point that I was attracted to fellow male classmates was made. In fact, I was distractedly in love with a handsome boy named Chris who was not in the circle of my immediate friends and who had mysteriously arrived in our hometown from Canada, just for senior year. On the first day of school, he had tapped me on my shoulder, choosing me as his workout partner, and I remember saying to myself, "This is the first person I will love." After I made this confession about


chosexual attraction held by Capote for Perry Smith, one of the murderers in the nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* (1965). The suggestion that there was a similar dynamic at work with Vidal and McVeigh set off something akin to catalytic rage in Vidal.

Vidal is not squeamish about challenging presidents, or would-be presidents. Of the Kennedys he said, “I never believed in Jack’s charisma. ... He was one of our worst presidents,” while Bobby was “a phony, a little Torquemada,” and Joseph, the family patriarch, “a crook—should have been in jail.” He quipped that Ronald Reagan was “a triumph of the embalmer’s art.” On the George W. Bush administration: “The Bush people have virtually got rid of Magna Carta and habeas corpus. In a normal republic I would probably have raised an army and overthrown them. It will take a hundred years to put it all back.” Of John McCain: “He’s a goddamned fool. ... He should have been court-martialed.” Of Hillary Clinton: “I’d always rather liked her. She’s a perfectly able lawyer. ... But this long campaign, this daily search for the grail, has driven her crazy.” He wrote that Barack Obama was doing “dreadfully” and explained: “I was hopeful. He was the most intelligent person we’ve had in that position for a long time. But he’s inexperienced. He has a total inability to understand military matters. ... He’s absolutely bowled over by generals, who tell him lies and he believes them.”

Vidal is an indefatigable social critic, commenting on the state of our democracy: “The United States is a madhouse. The country should be put away and we’re being told to go away. Nothing makes any sense.” Commenting on some famous homophobes, he remarked: “I believe that as the highest-ranking member of the U.S. Senate, Mr. [Trent] Lott should be charged with incitement to violence and to murder, specifically in the case of Matthew Shepard, and that Mr. [Gary] Bauer and others

who have indulged in the same reckless demonizing of millions of Americans be equally charged.” On feminism: “The hatred these girls have inspired is to me convincing proof that their central argument is valid.”

Dennis Altman argued in *Gore Vidal’s America* (2005) that the novel *Myra Breckenridge* (1968) was part of a “major cultural assault on the assumed norms of gender and sexuality.” Myra Breckenridge is a male-to-female transgendered mythic heroine—“I am Myra Breckenridge whom no man will ever possess”—who set out to “change the sexes, to re-create Man.” In 2006’s *Point to Point Navigation*, Vidal claimed that “it was not until I was halfway through the story that I realized she had been a male film critic who had changed his sex. Myron had become Myra. Why? I wrote on, laughing.” Margot Hentoff, in her review of the novel in *The New York Review of Books*, said that it conjured “the ultimate shared fantasy of the age—a future of androgynous independence.”

Myra seems more a literary device than an authentic character: she’s a verbatim mouthpiece for many of Vidal’s perspectives on gender and sexuality, such as his views on bisexuality. “I do share the normal human response to whatever is attractive physically in either sex. I say *normal* human response, realizing that our culture has resolutely resisted the idea of bisexuality. We insist that there is only one *right* way of having sex: man and woman joined together to make baby; all else is wrong.” Or his view of über-masculinity: “The young men compensate by *playing* at being men, wearing cowboy clothes, boots, black leather, attempting through clothes (what an age for the fetishist!) to impersonate the kind of man our society *claims* to admire but swiftly puts down should he attempt to be anything more than an illusionist, playing a part.” 

Chris, one of my more progressive friends said: “It’s about you and Chris—I knew it! He’s why you don’t spend as much time with us as you used to.”

I let his remark stand, for it was exhilarating to have my friends, cue sticks frozen in their hands, think that Chris and I were having a physical relationship. For that to seem true meant that I was on par with some of them who had longtime steady girlfriends. So, for my English teacher’s assignment, I took on the persona of Leonard Matlovich, a prominent gay activist of the time who had been a much-decorated Vietnam War veteran. The character I had Matlovich cite as the most influential in his life was Jim Willard in *The City and the Pillar*.

In my voice, Matlovich became a casual-talking guy for whom being gay was a natural state. Using him as my medium, I was able to talk about my love for Chris and how I schemed and planned and fantasized about having the kind of encounter that Vidal’s characters had experienced. I proselytized that being gay was nothing to be ashamed of. And I insisted that being a gay male did not lead inevitably to the alcoholic, suicidal, murderous despair at the end of the novel.

Years later, though, Matlovich would die of AIDS. As he said in his final public speech in 1988, “if there is any one word that describes our community’s reaction to AIDS, that word is love, love, love.”

Vidal’s dark rendering of the fate of gay men—and of course the term “gay” was not in widespread use in 1948—is what the reading public expected. In another popular book of my teenage years, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex But Were Afraid to Ask*, published at the same time I had encountered Vidal’s novel, the description of gay life by David Reuben, M.D., was as judgmental as something out of the Inquisition. I remember reading in despair, from that same leather chair, his description of how gay men met and interacted almost exclusively in bowling alley restrooms. And I didn’t even like bowling!

Over time, the more I reread Vidal’s book, the more conspicuous became its flaws, which included the overly tragic, fatalistic demise in store for homosexuals. But Vidal had written the book, his third novel, when he was only 22, and the fact that he took on the subject matter when he did makes him a visionary. In his introduction to an amended

1995 version of the novel, he recalls an editor warning him in 1948: “You will never be forgiven for this book.” Many major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, refused to review it, and as late as 1975 a copy was confiscated at an airport for obscenity.

But the book quickly became a bestseller when it was first published. Vidal’s revised version features a happier ending but also includes, to my dismay, a greatly neutered, less baroque version of the events I had read on page 47 of my edition. (Plus, it’s now on a different page.) Even their positions were now indeterminate: in the original, “Bob [was] on his back and Jim across him,” but that line was removed in the new version. Had I read this less sensual, vertigo-inducing, star-filled version of Jim and Bob’s consummation as a teenager, I wonder if the book would have had the same effect. That “shuddering sigh” between Jim and Bob on page 47 articulated a kind of love of which I needed an example at that time. It was something, as my English teacher had made clear, that could be both fictional and real.

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Mary Renault as the First Gay Novelist

ALAN BRADY CONRATH

BEST KNOWN for her historical novels set in ancient Greece, many with overtly homosexual themes and scenes, Mary Renault began her career with a novel set in modern times called *The Charioteer* (1953). Taking place during World War II, the novel recounts the story of a wounded soldier named Laurie “Spud” Odell who is both torn between two lovers and conflicted about his own homosexual feelings. One of his lovers is similarly confused, but the other, a naval officer who’s a veteran of the British public school system, seems quite comfortable with his sexual leanings and accepts himself as a different kind of man.

That *The Charioteer* was read as a “gay novel” is demonstrated by the fact that it became an instant bestseller among homosexual readers soon after its publication. Indeed if there’s a case to be made for it as “the first” such novel, it lies in the fact that it found a large and eager audience of gay readers—as did Renault’s next novel, *The Last of the Wine* (1956). Indeed these two novels undoubtedly provided much of the rank-and-file American public with its first exposure to homosexual themes and characters. And while *The City and the Pillar* (1948) had sold quite well a few years earlier, author Gore Vidal had seen fit to create two angst-ridden protagonists one of whom murders the other in the final scene. Renault, in contrast, took pains to portray same-sex relations in a positive light, notably in *The Mask of Apollo* (1966) and in *The Persian Boy* (1972), which effectively outed Alexander the Great.

Taken together, these books might qualify Mary Renault, herself a lesbian, as the first gay novelist, as she wrote not a one-off novel about same-sex love but a body of work that kept it front-and-center as a recurring theme.

Following is an essay by the late Alan Conrath, slightly edited by me, which appeared in the May-June 2004 issue. —RS

IT SEEMS THE GODS will have their revenge, or at least their ironic outcomes. Thus we owe it to a woman and a lesbian to have written the most authentic and beautiful prose about romantic love between men in all of literature. In eight novels and one history (a definitive biography of Alexander the Great), Mary Renault recreated the world of ancient Greece with an intensity and an authenticity unmatched by any of the writers who have attempted it, including some of greater critical acclaim.

Renault received her share of praise, to be sure, most of it

coming from her adoring public, which turned novel after novel into a bestseller. But she was also esteemed by other writers, such as Gore Vidal, who gave *The Persian Boy* (1972) a rave review, marveling that the author had found a readership for a novel about a homosexual love affair between a world conqueror and his Persian eunuch. Renault also won numerous awards for her work, and got a front-page obituary in *The New York Times* upon her death in 1983. Still, she is generally ranked below such writers as Robert Graves and Marguerite Yourcenar, who also wrote of ancient times. And she appears rarely if ever among the “greats” of 20th-century literature when critics take to drawing up their “top ten” lists.

It is worth pondering for a moment why Renault is not in fact included among the mightiest of literary lions. One factor is certainly the 20th-century bias in favor of experimentalism, especially in the use of language. Alas, Renault was a writer of gorgeous, realistic prose in the great 19th-century tradition; she was not Proust, Faulkner, Woolf, or Joyce. And while some of

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Renault’s works in the closeted 1950s and ’60s, when positive representations of gay people were virtually nonexistent.

these earlier writers did achieve popular success, by the time Renault came along—their first books were published in the 1950s—the arbiters of literary greatness were starting to take a dim view of anything that ventured onto the *Times* bestseller list. There also seems to be some critical bias against the historical novel, once a revered literary form that’s now seen as a sort of genre fiction.

But one can imagine other reasons, extraneous to strictly literary criteria, for why Renault occupies a less elevated rank than she may deserve. For starters, there is that profuse presence of explicit homosexual content in most of her novels. Renault clearly believed that one cannot write meaningfully or accurately about ancient Greece without treating homosexual behavior and relationships, which she saw as intimately connected to core Greek values. Many have tried, needless to say. For example, until Renault there was a virtual conspiracy of silence concerning Alexander the Great’s undeniable homo-, or at least bi-, sexuality. Only in the last thirty years or so (with a few exceptions) has any serious work dealing with that subject received mainstream critical attention.

“IT IS A LOVELY THING to live with courage, and to die leaving everlasting fame.” These words of Alexander the Great epitomize Renault’s characterization of him in two of her best novels, *Fire from Heaven* and *The Persian Boy*. Renault’s Alexander personifies the ethical ideal found in Greek culture from Homer to Plato and Aristotle: the concept of “virtue” as a moral standard—as *the* moral standard. This is quite a different approach to morality than the Christian habit of setting down a set of rules or principles that must be followed more-or-less ex-

Alan Brady Conrath, who died in 2005, was a writer and poet—by day an accountant—based in Boston.

actly if one is to lead a moral, God-pleasing life. Greek virtue subsumed such qualities as generosity, self-control, physical courage, loyalty, and energetic citizenship. Not excluded from this configuration were one's physical countenance and development. Plato cautioned against confusing the beauty of the soul with that of the body, but he never said that the latter should be ignored or despised. Such attributes were integral to the whole person. The Greeks had no interest in splintering the person into separate qualities and relegating some parts, such as a man's sexuality or ardor, to a lower rank.

This concept of virtue can perhaps be illustrated by a passage in *Fire from Heaven* in which Hephaestion, Alexander's adolescent lover, asks for proof of Alexander's love. They are climbing in a tree at the time. Alexander grasps his lover's hand and leans out into thin air. This demonstration of love is profound, for it presupposes a trust not only in Hephaestion's love but also in his physical strength and skill. The dramatic effect is far more compelling than any bedroom scene could be to demonstrate the essential unity of romantic love and virtue in Hellenistic culture. It is also perfect literary realism, exactly the sort of demonstration of affection that one adolescent would seek from another.

There are two other passages in *The Persian Boy* that elaborate this concept of male-to-male love. The first occurs when Bagoas, a Persian eunuch who became Alexander's lover at sixteen when the conqueror was 25, is seated at a dancing festival where Alexander first sees, then falls in love with, his future wife, the daughter of a tribal chieftain. Bagoas, as a part of Alexander's company, bears witness to the infatuation: "I had found him Hephaestion's boy ... [and] now I had given him to a woman. I sat in the hot torchlight, tasting death, and being pleasant to those around me, as I had been taught when I was twelve years old." What Bagoas understands, however strong his bond of love with Alexander—and the two remained together until the latter's demise—is that their love can never be shared on an equal basis: the youth's physical incompleteness renders him morally incomplete in the Greek scheme of things, limiting his attainment of virtue, and so Alexander's love itself cannot be complete.

This point is re-enacted, with Renault's same flair for narrative economy, after the death of Hephaestion from a sudden sickness. Bagoas is contemplating one of the carved images of Hephaestion in Alexander's suite, pondering the man's mystique, when Alexander startles him and asks what he's doing. "He was dear to you. I wanted to understand." Alexander took a turn across the room, then said, "He knew me." Now, in this moment, Bagoas knows that his real rival, Alexander's boyhood lover, has surpassed him for eternity, again because Bagoas cannot offer Alexander the love of an equal and therefore, in a special sense unknown to us today, cannot partake of the same ethos as the departed hero. This is a different premise for love than we have today—different not only in its inherent sexism, but in its indissoluble link between love as adoration and virtue of character. As for Alexander's attachment to the noble Hephaestion, it is a fact of history that Alexander lay upon his body, weeping, for an entire day. He sent the corpse to the oracle of Ammon at Siwah so that Hephaestion could be worshipped as a god. And he ordered that all contracts within his realm (which spanned from Greece to India) to be sworn "in Hephaestion's name."

What is also unique to Renault's writing is her depiction of

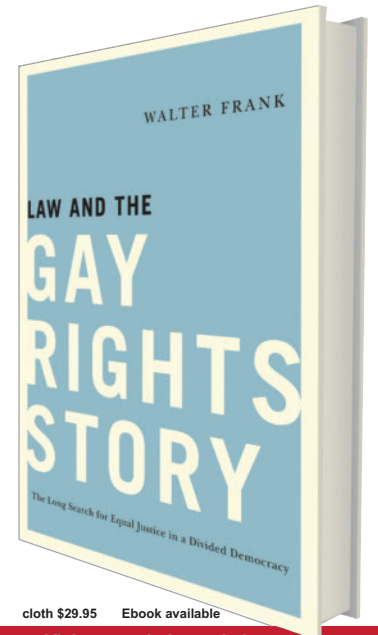
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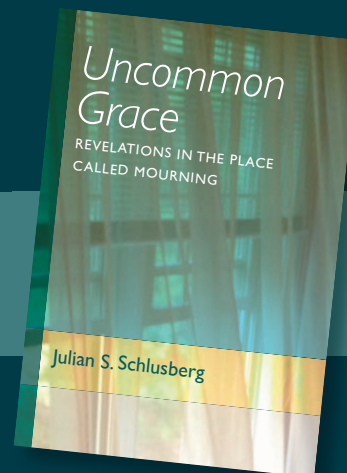
—Christopher Bram, author of *Gods and Monsters* and *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America*



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David J. DePalma, Ph.D.
Director of HeartVoice
Author of *Remembering Your HeartVoice: The Guidebook*

the various patterns of homosexual love that existed in the classical world. She notices one type of relationship for which there is no genuine heterosexual equivalent: the long-term homosexual bond that is non-monogamous, that may even involve female partners for fun and procreation. The fact that Alexander participated in such a relationship has given rise to the assumption that he was “bisexual”—as Gore Vidal asserted and as Renault herself let slip in her biography of Alexander. But I would still call this a homosexual relationship, because it’s clear that the primary emotional bond is between the long-term male partners. Indeed there’s a strong strain in Greek culture, famously expressed in Plato’s *Symposium*, that love between a man and a woman, because of their inherent inequality, is necessarily inferior to the love between men, whom the gods have made superior in character to women.

In *The Last of the Wine*, Renault’s twenty-year-old protagonist Alexias wonders anxiously if his friend Xenophon (based on the real historical figure) has the capacity to love another man. The implication is that there’s something lacking in a man who cannot love an equal. For its exploration of a homosexual relationship, *The Last of the Wine* surpasses even *The Persian Boy*. In part this is because the two central characters, Alexias and Lysis, young citizens of Athens, are more conventional, far less exotic, than Alexander and his retinue, so it’s possible for their relationship to take its own course without having to be reconciled with the spectacular accomplishments of Alexander. What one finds in this relationship is a pattern that is perhaps familiar to all great loves, yet unique to the homosexual experience because of the accommodations it must make to other sexual liaisons, including marriage to a woman. Alexias is about eight years Lysis’ junior, and their relationship initially follows the pattern of a somewhat older man setting a standard of behavior for a youth. Alexias’ father writes him that he approves the union and admonishes his son to follow the elder’s example and advice. The destiny the two lovers over the next years, set

against the backdrop of the Peloponnesian Wars, is described by Renault as going through a series of stages, starting with

the honeymoon stage in which all is perfect; the gradual distancing for no apparent reason; reconciliation which restores the former closeness but not the passion; the challenges, overcome, to mindset and emotion of other women along the way and attractions—never acted on—for other men and boys. They do not grow old together—I cannot reveal why, you must read the master herself for that—yet their relationship progresses through all the stages of seasoning and maturation, and though it ends tragically, it ends beautifully as well.

The bond between lovers in ancient Greece was cemented by a concept of virtue whereby each partner vowed never to shame the other through ignoble conduct. Again, we have a contrast with heterosexual love in a Christian marriage, where monogamy is essential to the bond.

IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT to impress upon a non-gay reader the importance of Renault’s works in the closeted context of the 1950s and ’60s, when positive representations of gay people were virtually nonexistent. Renault offered not just passing references but complete portraits of homosexual relationships of various kinds. And by attaching these relationships to a Homeric or Platonic concept of personal virtue, she was daring to suggest that they were superior to heterosexual relationships!

Renault is especially adept at filling in historical detail and making it seem vividly real. In *The Praise Singer*, for instance, the poet Simonides is horrified to discover his pupil writing down the lyrics to a poem he’s composing. Here, in this dramatic but amusing scene, perfectly rendered, Renault is reminding the reader that Western verse originated as oral performance (probably sung or chanted), and that transcription was at first regarded as a vulgarization. In *The Mask of Apollo*, one learns much about ancient stagecraft, and there’s a wonderful scene, perhaps the most dramatic in the book, in which the hero and his companion (a woman!) escape the sack of Syracuse in the reign of Dion by using the sound and stage effects in a theater to frighten superstitious pursuers. In *The Bull from the Sea*, a novel about the youthful Theseus, Renault sensibly renders her bull-riders as slight and lithe rather than heavily muscled—for how else could they perform the gymnastic acrobatics required by the riders (who were recruited by lot in Athens and sent to Crete) in the bull ring?

Alexander the Great’s last known remarks were uttered as he lay dying from pneumonia in Babylon (he was 32). The Greeks believed that certain men who had excelled in courage became gods upon their death. (Alexander was even regarded as a god in his own lifetime.) When asked at what times divine honors should be paid to him after his death, he replied, “When you are happy.”

Mary Renault wrote with grace and fluency, a master of both characterization and narrative technique. Her novels re-imagine an ancient Greece that is noble and seems wholly credible. She provides numerous images of what human beings can become if they strive to make it happen, and she has brought forth portrayals of homosexual love that are at once realistic and idealized. Her representations of love reflect specific features of the Greek ethos and invoke what is most difficult, most intense, and most admirable within each of us.



The Mockers

What rich glass bottle held the picture of
our music teacher, name I can’t recall.
I only know I had a twisted love
for her, that she was strange, alone, and tall.
We took the bottle to the field out back,
my childhood friend and I, and dug a grave.
Whatever crazy words we said, I lack
them now. Or did we sing or laugh, I crave
this memory, our kneeling on the ground
one afternoon to place Miss X in earth.
I strain my mind with hope to hear a sound,
even a bird, or leaves in wind, what birth
of folly or regret was brewing then,
what digging up could bring her back again.

MARY MERIAM

The Baldwin of *Giovanni's Room*

JAMES POLCHIN

WHEN James Baldwin presented a manuscript of *Giovanni's Room* to his agent, Helen Strauss, she told him to burn it. It was his second novel. His first, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, was a success with readers and critics. His editor at Knopf was eager for a second success by the young and talented "Negro writer." But a novel set in Paris about the white American David who falls in love with an Italian named Giovanni was not the book they were expecting—or prepared to publish. Eventually, Dial Press published the book, and the critics praised it for its prose and its honesty. "Even as one is dismayed by Mr. Baldwin's materials," wrote New York Times critic Granville Hicks, "one rejoices in the skill with which he renders them."

The plot is a simple one. David, living in the south of France, recounts his last year in Paris after his girlfriend Hella has left for several weeks in Spain. David meets Giovanni in the café life of the Left Bank, and the two fall in love, spending days and nights in Giovanni's one-room basement apartment. This room, with its paradoxical meanings of protective isolation and prison, haunts the novel's ending. When Hella returns to Paris, David resolves to build a life with her and leaves Giovanni, escaping without a word. David struggles with his decision, and eventually Hella learns the truth about his relationship with Giovanni. The novel ends with Hella leaving David to return to America, Giovanni executed for the murder of a wealthy gay man, and David alone in the South of France.

Perhaps calling *Giovanni's Room* a gay novel is a misnomer. "It's difficult to say when its love story became a gay love story," wrote Christopher Bram in *Eminent Outlaws*. In many ways the novel elides its labels. Both David and Giovanni had sexual and emotional relationships with women and men. You could say the tragedy of the story fits with the plotlines of gay characters in much of mid-20th-century American fiction. But *Giovanni's Room* has endured, I suspect, not because of how it fits into the era, but how it resisted such plots and definitions of gay love.

In an essay Baldwin wrote in 1949 for *Zero* magazine titled "Preservation of Innocence," he boldly criticized portrayals of homosexuals in contemporary American fiction, most acutely in hard-boiled detective novels: "These novels are not concerned with homosexuality but with the ever present danger of sexual activity between men." For Baldwin, a novel was meant to witness experiences beyond our definition and understanding of human behavior. Baldwin would harness these ideas in *Giovanni's Room*. The novel becomes a kind of anti-narrative of

homosexuality by making the complex struggle of homosexual desire the extended, self-conscious heart of the story. There is no happy ending. There is no transcendent heterosexual coupling in the aftermath of a homosexual threat that so often concluded such stories. Instead, Baldwin gives us the turmoil of a man longing to escape the definitions of sexual desires forbidden to him—and failing miserably. The novel's poignancy lies in how it makes us witness this longing and struggle for ourselves.

The following essay was first published in the January-February 2010 issue. — JP



IN THE FALL OF 1951, the 27-year-old James Baldwin, seeking a quiet place to finish what would become his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, found himself in the Swiss village of Loèche-les Bains. Baldwin had been living in Paris since 1948, beginning an expatriate life that would continue for the next forty years. There in that mountain village, he was the only black man, and he realized quickly that he was in a place that had never actually seen a black man before. The spectacle of Baldwin's presence, his experiences of being touched and insulted with familiar racist words tinged with French accents, formed the subject of his essay "Stranger in the Village" (1953). But the

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essay, in both its eloquence and anger, makes a much larger argument beyond the villagers' actions. Baldwin uses his encounters as an occasion to ponder the whole history of Western white supremacy, arguing that "the root of the American Negro problem is the necessity of the American white man to find a way of living with the Negro in order to be able to live with himself." It was precisely such dislocations from the Manhattan geographies that mapped the terrain of Baldwin's literary imagination, where he often came to his profound insights about racism—and homophobia—in the U.S.

Baldwin's fiction and nonfiction almost always focused on the U.S., but they were largely written outside of its borders. *Giovanni's Room*, his second novel, is an exception. Set in 1950s Paris, the novel tells the story of the homosexual awakening of David, a young American separated from his girlfriend, who begins a relationship with an Italian, Giovanni. When his girlfriend returns to Paris, the affair with Giovanni ends as David sinks into a heterosexual performance while struggling with his desires for Giovanni. The novel has become a classic in the annals of gay and lesbian literature, even as it complicates the very definition of a stable sexual identity. Baldwin's third novel, *Another Country*, is set in Manhattan and explores interracial and bisexual relationships among a group of writers and musicians, most of whom come from outside the geographic, sexual, and racial boundaries of 1950s America. Begun

Giovanni's Room has become a classic in the annals of gay and lesbian literature, even as it complicates the very definition of a stable sexual identity.

in the late 1940s, it took Baldwin over ten years to finish the novel, bringing it to completion on the shores of the Bosphorus in a small apartment in Istanbul. "Once you find yourself in another civilization," he once said, "you are forced to examine your own."

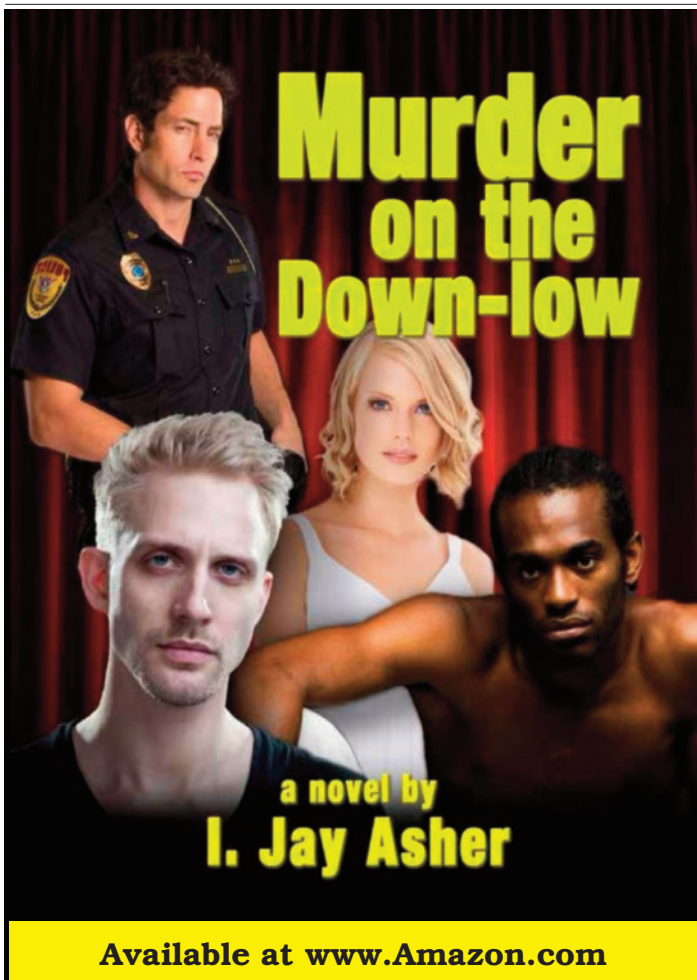
Baldwin was in many respects the first global American writer. He pulled together the threads of American history from its European traditions and African exploitations, and created stories that were deeply anchored to his own experiences in postwar America. In his self-imposed exile, he was given many labels during his lifetime: Negro, black, gay, queer, radical, pacifist, Northerner, race traitor, expatriate writer. He spent his career embracing the vicissitudes of being both outside and inside the many social identities that were foisted upon him. In the introduction to her fascinating 2009 book, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade*, Magdalena Zaborowska opened

with a striking quote from the writer: "Perhaps only someone who is outside of the States realizes that it's impossible to get out." This idea echoes a similar one from "Stranger in the Village": "People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them." These layered confinements of geography and history gave shape to Baldwin's literary and political visions and marked his self-imposed exile as a crucial component of his creative work.

There has been much interest in Baldwin's life and writings since his death in 1987, but his biographers have scarcely considered the influence of his expatriate life on his work. Herb Boyd's *Baldwin's Harlem: A Biography of James Baldwin* (2008) places him in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s as it's played out in the neighborhood of Baldwin's childhood, but gives little acknowledgment of Baldwin's homosexuality. *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (1991), by the Scottish writer James Campbell, details Baldwin's life through a reading of his fiction without dwelling on his life abroad. *James Baldwin Now* (1999), a collection of essays edited by Dwight A. McBride, focuses more on Baldwin's sexual orientation, with a few essays focused on his transatlantic migrations.

Baldwin's Turkish Decade situates Baldwin within a complicated constellation of sexual, racial, and national identities, and offers a subtle analysis of Baldwin that moves beyond simple classifications. "This project," Zaborowska writes, "attempts to bring the conflicting and often contradictory depictions of Baldwin's person and writings together." To see Baldwin in Turkey, a country layered with complex histories and divided between Europe and Asia, is, as Zaborowska suggests, to see Baldwin anew.

Like Baldwin himself, this book defies easy classification. Part travel memoir, part literary analysis, part biography, and part social history of Turkey in the 1960s, the book explores the ways in which Baldwin "functioned as a transatlantic black intellectual," how the city influenced his work, and how he came to affect the cultural and intellectual life of Istanbul. The book is organized around three significant works that Baldwin accomplished during his time in Istanbul: the completion of his novel *Another Country*, a book which, according to




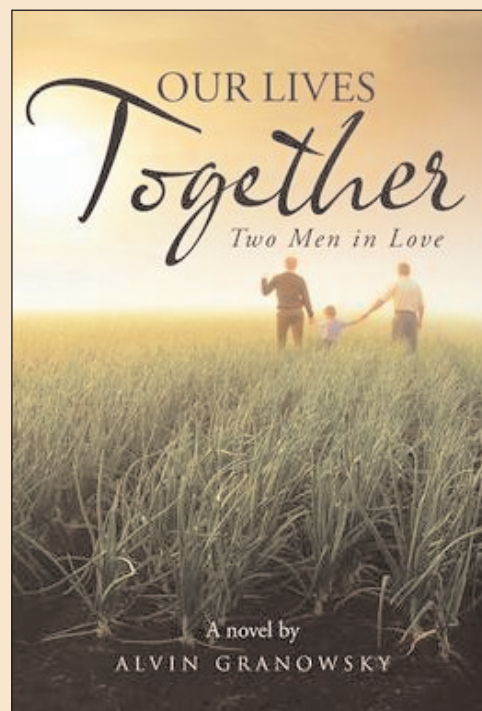
Zaborowska, should be reconsidered as “a record of sorts of Baldwin’s contacts with the new places, peoples, and cultures of Turkey”; his directing and staging of John Herbert’s controversial play *Fortune in Men’s Eyes*, about homosexuality in prison; and his work on a collection of essays, *No Name on the Street*, which reflect on the Civil Rights Movement and, according to Zaborowska, offer “a careful analysis of black masculinity in relationship to homophobia on both sides of the color line.” Within each part of the book, she weaves the analysis of Baldwin’s writings in with her interviews of the writers, journalists, artists, diplomats, and family members who populated Baldwin’s life in Turkey.

Baldwin was shaped by the city and its people, to be sure, but they in turn were shaped by his works. For example, when Baldwin took on the project to direct and stage Herbert’s play, which was translated as “Düsenin Dostu” or “Friend of the Fallen,” it was a radical move. “The play was a success because it was a revolutionary play for the Turkish audience ... this was the first time that homosexuality was vividly being shown [in the theater],” says one of Zaborowska’s interviewees.

Zaborowska organizes the book around a short film made by Turkish director, photographer, and friend of Baldwin, Sedat Pakay. Entitled “James Baldwin: From Another Place,” the film captures Baldwin’s movements through the city streets and markets over a three-day period in 1970. In one interview, Baldwin says: “Watching people on the streets of Turkey and dealing with some of the people who I know here, one’s aware of the certain kind of uneasiness in them, in relation to the western world, a certain angle (anger?) to their relationship to it. Which echoes something in me ... because of our own peculiar relationship to the west.” The film and Baldwin’s words thread throughout the book as a metaphor for a new way of visualizing and understanding his writings. This is particularly true in Zaborowska rereading of *Another Country* as a novel not only about New York but deeply shaped by a hybrid outlook of “East-West urban imaginary.”

The one problem I have with Zaborowska’s study is her casual use of the terms “gay” and “queer”—terms that hold particular meanings today that they didn’t have in the 1960s. Zaborowska notes that “while Baldwin championed erotic liberation since the 1940s” he “resisted the term ‘gay’” even in the later years of his life. While Zaborowska doesn’t explore this resistance, it raises a vexing conundrum about how to frame Baldwin’s life in a study that so astutely places him as an outsider to the national idioms of race and sexuality. In the end, the book demonstrates that any account of Baldwin’s life and writings is itself constantly “trapped in history,” searching and stumbling for the very terms of sexual identity that Baldwin so often rejected.

Zaborowska’s book will make you want to reread *Another Country* and his later works with a new context of understanding. The book illuminates, with a scholar’s focus and a writer’s nuance, how Baldwin’s exile in Istanbul was not simply a theme or escape from the racism and homophobia of the U.S., but also a deeply felt condition crucial to his intellectual and creative imagination. Indeed, the book reminds us that some of the most poignant and insightful writings about sexuality and race in the canon of American literature were composed well beyond our shores. 



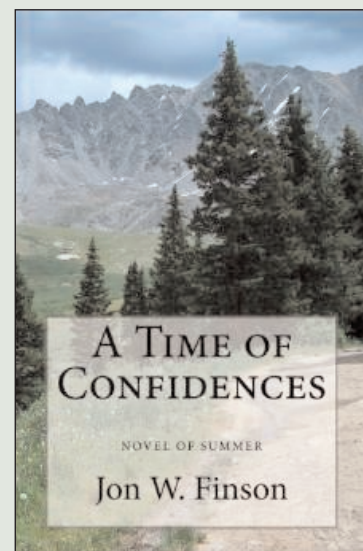
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A Single Man We Can Relate To

CHRIS FREEMAN

IN HIS MEMOIR *Christopher and His Kind*, Christopher Isherwood describes his relationship with E. M. Forster, who was 25 years his senior. When they met in 1932, Isherwood felt that “Forster was the only living writer whom he would have described as his master.” Less than a year later, Forster allowed him to read the manuscript of *Maurice*, which was already twenty years in the making. It would become the open secret of 20th-century British literature. Isherwood compared it to the other works by Forster and found it to be “both inferior and superior to them: inferior as an artwork, superior because of its purer passion, its franker declaration of its author’s faith. This moved Christopher tremendously on first reading.” Forster never published the book, but he left it in Isherwood’s care, who had it published in 1971, a year after Forster’s death.

So Forster may well have written the first great gay novel, but it came a bit late in the game. As a young writer, Isherwood included homosexuality in his work rather obscurely. Regarding *The Berlin Stories*, for example, Isherwood told Winston Leyland in 1971, “I’m often asked if I regret that I didn’t say outright ... that I was homosexual. Yes, I wish I had. ... To have made him a homosexual, in those days, would have been to feature him as someone too eccentric. It would have made a star out of a supporting actor. ... But I must also frankly say that I would have been embarrassed, then, to create a homosexual character and give him my own name.” Of course, Isherwood corrected this in *Christopher and His Kind*, his 1970s retelling of the Berlin years, in which he bluntly declared, “To Christopher, Berlin meant boys.”

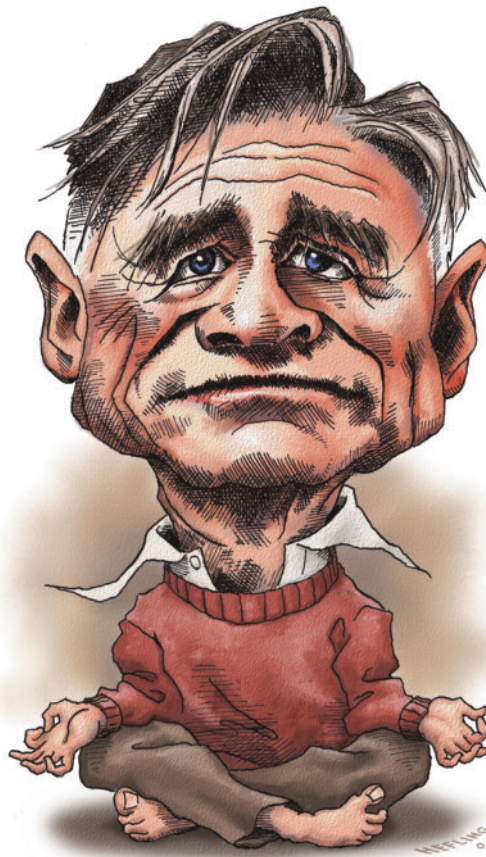
In the 1950s, Isherwood published a rather uneven novel called *The World in the Evening*, in which he created perhaps the first militant gay character, Bob Wood. Bob, who lives openly with his lover, Charles Kennedy, is fed up with politeness and hiding; he tells the protagonist, Stephen Monk, “Maybe we’re just too damned tactful. People just ignore us,

most of the time, and we let them. We encourage them to. So this whole business never gets discussed, and the laws never get changed. ... Jesus, I’d like to take them and rub their noses in it.” Isherwood had been peripherally involved with the Mattachine Society in L.A. in the late 1940s and early ’50s, so he was beginning to meet people like Bob and Charles in the early Homophile movement. He also became friendly with Evelyn Hooker, the psychologist whose work led to the removal of homosexuality as a pathology from the DSM.

The closest Isherwood came to writing a gay “relationship novel” is his 1964 masterpiece, *A Single Man*. Notably, though, this is a novel about the loss of a partner, a story of grief, longing, and recovery. What gave rise to it was a hypothetical question: what if Don Bachardy, Isherwood’s lover for a decade, left him? The two men lived apart a good deal of the time in the early 1960s and very nearly broke up. So the novel, surely one of the first gay novels to cover a full-fledged relationship, however obliquely, is Isherwood’s attempt to use fiction to help him come to terms with what felt almost like an inevitability.

In Isherwood’s voluminous diaries and in the recently published letters between Isherwood and Bachardy (*The Animals*, edited by Katherine Bucknell, 2013), we have an autobiographical record of more than a million words of one of the most fascinating, unusual gay love stories of the 20th century.

What follows is my slightly revised review of Isherwood’s 1960s diaries from the March-April 2010 issue, including a new passage, in italics, at the end. These diaries have been very helpful in situating the evolution of *A Single Man*.
— CF



Chris Freeman, a regular contributor to the GLR, teaches English and gender studies at USC. With James Berg, he has edited three books on Isherwood, including the forthcoming *The American Isherwood*.

AMID THIS SURFEIT of words and pages, there is much of interest about Isherwood’s life and career in his diaries from the 1960s: his observations about his times; his interest in how a writer works (or doesn’t), how a relationship persists and grows (and struggles), and how a person ages; his fears of his own decrepitude as he watched so many of his friends suffer and die. It is unsettling, in fact, to spend a few hours immersed, say, in 1965, and to

come out of the book disoriented about what day of the week it is. Isherwood's writing is that vivid; his reality is that well conveyed.

In the spring of 1961, for example, Isherwood is in England for an extended stay, visiting his lover Don Bachardy, who's at art school at Slade in London. The story of this legendary relationship, so well depicted in the 2008 film *Chris and Don: A Love Story*, is pervasive in the volume, of course. A diary entry for April 28th gives an important insight into Isherwood's feelings about his native land: "There is much that is lovable here but thank God it is not my home. Never do I cease to give thanks that I left it." A few weeks later, these thoughts continue: "I realize now, on this trip, that my longing to be away from England has really nothing to do with a mother complex or any other facile psychoanalytic explanation. No, here is something that stifles and confines me. I wish I could define it. Maybe the island is just too damned small. I feel unfree, cramped." The trip also reveals tension in Isherwood's longstanding relationships with E. M. Forster, Joe Ackerley, and especially W. H. Auden. Having failed to do much work with Auden and his lover Chester Kallman—they were working half-heartedly on a musical adaptation of Isherwood's Berlin writings—Isherwood notes on the day of their parting that "there was a feeling of haste and constraint and I don't think this was at all a satisfactory ending."

The Berlin musical project brings me to another, quite interesting aspect of the diaries as history. We know how a lot of this turned out, so beholding it in its conception is often fascinating. Even as this musical collaboration with Auden and Kallman founders, we know that *Cabaret* is yet to come. We know that the Berlin material contains the makings of one of the most successful musicals (and film adaptations) of all time, and we know that Isherwood will have little (or nothing, really) to do with it. Seeing, also, that Isherwood's screenplay is rejected, especially after all the work he did on it in the late 1960s, helps explain why he could never find anything positive to say about the show that made him as rich and famous as he'd ever been.

What is perhaps most curious about *The Sixties* is that it is almost reticent, even silent, on many major events of that tumultuous decade. Of course, a diary is a personal record, not a history. Nonetheless, history intervenes. So the Cuban Missile Crisis appears in the early years (and in *A Single Man*), and Isherwood's close friend Aldous Huxley dies the same day JFK is assassinated. The entry for November 30 opens: "Such a strong disinclination to write anything about Black Friday the 22nd. But I ought to. To remind myself." Listening to the radio for the accounts of the day, Isherwood writes: "Just disgusted horror ... there *was* the feeling—journalistic as it may sound to say this—that some sort of nationwide evil was functioning. It *was* something we had all done with our hate. Aldous seemed an anticlimax." The entry for that day ends, "Life goes on, or stops. If it goes on, it will change for me."

Many hallmarks of the 1960s are visible throughout the diary. There's a funny experience of attending Timothy Leary's "show" at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium in early 1967:

"What was so false and pernicious in Leary's appeal was its complete irresponsibility. He wasn't really offering any reliable spiritual help to the young, only inciting them to vaguely rebellious action—and inciting them without really involving himself with them." The assassination of Martin Luther King gets little notice. The death of Judy Garland and the Stonewall riots go unremarked. The Manson murders get some attention. Here again, knowing how things turned out comes into play. On August 12, 1968, we read that "Sharon Tate, Roman Polanski's wife, came to see Don about having her portrait drawn by him." A year later, on August 20, 1969, we get this: "Leslie Caron told me on the phone that the murder of Sharon Tate and the others in Benedict Canyon, followed by the two other murders at Silver Lake and Marina del Rey, created a tremendous panic."

Having survived a decade of painful growth, separation, and struggle, Isherwood and Bachardy ended the summer of 1969 with a trip to the South Pacific. They flew to Tahiti, notes Isherwood, on "the perfect night to depart—right after the moon rape. (Oh, how sad it was to look up at the poor violated thing and know that it was now littered with American junk and the footprints of the trespassers!)"

The index entry for Don Bachardy is four columns long, so to say that he is on almost every page is just about right. Isherwood records the vicissitudes of long-term relationships. While

Isherwood's 1964 masterpiece *A Single Man* is one of the first novels to feature a full-fledged gay relationship.

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HIDDEN:
The Intimate Lives of
Gay Men Past and
Present
by Clinton Elliott

This is a wide-ranging, sparkling and surprising collection of brief biographies of 400 closeted gay and bisexual men in modern and early modern history. Men such as Jack Kerouac, Frederick The Great, Cardinal Newman and 397 others -- all forced to live hidden lives.

they had particular challenges—their thirty-year age difference, Isherwood’s fame and success, Bachardy’s artistic development and self-determination—they also clearly loved each other deeply and abidingly. In April 1962, as Don needs more independence, he decides that he wants his own studio space—at their garage. Isherwood slyly records their conversation: “When I ask [why not in Santa Monica], he says jokingly that he wants to keep an eye on me. And I suspect that this isn’t entirely a joke. He is afraid of leaving me *too* much alone. He doesn’t want *my* independence.”

A particularly low point in the relationship comes in February 1963: “What I am miserable about is the feeling that Don is gradually slipping away from me. To go to New York with him at this time, especially in order to ‘celebrate’ our anniversary, seems grimly farcical. I don’t feel I have the heart

for it. Also, to make matters worse, I have been reading through all these diaries and feel absolutely toxic with their unhappiness.”

This “unhappiness” is what Isherwood tried to work out in A Single Man. An indicator of how successfully the fictional “what if” helped resolved the conflicts in the relationship is the fact that Bachardy supplied the title for the book. Isherwood notes, “In bed, on Monday night, Don was silent for a long while. I thought he had fallen asleep. Then he asked, ‘How about “A Single Man” for a title?’ I knew instantly and have had no doubt since that this is the absolute ideal title for the novelette.” George’s love for Jim haunts him, but he also knows that his own life has to continue. One can see the gravitational pull, the vicissitudes of everyday life in the novel: a gay relationship novel, one of the first of its kind.



ART MEMO

The Sloth of Sadness

ANDREW HOLLERAN

NEAR THE BEGINNING of *A Single Man*, the novel by Christopher Isherwood on which Tom Ford’s new movie [in 2009] is based, a college English professor named George tells his class the story of Tithonus, a beautiful mortal who, after the goddess in love with him asks Zeus to grant him immortality, ages into a very old man because the goddess has forgotten to ask for the gift of eternal youth. Tithonus eventually becomes a creature so dry and rasping that he turns into a cicada. Why, one wonders, is that in the book? Because the issues the fable deals with—love, immortality, youth, old age—are the same ones played out in Isherwood’s account of what is to come: the professor’s last day on earth.

In the movie, however, this speech is missing—which made me think, on rereading *A Single Man* the day after seeing the film: nothing in mythology is stranger than the way a book is turned into a film. It was surprising enough when news came that Ford, till now a successful fashion designer, was filming Isherwood’s novel, since so much of it takes place in the professor’s head. *A Single Man* is largely stream of consciousness. Nothing much happens. We watch George wake up, dress, drive to campus, teach a class on Aldous Huxley’s novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (which inspires the story of Tithonus), visit a gym, shop for groceries, get drunk at dinner with an old friend, and end up at his favorite bar, where he meets a student he goes swimming with and later takes home. Along the way, he remembers his previous life with his partner Jim, before Jim was killed in an accident. But these flashbacks are brief; the primary stuff of the novel is

the contrast between the mundane quality of George’s day and his rich interior life: his thoughts on teaching, age, Los Angeles, England, a dozen other things. The book is moving, in part, because it is so uncomplaining. Jim’s death is never harped on; in fact, *A Single Man* is more about aging—aging alone—because Isherwood wrote it at a time in his life when he feared his partner Don Bachardy was going to leave him. It’s an assessment, really, of Isherwood’s own condition, an answer to the question “Could I go on without him?”

Because it’s so full of life—and true to life—*A Single Man* is never depressing. George is alienated, he’s lonely, but he’s keenly aware of the world he lives in, and at the end of his day, while having dinner with his friend, George “begins to feel this utterly mysterious unsensational thing—not bliss, not ecstasy, not joy—just plain happiness. *Das Glueck, le bonheur, la felicidad.*” Finally George decides that he can go on—he will look for another Jim.

In the movie, on the other hand, George is so depressed from the start that people keep telling him how awful he looks (which makes no sense; he looks like Colin Firth)—and only the audience knows the reason why: George is packing heat. He’s got a gun, a gun with which he plans to end his life. Movies, no doubt, require a narrative suspense that prose works do not. There is a great deal in both the printed and filmed versions of *A Single Man* about the past, the present, and the future (has anyone ever told us *not* to live in the present?), and a movie takes place in the present in a way a book does not. In the book, George’s observations are so interesting that we gladly follow him around without knowing where we’re going. In a movie, I guess you need a gun.

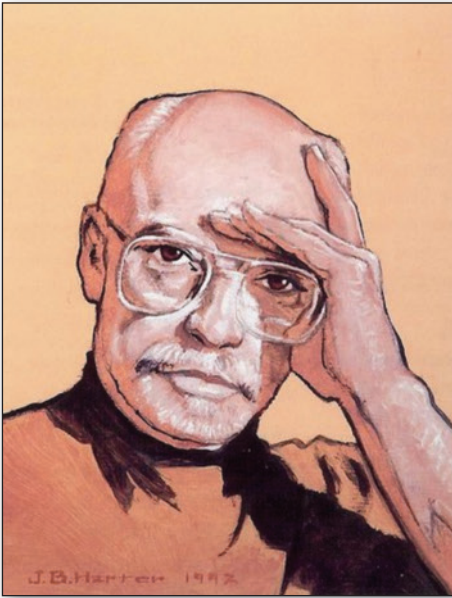
This makes the film melodramatic. The

friend I sat with got up to pee halfway through and when he returned from the men’s room after learning from the ticket taker in the lobby that the movie still had half an hour to run, he sat down and whispered, “Can’t he just *die*?” Meanwhile, I was hoping the gun would go off accidentally, since George apparently could not bring himself to use it.

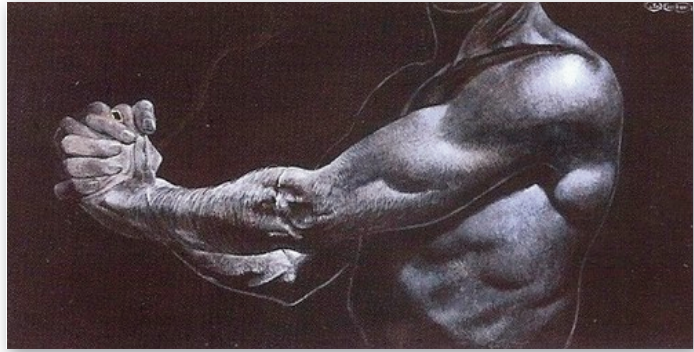
Nietzsche said the thought of suicide had gotten him through many a bad night, but during its first half *A Single Man* has a bad case of *The Hours*. In the book, “the sloth of sadness” is precisely what George wants to avoid; in the movie he’s drowning in it. The film even opens with a beautiful image of a body under water, and all I could think of was Virginia Woolf drowning in the river. For that is where *A Single Man* seems to lie—on a spectrum between *Far From Heaven* (its perfect design, its Julianne Moore) and *The Hours* (its water motif, its Julianne Moore)—with a bit of the French movie *Diva* thrown in: the aria from *La Wally* (effective in both films).

A Single Man made me think that while Congress has had a hard time with health care, that doesn’t mean they couldn’t pass a law forbidding gay male directors and writers from working with Julianne Moore. In *Far From Heaven* she was perfect. But the endless nervous breakdown she was forced to depict—that pointless California housewife angst—in *The Hours* was excruciating to sit through. In Ford’s version of *A Single Man*, the down-to-earth Englishwoman that Isherwood gives us as George’s best friend becomes—what else?—a stylish fag hag at the end of her rope. One has to ask if this glamorous grief comes from Hollywood tear-jerkers: the Joan Crawford and Susan Hayward classics that constitute part of many gay men’s matrimony.

John Burton Harter Charitable Trust



John Burton Harter. *Self-Portrait*. 1992. Oil on panel. University of Buffalo — The State University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.



John Burton Harter. *Torso (Arms in Tension)*. 1979. Acrylic on board. University of Buffalo — The State University of Buffalo, Buffalo, New York.

John Burton Harter (1940-2002) is remembered for his powerful studies of the male figure, as well as his superb portraits and landscapes.

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Still, much about *A Single Man* is gripping. Colin Firth is superb, and everyone he interacts with—a hustler at a liquor store, a little girl in the bank, the neighbor's boy, the student who gets George to plunge into the cold sea, even Julianne Moore—is first-rate. It's true that Ford has tarted things up, no doubt for the same reason that directors who film Jane Austen novels always use a grand country house of a kind that no one in a Jane Austen novel would ever be found in. In Isherwood's novel, the house George inhabits with Jim is so small, two people cannot enter the kitchen side by side; in the movie he lives in something out of *Architectural Digest* and drives a beautiful Mercedes. But that's show biz. Ford has been criticized for making the film too beautiful—a strange complaint—but how else would a director with Ford's career in fashion make the film?

The real problem with the movie is not its elegance; it's that there is no way to convey Isherwood's subjectivity on film. Close-ups of eyelids do not an interior monologue make. Movies affect us in a way that nothing else can, and the sense of experiencing what George is going through as it happens is powerful. But the wonderful complexity of Isherwood's mind is lost in the camera's inability to do anything but

record surfaces.

Nevertheless, despite its case of *The Hours*, this movie is worth seeing. Once the gun is dropped, it redeems itself. In the end, what pulls George through is what gets most of us through—connections with other human beings. Though George turns down the hustler at the liquor store and does not take advantage of the student, they and their beauty bring George back to life, just as the shirtless tennis players he watches on campus earlier in the film take him outside of himself. (In the book George jerks off to the memory of the tennis players before going to sleep: exactly what a gay man would do at the end of his day.) Ford's film is very beautiful and at times moving, and if all it did was get you to read the book (a mere 182 pages), it would be worthwhile.

Which leads us back to the strange relationship of books to movies. *A Single Man* is a novel that Ford says he has loved a long time. And this first film is good enough to make us look forward to what he'll do next. But it's also a curious example of why some books cannot be made into films, or what happens to them when they are. The adage is that bad books make good movies. But it's a mystery in the end. How, for example, did the short story by E.

Annie Proulx on which the movie *Brokeback Mountain* is based—almost entirely dialogue—become the epic, beautiful, heartbreaking movie that it did? Why, on the other hand, have the infinitely richer Proulx or F. Scott Fitzgerald never been filmed satisfactorily? Perhaps it's what Proulx said: the one thing film cannot do is convey subjectivity.

No one can say whether *A Single Man* would have been better had Ford included George's visit to the gym and grocery store, made him drive a beat-up Chevy, or played down the flashbacks to Jim. The latter aspect of the book, he said in an interview, was what appealed to him: how can we go on when someone we love is inaccessible? A movie-maker can do whatever he or she wants with a book, for better or worse; and sometimes much is gained, and sometimes something is lost in translation. Reading *A Single Man* after seeing the film makes one put down the book and think: the filming of a novel is stranger than anything in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—stranger than Daphne turning into a tree, or Tithonus ending up a cicada.

This review of the 2009 film A Single Man was first published in the March-April 2010 issue.

Frida's Wounded Body and Soul

MEXICAN PAINTER Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) has had an impressive posthumous life. Actual photos and descriptions of her are as colorful as her paintings, which fit uneasily into a broadly surrealist category. She was largely self-taught and refused to identify herself with any “bourgeois” school of art.

Kahlo was a Mexican nationalist, a staunch communist, and a bisexual before it was hip. Several movies have been made about her life, most recently (and memorably) one with Salma Hayek in the simply titled *Frida* (2002), which won two Oscars. Hayek played the title role, striking in the film an uncanny resemblance to the Kahlo of the numerous self-portraits, whose luxuriant hairiness includes her signature unibrow and faint moustache. Her direct gaze—in her own work and in photographs taken by her various friends and lovers—is compelling.

Frida Kahlo, a paperback about Kahlo's life and art, is an affordable art book. It's full of good reproductions of her work that accompany a simple biographical narrative, so that we know which paintings followed which events. This guidebook seems to be written for readers with a high-school vocabulary, and it would make an engaging introduction to the painter's life for someone with no previous knowledge of Kahlo or of her cultural milieu.

The book is divided into chapters, with an italicized summary at the beginning of each. Chapter One, “Viva Mexico!” begins thus: “For Mexico, as for many other countries worldwide, the early years of the 20th century were turbulent and often violent. Political revolution cleared the way for a new type of art whose pioneers became national idols. These heady years bred a rebellious spirit: Frida Kahlo.”

The Casa Azul (blue house) in Mexico City where Kahlo grew up has been a museum and a shrine to her legacy almost since her death in 1954. The book ends with attractive photographs of several of its rooms, kept as they were in her lifetime. This house was her home base, and she returned there

JEAN ROBERTA

Frida Kahlo

by Claudia Bauer

(translated by Stephen Telfer)

Prestel Verlag. 128 pages, \$14.95

several times throughout her adult life as a chronic invalid after the devastating accident in 1925 that fractured many of her bones, including several vertebrae, and which precipitated numerous reconstructive surgeries.

This book, like others about Kahlo, pays tribute to her ability to transmute physical and emotional pain into art. Less

convincingly, it describes her in terms of her current image as an “independent woman” of the early 20th century, one who supposedly followed her own path to success. Her popular exhibitions are trotted out to support this image, and so are her colorful affairs with both men and women.

However, the facts of Kahlo's life and the themes of many of her paintings show the crazy-making pain of her love for

Diego Rivera, her mentor and then her husband, who had affairs with numerous women (including Kahlo's sister) throughout their marriage. In traditional patriarchal style, Diego took care of Kahlo whenever she was in a physical crisis but refused to limit himself to one woman. While he could accept her affairs with women, he ended several of her affairs with men by threatening them. These facts, based on written testimony from Kahlo and Diego as well as others in their circle, have been discussed at greater length by other biographers.

The paintings themselves invite a biographical interpretation. Ultimately, it is impossible to judge whether Kahlo's frequent physical relapses were caused mainly by physical injuries that never healed adequately or by emotional wounds which could never heal in the context of a relationship between two people with clashing needs.

Frida Kahlo acknowledges that the artist's death, officially described as the logical result of a long decline, might have been an assisted suicide. Like Sylvia Plath, a contemporary writer who also acquired cult status after her early death by suicide, Kahlo emerged as a martyr to heterosexual love as well as to art. Both the life and the work of Frida Kahlo are undeniably moving, and her art speaks more eloquently than the volumes of print that have been devoted to her. However, neither happiness nor emotional independence is easy to find there.



Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait, 1940

Jean Roberta is a widely published writer based in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Our Kind of Town

WHEN I WAS growing up in Evanston, Illinois, Chicago's Lincoln Avenue intrigued me because it was one of those streets off the actual grid. It coursed through the city at an odd diagonal and confused me, though I often drove my mother's Pontiac Le Mans along it, especially on a Friday or Saturday night. Some of the characters in Gregg Shapiro's new collection of short stories, *Lincoln Avenue*, seem to favor AMC Hornets and Oldsmobile Cutlass station wagons for their forays.

Regardless of the make of vehicle, though, the farther away the avenue got from the suburbs and the closer it came to Chicago's Lincoln Park, the more alluring the route became. For in the mid and late 1970s, many of the city's gay bars, places like the Broadway Limited and Center Stage, could be found along it, with others at crucial intersections, particularly where Lincoln crossed Halstead and Clark streets. Many a weekend night, I would lead my tolerant pack of straight high school friends into some of these bars, pretending I didn't know the venues were gay. It would often take a few minutes before my friends figured out what kind of place they were in, at which point they would insist on leaving even before finishing their beers. I would feign surprise at my mistake.

So, for someone who grew up in virtually the same suburban and urban landscape as Shapiro, and at the same time, the stories he tells in his new collection resonated strongly. In "Lunch With a Porn Star," the narrator is on a northbound El train when he spots a famous actor named Billy Bigg. Eventually the narrator summons up the courage to invite Bigg to join him at lunch in the Loop. As the two sit with their orders of take-out Chinese, the reader eagerly awaiting the action to come, the scene suddenly stops the moment they unfold their napkins. End of story.

In "Swimming Lessons," a gay high school boy is enrolled by his parents in a beginner's class at the local suburban YMCA—though he'd rather be throwing pots in a ceramics class. But when Paul, the young swimming instructor, walks in wearing "a green racing suit, the same color as Robin's on *Batman* [though] Paul filled out the front better," the boy is relieved and ready to learn the crawl stroke. But before either of them gets wet, the story goes dry. No diving, no stroking, no sucking in and blowing out.

Shapiro sets up his stories well—though many read like personal essays—and his mostly first-person narrators engage us the moment we meet them. But Shapiro has a maddening tendency to stop the action in every story just as it begins to pick up speed. This collection feels more like the beginnings of sto-

DAVID MASELLO

Lincoln Avenue: Chicago Stories
by Gregg Shapiro
Squares & Rebels. 100 pages, \$14.95

Last Night at the Blue Angel
by Rebecca Rotert
William Morrow. 334 pages, \$25.99

ries yet to be completed. We keep getting stuck at red lights along Lincoln Avenue, though we know there's more action ahead.

Rebecca Rotert's novel, *Last Night at the Blue Angel*, takes place a decade earlier and in what feels like a much different Chicago. Like most mature American cities in the mid-1960s, Chicago was literally tearing itself apart. Its greatest buildings and most distinctive streetscapes were being lost. "I tell ... the whole story of Chicago wrecking all its best buildings,"

says Jim, one of the characters in the novel, a man hopelessly in love with Naomi Hill, a bisexual female nightclub singer. He moonlights as a photographer documenting the demolition of Chicago's architectural legacy, a metaphorical reference to his own fragility. "I'm talking about Adler and Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Burnham and Root. They're the ones put Chicago on the map," he states.

Jim is as obsessed with the impending destruction of Louis Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange as he is with Naomi, who remains as emotionally distant as one of that building's sculpted vines scrolling atop a cornice. It makes sense that Jim seeks to



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David Masello is a widely published essayist and poet based in New York City.

document the building in his photos, for it may be the most architecturally important structure to have been lost in Chicago. I was a young teenager in 1972 when the bulldozers had finally accomplished their task and, being the nerd that I was, I canvassed my neighborhood with a petition to try to save the Exchange at the last hour. When I asked for a signature from my ninety-year-old cousin Eva, who had worked there as a young secretary, she said with disdain, “That building felt old and dark even then.” But there’s a problem in the setting of the demolition of the thirteen-story masterpiece, which assumes the presence of a character in Rotert’s novel: the author places its destruction in 1965, seven years before its actual demise. Rotert explains this poetic license in an Author’s Note. But should facts be this malleable?

Not unlike Chicago in that turbulent era, Naomi Hill, the singer at the heart of the novel, is highly self-destructive. As a teenager in the 1950s, she falls in love with a female classmate in her small Kansas town and is driven out when their affair is discovered. She hitches a ride to Kansas City, where her nascent talent as a sultry nightclub singer is discovered. After an affair with the club’s owner, the brother of the girl she loved back home, she moves to Chicago, spirited there with the aid of a

pod of lesbian nuns.

She gives birth to Sophia, whom the reader meets as a precocious tween living with her mother in a down-at-the-heels downtown hotel. Some nights, Sophia awakens to a room-service breakfast with a strange woman joining her at the table; other mornings, it might be a man her mother has brought home. Once homework is done, she faithfully watches her mother from the wings at every performance at the Blue Angel where, after her mother takes her bows, Sophia says, “I run to her, hug her, my face pressed into tulle and sequins, steam coming off her like a racehorse.” When Naomi’s audiences start to dwindle, she reassures her daughter and herself by declaring, “It just doesn’t matter how small a crowd is, so long as they adore you.”

But if she’s adorable on-stage, off-stage she’s self-absorbed, indiscreet, and prone to drama and overuse of the word “darling,” as if she’s some low-rent Mame. When a man she loves proposes to her, offering her a new suburban domestic lifestyle, she whines, “How much I feared such a life, a *normal* life. ... I feared becoming invisible again, powerless, dependent. I wanted to do the right thing but I wanted something else more. To be known. To be loved.” Like many a star, Naomi is more fun on stage than off. 

Lowering Our Sights

IF WE TAKE a long view of the trajectory of the American gay rights movement, there is something peculiar about where it seems to have taken us. In 1969, the Gay Liberation Front announced: “We are a revolutionary group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions on our nature. ... We are women and men who, from the time of our earliest memories, have been in revolt against the sex-role structure and the nuclear family.” In striking contrast, today’s gay rights movement is celebrating recent legal victories, notably the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the Defense of Marriage Act, in its campaign to legalize marriage for same-sex couples.

Is this progress? Sociologist Suzanna Danuta Walters concedes that it is—kind of. In her new book, *The Tolerance Trap*, she argues that the national salience of GLBT discourse in the media and the movement’s impressive achievements in recent years have come at a cost. Although we may have won the battles for gay marriage and military service, these victories have done much less to advance the cause of authentic equality than advertised.

Walters is an accomplished academic at Northeastern University who has written extensively on sexuality, popular cul-

MARCUS AURIN

The Tolerance Trap: How God, Genes, and Good Intentions are Sabotaging Gay Equality

by Suzanna Danuta Walters
NYU Press. 343 pages, \$29.95

ture, and feminism. *The Tolerance Trap* is written for a general audience, and it reads a bit like a series of lectures, including the occasional joke and personal anecdote (which is not to say the book isn’t scholarly or doesn’t deliver a coherent and compelling thesis driven by sophisticated analysis—it does all that). Her argument is that the gay movement’s tactical shift in the 1990s toward achieving social “tolerance”

in many ways precludes “substantive integration” into American society, which she sees as a worthy goal. This is because the emphasis on tolerance has left unchallenged—and even revitalized—the heteronormative institutions and underpinnings of American culture. Writes Walters: “Full integration is always a radical and utopian project because it insists that the human project is made better through that lofty project. How different this is from the goal of tolerance. Tolerance is dangerously figured as an endpoint in itself—not process or project but a benevolent act of dominance toward its other. ... [T]olerance is inevitably reluctant forbearance.”

Walters turns to recent efforts by the gay community to gain acceptance into iconic institutions traditionally defined in explicitly heterosexual terms—the military, popular media, and marriage itself—as tactically expedient but strategically dubious. After recounting the meteoric rise of homosexuals in popular culture and politics over the last fifteen years, she retorts that it was almost too easy. By eschewing confrontation and instead seeking acceptance into institutions steeped in heterosexual symbolism, the gay rights movement has managed to secure

Marcus Aurin is a doctoral candidate living in Boston.

unprecedented social visibility. Meanwhile, our society and our institutions remain fundamentally unchanged, except that gays are now enthusiastically encouraged to emulate and aspire to the traditionally heterosexual ideals of marital monogamy and martial discipline. Traditional sexism and homophobia remain vigorous, however, as any cursory review of homosexual hate crime and suicide statistics will reveal, not to mention right-wing political rhetoric and policy initiatives.

The Tolerance Trap focuses on three discussions that have dominated the mainstream gay movement. In addition to the military and marriage, a third narrative about the “cause” of homosexuality has played a critical role in the development of tolerance toward gay people. Walters contends that “there is, inarguably, an overwhelming ‘born with it’ ideology afoot that encompasses gay marriage, gay genes, and gayness as a ‘trait’ and that is—of course—used by both gay rights activists and anti-gay activists to make arguments for equality or against it.” And so the argument continues to play out between anti-gay factions claiming that homosexuality is a choice that can be cured and pro-gay factions claiming that it’s biologically determined. The irony is that these arguments essentially reverse the polarities of the gay liberation era, when conservatives held that homosexuality was a pathology and gay activists insisted that their identity was a conscious rejection of heterosexuality.

Walters acknowledges that public consensus largely favors the biological argument and rejects the notion that homosexu-

ality can be “cured.” But she’s highly critical of how and why public opinion has moved in this direction. The popular narrative supporting the idea that gay people are “born that way” has emerged as an almost unquestionable dogma, based not on scientific evidence but on a retrograde kind of essentialism that assumes a rigid, biologically-based gender dichotomy. Walters worries about what this underlying assumption implies for society’s gender roles: “If tolerance rests on immutability and immutability rests on some black/white, gay/straight, male/female vision of clear-cut difference, then tolerance becomes the handmaiden to a *more* sexist society.”

The promotion of biological narratives by gay rights activists, Walters argues, was tactically successful in persuading much of the American public to tolerate gay people. The trouble with this kind of charitable tolerance is that it establishes a social and moral hierarchy based on traditional, sexist identities. Naturally superior heterosexuals grant congenitally inferior homosexuals a special dispensation to partake of the propriety of some of their institutions, provided they (the gays) strive to live up to established conventions—monogamy and familial rectitude within marriage, manly valor and obedient discipline in the military. Gay tolerance, according to Walters, requires that GLBT people identify as “gay” in accordance with received heterosexual norms and values while concealing the desires and behaviors that might challenge or offend traditional heterosexual propriety.

Walters fears that in the recent whirlwind of public enthusiasm for gay acceptance into institutions once reserved for white, middle-class heterosexuals, we may lose sight of where we are going and where we’ve been. Many commentators have already welcomed the emergence of a post-gay era in which non-heterosexual identities become so innocuous as to be socially meaningless. Here the problem is the reality that homophobia and heterosexism are still alive and well in our society. “The post-gay story fits with the tolerance trap because neither one requires real examination of continuing and structural homophobia.” In other words, the sudden success of the gay agenda may be based upon a Faustian bargain. Here Walters evokes the warning offered by David Halperin in *How to Be Gay* (2012): “we are witnessing the rise of a new and vehement cult of gay ordinariness,” which not only denies our own specificity but also denies our “ability to contribute anything of value to the world we live in.” As long as tolerance is our reigning ethos, as long as we deny our difference in the service of a misplaced allegiance to gender and sexual norms, we deny “the unique genius in being queer.”



Snow Ghazal

That winter, we underestimated it—the sharp-edged snow.
Every day the sky fell piecemeal, imitating sharp-edged snow.

I drank coffee in the kitchen while you toyed with the piano.
Our sink was piled with banks of plates, white and chipped, like
sharp-edged snow.

Almanac across our laps, we plotted trips to town, as if
we could calibrate the comings and goings of sharp-edged snow.

In late afternoon’s unearthly blue, ice cracked the black branches;
then we remembered our hurt, and came to hate the sharp-edged snow.

In an open field, wrapped in winter-thick wool, frost found my face.
That day I learned that nothing could satiate the sharp-edged snow.

Tallying the costs of winter days spent in blue-black silence,
I gave you the bill. You asked if you could pay in sharp-edged snow.

In April I looked out our windows; on the tired glass, flakes scratched
clear and wet trails; for once we agreed: too late for sharp-edged snow.

Our evening nudity was habitual, unerotic.
You raked with nails cold as slate, reminding me of sharp-edged snow.

Wrapped in sheets, you stood: What’s it going to be, Charlie? It was
your voice that did it; your voice, and the grating of sharp-edged snow.

CHARLIE BONDHUS

Secret Service

BEING GAY became an explicit barrier to military service in 1950, when President Harry Truman signed the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Thirty years later, Ronald Reagan ordered the discharge of any service member who engaged in homosexual acts or stated they were homosexual (or bisexual). After failing to lift the ban, Bill Clinton signed “Don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT) into law in 1993. Barack Obama campaigned on full repeal, which was approved in 2010 and became effective a year later.

A self-described “peacenik,” Vincent Cianni had caught a radio interview with the mother of an American soldier who had served in Iraq before being discharged for being gay. She spoke about her son with pride. The author, who’s also gay, realized that while keeping a “humane” stance against war he had been ignoring injustice in his own community, and decided to learn more about gays and lesbians who serve.

From 2009 to 2013, Cianni interviewed a hundred veterans and active-duty soldiers for this book. Cianni calls himself a “visual anthropologist.” He traveled the country, applying a simple process: listen to a person’s story and then take his or her picture. From the results, he compiled 54 short essays with photos of soldiers across a spectrum of rank, race, geography, religion, and family makeup. He used black-and-white film and shot between thirty and sixty images of each subject. The expressions and postures he captured convey a somber, often defiant dignity. In an opening essay, Alison Nordstrom, former curator at the George Eastman House photographic museum, likens Cianni’s work to that of WPA photographers Lewis Hine and Walker Evans, who practiced “truth-telling” through images. “[His] images are collaborative,” she writes, and display a “curious intensity.”

The portraits are striking, printed in soft gray tones on thick matte paper, without names. The stories, on the other hand, are set in Courier typeface on thin white sheets that recall government-issue stock. Identifying data appear at the top of each essay, while the page number of the interviewee’s photograph appears at the end, so that by turning back to that page the reader can see what a subject looks like. This roundabout process could have been made more efficient, if that were the aim, but as presented it conveys the complicated circuitry of a gay service member’s life under DADT. Just over half of the storytellers served in the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marine, and the rest in the Army or Air Force—some on overseas assignments and others in stateside reserves. Two-thirds are men. Most are in their thirties, forties, or fifties.

Cianni focused on two questions: why respondents joined up, and how DADT affected their careers and lives. Their stories

ROSEMARY BOOTH

Gays in the Military

Photographs and Interviews
by Vincent Cianni
Daylight Books. 256 pages, \$45.

are often full of hardship and loss. For example, Debra Fowler, a Korean linguist in the Army during the late 1980s who earned top awards from the Defense Language Institute, was abusively outed while being investigated for top-secret security clearance, then given a dishonorable discharge. Joseph Rocha, a K-9 unit dog handler in the Navy, came out to his commanding officer after years of hazing and humiliation. Honorably discharged, he remains hobbled by post-traumatic stress from the mistreatment.

Against all odds, a few servicemen managed to push back. Victor Fehrenbach, who flew 88 combat missions in Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, was outed under DADT. At first he agreed to “stay quiet, sign a piece of paper and move on” in exchange for an honorable discharge, but later decided to reverse course and fight the decision. Anthony Loverde, an Air Force



From *Gays in the Military*. Identified as Victor Fehrenbach, Boise, ID, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force, 1991-2011


loadmaster deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, was discharged for homosexual conduct. Although he had a civilian job offer, Loverde joined a legal challenge to force the issue of reinstatement. “I said, ‘Of course. I want to go back in the military,’” he remarks. Four years later, he was back doing the same work, at his previous rank.

Maria Zoe Dunning, a commander in the Navy and graduate of the Naval Academy, challenged the military’s ban when she was discharged after twelve years of service. She won her case using a legal strategy the Pentagon subsequently prohibited, and proudly describes how, on her retirement in 2007, she and her wife walked down the red carpet on her ship to be “piped over the side together in the first same-sex piping ceremony in U.S. Navy history.”

Most experiences did not end so happily. Martha Taylor, a

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

supply operations officer in Canada, was expelled from the U.S. Air Force as a result of a witch-hunt in the Reagan era. She recalls: “I was processed out and went back to the officers’ barracks. I stood by the dumpster and took off my uniform. ... I never wanted to see it again.” Still, many gay and lesbian service members speak glowingly of military service. While they resent betrayals and abuse, they nevertheless mourn the loss of work they had chosen and loved. *Gays in the Military* amply demonstrates how the notion of military service can captivate and inspire. The sitters in Cianni’s vivid photos display strength, and guts.

Close to 14,000 servicemembers were discharged under DADT. *Gays in the Military* outlines the psychological, financial, and interpersonal burdens they endured. At the same time the nation lost the resources invested in these soldiers’ training. More subtly, the armed forces suffered erosion of a core value: the expectation that soldiers will tell the truth. 

Father of Anxiety

JOHN R. KILLACKY

My Thinning Years: Starving the Gay Within

by Jon Derek Croteau

Hazelden. 240 pages, \$14.95

IN MY GENERATION, gay boys and their fathers had complicated relationships. I know I did, growing up in a working-class Irish Catholic family in Chicago some sixty years ago. The middle child of five and oldest boy, I was not what my dad imagined his first son to be. There weren’t any role models back then for parents or questioning children, no networks of support. Popular culture demonized “homosexuals” as pathetic and lonely outcasts. My teenage years were the worst, when burgeoning sexuality was at its best conflicted and isolating. There was no one else who shared my secret, or at least that’s what I thought, until college.

There are many poignant parallels for me in Jon Derek Croteau’s beautifully crafted memoir of surviving an abusive father and overcoming his own anorexia and internalized homophobia. The author dreamed of being in school musicals, but instead his father made him play sports year-round. Even after a plate in his hip was shattered playing football, his father forced him into basketball and baseball, belittling him in public and screaming at him in the car rides home about how embarrassing the boy’s ineptitude was.

Eager to please his tyrannical father, Croteau persevered, breaking an eye socket and shattering a wrist bone. His sympathetic but ineffectual mother tried but failed to intervene. At home, he avoided contact with his father; the slightest provocation could land him in his room without dinner, often accompanied by welt marks from his father’s belt. The bedroom became Croteau’s sanctuary where shelves, drawers, and closets were fastidiously organized—no chaos here, as he sang along quietly to Whitney Houston.

In high school, still desperate for his father’s approval,

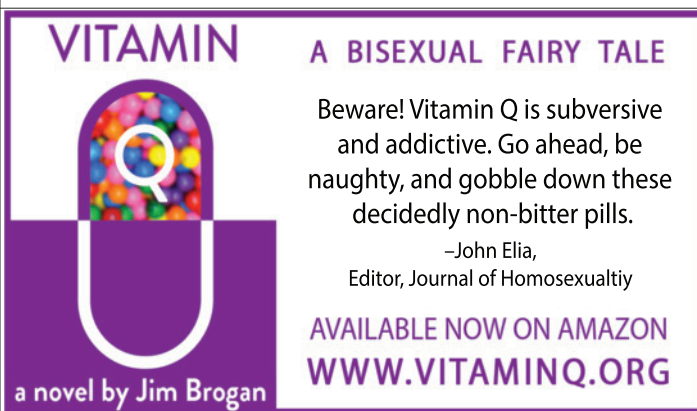
Croteau excelled by overcompensating, becoming captain of the tennis team, editor of the yearbook, president of student council, and an honors student. He was everybody’s best friend but utterly alone as he suppressed his sexuality. Girls sought boy advice from him, and boys sought dating tips. Unrequited bromance crushes were awkward and painful.

The author felt ill-equipped to attend college, so he spent a gap year at home working at a bank, even trying a three-week Outward Bound experience to bolster his confidence. During this period, anorexia, bulimia, and obsessive running overwhelmed his body as he tried to “starve the faggot inside.” Once away at college, the self-loathing and self-destructiveness escalated: “binging, purging, starving, and punitive jogging” were all part of the cycle. Sexual encounters were few and always complicated, the specter of his father looming under every bed. Graduating summa cum laude from college in only three years, Croteau then attended graduate school to study counseling psychology. This pleased, but did not appease, his father. As life progressed, boyfriends were occasionally welcomed home, but visits always ended in paternal tirades and emotional devastation.

In therapy and in his academic studies, Croteau painstakingly began to deal with his repressed anger against his father and to see his own lack of self-acceptance as the root of his eating disorder. Meeting the man who is now his husband was also part of his healing journey. “By letting in all of that love, I learned how to truly love and accept myself,” he writes. Family reconciliations were attempted after his mother’s death, and then again after his father’s quadruple bypass surgery. All came to naught, as his father’s venomous condemnation always erupted. In the end, though, the author finds his peace by severing ties with his father, while absolving him thus: “And even though you will never be a part of my life. ... I need you to know that I forgive you. I have forgiven you.”

Croteau’s courageous disclosure of his arduous journey toward self-acceptance is especially relevant for many gay men who have been disenfranchised from their families of origin. The book also illuminates the realities of male eating disorders, adding considerably to the literature on anorexia, still wrongly perceived as solely a female disease. Today, Croteau and his husband live in Vermont. He counsels executives on empathic leadership and inclusivity, blogs for the *Huffington Post*, and is a speaker with the National Eating Disorders Association.

John R. Killacky is executive director of the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, a renovated art deco movie palace in Burlington, VT.



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a novel by Jim Brogan

Addressing James Baldwin

CHARLES GREEN

Letter to Jimmy

by Alain Mabanckou

Soft Skull Press. 176 pages, \$15.

THIS SHORT BOOK provides many insights into the life and work of James Baldwin (1924-1987). On the twentieth anniversary of his death, French-African writer Alain Mabanckou has written a biography in the form of a letter to Baldwin, addressing the novelist as a way of examining his life and writings as he considers Baldwin's relevance today. Mabanckou finds much in Baldwin that still speaks to us concerning race, sexuality, and Western history.

Mabanckou begins by thinking about a wanderer he observed while living in Los Angeles who turned out to have a connection of sorts to Ralph Ellison. His reflections on this stranger lead him to reminisce about Baldwin, who wandered as well, both physically and emotionally, moving from Harlem to Greenwich Village and on to Paris, always isolated from his surroundings by virtue of being "black, bastard, gay and a writer." He used his outsider perspective to create powerful works that still resonate today, notably the novels *Giovanni's Room* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain* and the essays "The Fire Next Time" and "Everybody's Protest Novel."

Born to an unwed mother in 1924, Baldwin grew up in a dysfunctional family in Harlem during a harsh period in U.S. history. Not only did he grow up in a black ghetto where the police eagerly enforced racial discrimination; he also had to deal with a stepfather who was "consumed by his religious faith." David Baldwin passionately hated white people, refusing to let his son's teacher take him to the theater. He also seemed to hate his own and his son's blackness, as he made many comments to his young son about the boy's ugliness and "big eyes." For all his work as a preacher and his commitment to Christian doctrine, he could not find peace for himself. Indeed, "convinced that his own family [was] plotting to poison him," he refused to eat at home and later died from tuberculosis. Of the latter event James Baldwin remarked: "the disease of his mind helped the disease of his body to destroy him."

Despite his relationship with his father, Baldwin didn't change his name. As Mabanckou observes, in an age when many African Americans, such as Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, did just that, Baldwin kept his name as a reminder of "a lineage forged of lurid relationships, domination, whipping, and slavery."

Baldwin's friendship with novelist Richard Wright was equally complicated. Having followed the author of *Native Son* to Paris, Baldwin would later reject his mentor's work. In the essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" he argues that *Native Son*, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, favors "moral stories over art," displaying insincere outrage over big issues and showing off the authors' emotions. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* moved him as

a child, as an adult he finds it dishonest, sentimental, and unable to elicit true feelings. He levels the same criticisms at *Native Son*, finding the characters "to be far removed from the truth of daily life." This inevitably caused a rift between Wright and Baldwin, but it did establish Baldwin as a "young Turk."

Mabanckou also considers Baldwin's life as an expatriate. While in France he generally escaped the racism that dogged him in the U.S. To be sure, at first he was isolated from French society due to the language barrier, spending time instead with white Americans also visiting and living in France. Even abroad he was not exempt from prejudice. Renting a room in a farmhouse in the countryside, he had to win over his landlady, a woman who had lived in Algeria during colonial times and "always believed that black people had helped chase the French out of ... her homeland." Nevertheless, living abroad gave Baldwin the opportunity to discover himself and shape his talent. Deeply intimate, *Letter to Jimmy* is a tribute from one expatriate writer to another who achieved his dream of becoming "an honest man and a good writer."

Charles Green is a writer based in Annapolis, Maryland.

Out of the Capsule

KAT LONG

Sally Ride: American's First Woman in Space

by Lynn Sherr

Simon & Schuster. 341 pages, \$28.

IT WAS only one sentence in a lengthy obituary of America's first female astronaut, but it momentarily overshadowed Sally Ride's inspirational life. "Dr. Ride is remembered by her partner of 27 years, Tam O'Shaughnessy," it read, and you could practically hear readers gasp in surprise. Almost no one outside of her immediate family realized that Sally Ride, America's first woman in space, was in a long-term relationship with another woman.

This is how Ride wanted it, according to Lynn Sherr's vigorous new biography, written after Ride died of pancreatic cancer at age 61 in 2012. Sherr, a journalist who anchored ABC's coverage of NASA's space program in the early 1980s, befriended the astrophysicist as she trained for her first shuttle mission. Like the rest of America, Sherr was captivated by the brilliant, optimistic woman who seemed destined for the stars.

Growing up in southern California in the 1960s and '70s, Sally Ride was a nationally ranked tennis champ who spent her time off the court studying Shakespeare, physics, and astronomy. By the time she entered Stanford with a major in physics—the only woman in the department—she had decided that science, not sports, would be her career. She also met her first serious girlfriend, a fellow tennis semi-pro. Sherr doesn't speculate as to whether Ride's reticence about her sexuality originated in the women's tennis circuit, but she was undoubtedly aware of the negative reaction when her mentor, Billie Jean

King, came out in 1981.

By then, Ride was ensconced in the ultra-macho milieu of NASA. When she and six other women were accepted into the Space Shuttle program in 1978, journalists asked them ridiculous questions—“How will you apply makeup in space?”—and late-night comedians made the “astronettes” the butt of insulting jokes. The clueless team at NASA responsible for packing the astronauts’ toiletry kits asked Ride if she thought 100 tampons would be enough for their six-day mission, just in case.

On June 18, 1983, Ride buckled into the Challenger’s cockpit for liftoff. Years later, she would describe “the psychological and emotional feelings that come along with the actual launch ... fueled by the realization that you’re ... sitting on top of tons of rocket fuel and it’s basically exploding underneath you. It’s an emotionally and psychologically overwhelming experience. Very exhilarating. Exhilarating, terrifying and overwhelming all at the same time.” On the brief mission, Ride operated the giant robot arm that lifted satellites out of Challenger’s cargo bay and set them into orbit. She and a fellow astronaut also rigged a camera to take a picture of the shuttle against a backdrop of Earth’s horizon—the first space selfie.

When she returned to earth, Sallymania swept America. She went to Disney World, gave hundreds of interviews, had lunch with President Reagan, and endured criticism from the press when she allegedly refused to accept a bouquet of flowers. Ride bore it all with humor, but the experience showed her how far female scientists, and women in general, had to go to achieve equal footing with men. After retiring from NASA in 1987, she taught physics at UC-San Diego and set up house with Tam O’Shaughnessy, whom she had known since she was a teenager. Together they founded Sally Ride Science, a company that produced educational products geared toward girls “to make science cool again.” But she never felt free enough to come out, even to her closest colleagues in academia or at her own company. She jumped from one insular community to the next, maintaining an ironclad shell around her private life.

This entertaining and informative biography uses interviews from dozens of Ride’s childhood friends, college pals, NASA colleagues and family, and even her ex-husband, fellow astronaut Steve Hawley, whom she married in 1982 and divorced in ’87. (Note the prominent wedding ring she sports on the book jacket photo.) Ride left virtually no diaries or letters that revealed her private thoughts. Sherr certainly faced a challenge in writing an accurate account of a woman who resisted any writer’s attempt to delve into her compartmentalized life while she was alive.

Ride’s reasons for remaining in the closet even after she left NASA—and even after her friends had put two and two together—are not entirely clear. Sherr doggedly interviewed Ride’s first serious girlfriend, her ex-boyfriends, and her ex-husband, asking if they had an inkling of her motives for such secrecy. But the world-famous astronaut remains inscrutable to her closest family and friends—including Sherr—and certainly to readers of this book. In 2013, President Obama named Sally Ride a posthumous recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, for her contributions to science and women’s leadership.

Kat Long is a freelance science writer and a Master’s candidate at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism.

Tell Your Subordinates!

HEATHER SEGCEL

The Glass Closet: Why Coming Out Is Good Business

by John Browne

Harper Business. 240 pages, \$27.99

JOHAN BROWNE was the CEO of BP from 1995 to 2007. During his tenure, a harrowing refinery explosion took place in Texas, killing fifteen and injuring 170 workers. While trying to be the face of corporate accountability, Browne was falling apart inside. Tabloids back in England were threatening to out him after a scorned escort spilled the beans about their relationship. Injunctions were filed, Browne resigned his position in anticipation of a firestorm, and the news came out to a flurry of headlines that quickly faded from view.

Having had his life turned upside down by the mere threat of being outed, Browne began to take notice of how few openly gay people there are among the upper ranks of corporations. While recognizing the risks involved, he argues in *The Glass Closet* that coming out is “good business” because it supports the values of visibility, transparency, and creativity.

There’s much to like in this book, but let me first dispense with a few quibbles. One has the feeling that it was assembled rather hastily as it leapfrogs from memoir to a history of oppressed peoples to a “how to” book for corporations. Its central thesis might have been better presented in a tightly argued article than in a book.

Browne’s thesis is that someone in a position of power who elects to hide a central fact about himself is likely to be perceived as untrustworthy. In contrast, coming out shows a fundamental honesty and a willingness to take risks. It can also pre-emptively shut down offensive comments from coworkers. For example, Browne interviewed a former investment banker whose boss taunted him on a company outing, pointing out a pink bicycle and making rude comments for other employees to laugh at. After leaving the job, the man wished he had come out sooner. “What’s the fun of telling me there’s a pink bike if I’m proud of being gay? It’s only funny because I’m trying to stay in the closet. Coming out kills the joke.”

When Browne was at BP he took pride in his ability to compartmentalize, viewing it as an elite form of multitasking. What he discovered was that the effort involved in hiding his sexuality sapped his creativity. Companies that recruit with diversity in mind often cite the innovations sparked by exposure to other types of people as crucial to getting their best ideas.

Of course, there are still many places in the world where coming out is unsafe, and Browne makes it clear that there are times when it is simply not advisable. His optimism that the global tide is turning in favor of equality is offset by the reality that there is a dangerous countertrend in some parts of the world. That said, among the people he interviews are some who help others manage their coming out processes, and they often find people for whom there will be few serious consequences for

stalling until life is indefinably “perfect” before dropping the Q bomb on coworkers. These are the folks to whom Browne is primarily speaking, and his call to action has merit: diversity magnifies diversity and invites more.

This reader opened *The Glass Closet* prepared to be a bit smug, recalling subsequent BP CEO Tony Hayward’s yawning remark that “I want my life back” while the Gulf filled with oil during the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Would a former BP executive try to cover his company’s oily tracks with a rainbow banner? Thankfully, this did not happen. *The Glass Closet* is imperfect, but its intent seems authentically benign. There are stories from trans people and bisexuals, which makes this a rare GLBT book that actually touches on everyone in the proverbial quiltbag. While trans people in the lower economic strata risk their lives to be out, Browne shares the story of an executive who faces at worst some ribbing from colleagues. Those in power have much less to risk, and potentially something to gain, by coming out at work.

Heather Seggel is a freelance writer on a quest for affordable housing in northern California.

Men and ‘Melancholia’

DALE W. BOYER

Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature

by David Greven

Ashgate Publishing Limited. 250 pages, \$109.95

AN ALARMING PASSAGE occurs on page 56 of David Greven’s *Gender Protest and Same-Sex Desire in Antebellum American Literature*. After a lengthy introduction, in which author David Greven discusses subjects ranging from Freud to Lacan and a myriad of other sources in between, he proclaims that he’s more interested in comparing these psychoanalytic accounts to each other than he is in actually applying them to literature. Thus the title of his work might more accurately be “A Comparison of Various Psychoanalytic Theories about Antebellum Literature.”

Once the author finally gets down to exploring the literature itself, however, his book is actually rather interesting. Focusing on certain unnamed feelings and emotions in pre-Civil War literary works, he remarks that “this apparent namelessness, unspokenness, and silencing of same-sex love and desire and sexuality was itself a kind of naming.” Some may see this argument as tendentious, but Greven’s painstaking excavation of hidden motives and desires—while startling at first glance—is often ingenious and convincing. For instance, his assessment of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Ligeia* argues that it is “a queer scene between women, a female-female exchange not of bodily fluids, but of actual bodies.” He continues: “Instead of producing an offspring with an independent life, Ligeia regenerates herself. Chillingly, she co-opts another woman’s body chamber as her birth-chamber, bursting out of it,” rendering unnecessary the

male component of sexual commerce.

Greven builds many of his arguments around what he calls “gender protest” whereby unstated same-sex attraction is conveyed through characters who express atypical gender traits. For example, during Andrew Jackson’s presidency the dominant depiction of American masculinity stressed the unflinching, even brutal determination of the frontiersman. But there were also those men who suffered from “melancholia,” which may be interpreted as a backlash against this notion of the typical male temperament. He cites James Fenimore Cooper’s character Natty Bumppo, who “reveals that he finds heterosexual relations bewildering and enigmatic.” He also discusses at length the rather extravagant (by our standards) culture of mourning that governed much antebellum literature. These were periods of mourning when both men and women were allowed to grieve openly over same-sex attachments that had hitherto gone unacknowledged. An example is the melancholic Arthur Pym in Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, which Greven sees as “an allegory of lost male bonds.”

Greven is perhaps at his most provocative when he calls Hawthorne’s *A Scarlet Letter* a “queer text,” which even he admits could be a stretch. The focus is on Hester Prynne herself, who by definition displayed an outlaw sexuality, though not quite in the sense that equates with our word “queer.” Still, Greven’s argument is more subtle and ingenious than it may at first appear, notably because Hester (unlike Dimmesdale) refuses to renounce her nonconforming desire. Instead, she chooses to live as an outlaw in the community that has stigma-

Let It Stay

It could have been one that night,
or a bit later.

In the taverna’s shadows,
As the back booth blocked us,
Just us two, the place empty,
The lamp’s dim light around us,
The waiter slumped by the door.

Anyway, no-one could see us,
though both on fire—
Why should we care now?

Clothes pulled open, not much on really,
Glorious hot July steaming about us.

But out now, ecstatic,
the quick flash of flesh—
How the image flies to me, even these
decades away,
Now let it stay here, here in this poem.

CONSTANTINE P. CAVAFY
(Translated by William Leo Coakley)

tized her, much as many lesbians and gay men today choose to live openly in an often hostile society.

Gender Protest is not an easy text to read, and it's clearly intended mostly for academics. The author sometimes overstates his case, as when he finds a "startling suggestion of same-sex desire" in a female character's "sympathetic throb" toward Hester Prynne. Nevertheless, for those willing to take up the challenge, the reward is a perceptive, subtly radical, and ultimately quite persuasive study.

Dale W. Boyer is a writer based in Chicago.

Interwar Paris *Encore*

IRENE JAVORS

Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932: A Novel

by Francine Prose

HarperCollins. 448 pages, \$26.99

CROSS DRESSERS, artists, poets, writers, jaded chanteuses, fabulously wealthy aristocrats, brilliant conversations, and an endless flow of magnums of champagne converge in Paris, that "City of Light." Starving multitudes, unheated garrets, anti-Semitic mobs calling for blood, degenerates, falling-down drug addicts, and dark foreshadowings of fascist atrocities to come also converge in Paris, a city of darkness as well.

Both Parises figure prominently in Francine Prose's new epic novel, *Lovers at the Chameleon Club, Paris 1932*. Spanning more than twenty years, the novel depicts the lives of various characters that offer their perspectives on each other's lives as well as the historical moment. The work is a psychological and social portrait of France between the wars. Loosely based on the lives of various historical figures such as Henry Miller and the photographer known as Brassai, the novel also features a bored baroness, a world-weary cabaret owner, and an assortment of lost souls who float through Paris. Even Picasso makes an appearance. The story is told in alternating narratives from all of the major characters, a technique that's reminiscent of montage filmmaking whereby separate snippets of film are pieced together to create a narrative.

But Prose's larger project involves an examination of the psychological underpinnings of the central character, Lou Villars, who's clearly based upon the real-life person Violette Morris, a racecar driver who was a lesbian and sometime cross-dresser. Violette is one of the two subjects, along with her female lover, who appear in a famous photo by Brassai known as *Lesbian Couple at Le Monocle, 1932*. Prose painstakingly unspools Villars' life from girlhood to racecar driver to spy for the Nazis and Gestapo torturer at the infamous 93, rue Lauriston, Paris. The novel describes how Villars justified her embrace of Nazism and the Vichy regime as an act of patriotism, likening herself to Joan of Arc. Believing that Jews and Communists were polluting French culture, she saw her mission as one of

purifying France of these contaminating elements.

The deeper reasons for Villars' turn to fascism remain an enigma. From her bizarre childhood on, she saw herself as an outsider. She was a fantastic athlete and racecar driver who was prevented from pursuing these avenues as a professional due to her gender. She was a lesbian and cross-dresser who was thwarted in love. Yet she identified with a political movement that was expressly misogynistic and homophobic. By embracing fascism she apparently found "a place at the table" where she enjoyed a measure of power and status—for a time. But this scarcely explains her terrible moral decisions at a time when being an outsider was the very thing that led to your persecution.

Prose has written a big book which at times can seem like the Cecil B. DeMille version of Paris in the '30s, full of wide-angle shots and clichés about the Parisian demimonde and Bohemia ("divine decadence" and all that). But seen through the eyes of the novel's central characters, notably Lou Villars, this world takes on a depth and breadth that justifies the novel's sweeping ambitions.

Irene Javors is a psychotherapist and writer who lives in NYC. She is the author of *Culture Notes: Essays on Sane Living* (2010).

One Road to Fatherhood

TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

All I Love and Know

by Judith Frank

William Morrow. 432 pages, \$26.99

AN AIRPLANE might seem a clichéd place to start a story, but that, and an anguished reflection, are where Judith Frank begins her second novel, *All I Love and Know*. The protagonists are Matt Greene and his partner Daniel, who seem to be mismatched—and they both know it. Matt is the happy-go-lucky, easygoing youth who wears his heart on his sleeve. Daniel, by contrast, tends toward gloominess, often around his Jewish heredity.

The two men have a semi-committed relationship and live in Massachusetts, more-or-less happily, but their differences—and their different political outlooks—are brought to the fore when Daniel's twin brother and sister-in-law are killed by terrorists in a café near their home in Jerusalem. This precipitates the opening plane ride, but a funeral isn't the only reason for the hasty trip: Daniel's sister-in-law had asked him to raise their children, six-year-old Gal and one-year-old Noam, in case of an emergency.

The road to parenthood for these two gay men who never considered becoming fathers is not a smooth one. There are two sets of grandparents to consider, lifestyles to alter hastily and drastically, plus legal matters and social workers to deal with on two continents. Readers won't be shocked that there are problems between the two new, sudden dads: Daniel isn't sure he loves Matt enough to want to co-parent with him, while Matt

doesn't feel appreciated for the changes he's made or the chores he has undertaken. There are conflicting parental styles when the older child acts up, and a crisis of diarrhea precipitated by a baby in distress.

This confusion does not produce much comic relief, alas. And while this novel has all the markings of a tear-jerker—including a good bit of maudlin language and characters musing about their feelings—it doesn't really go in that direction either. Then there's that handful of semi-gratuitous digressions that involve fairly explicit descriptions of sexual activity. This comes as quite a surprise, since family dramas such as this don't normally contain X-rated scenes—notwithstanding the one that *is* integral to the story. What's more, the novel takes place over more than a year's time in the characters' lives—and feels it. There's a lot of repetition, a lot of back-and-forth with peripheral cast members (in particular, Daniel's mother) that adds little to the story. Several times it felt like the author was wrapping things up, only to plunge us back into the tale, waiting for an epiphany that never comes.

One could be forgiven for tossing this book aside lightly, were it not for Frank's keen ability to convey the raw depths of feeling experienced by the main characters, whether grief over an irrecoverable loss or confusion in a chaotic situation. This doesn't completely offset the tedium elsewhere in the story, but it does give Daniel, Matt, and the supporting players a realism that allows us to pick sides in their skirmishes, to feel delight when they find reserves of strength within themselves, and even to deflect one's irritation when their lives become mired in overly wordy prose.

Murder as Mission

CHRISTOPHER LEE COCHRAN

American Honor Killings: Desire and Rage Among Men

by David McConnell

Akashic Books. 256 pages, \$15.95

THE TITLE of this book refers to a type of murder that involves a straight male perpetrator and a gay male victim. But these are not hate crimes in the usual sense (though they may be reported as such in the mass media). They are crimes of passion—or, more accurately, crimes of passionate men who reacted with extreme violence to contact with gay men. Such crimes, argues author David McConnell, are the “remote cousins” of old-fashioned duels. They are “honor” killings in the sense that the perpetrator sees himself as a combatant against a social evil, even as a hero fulfilling a destiny of some kind.

What these portraits collectively reveal is that, for all the recent progress toward GLBT equality, it can still be a rough and tumble world out there in many patches of the American social fabric. Indeed the very visible gains in recent years could even be triggering a backlash in this other America. The Supreme Court rulings striking down DOMA and legalizing same-sex marriage in California are the latest push into unknown territory for American society, with widely varying implications according to class, geography, and culture. Reaction to these rulings from far-right religious groups already indicates that these issues will stay at the forefront for some time.

Far from simple hate crimes, these crimes are seen more as a reaction to this new, evolving reality. Straight men have not only held most of the power—they still do—but they've been accustomed to a veil of discretion when it comes to the truth about their private selves, their weaknesses, anatomical features, fears, and foolishness. Open talk about sexuality in general and gay sex in particular threatens to tear away this veil of silence. The killers that McConnell met and interviewed saw themselves, or needed to see themselves, as “believers, soldiers, avengers, purifiers, as exemplars of manhood.”

McConnell combines previously published news reports and court records with his own research and interviews, weaving these accounts in a literary fashion that gives each retelling the feel of a short story. It's a highly effective technique that captures our attention immediately, bringing us into the minds of these killers as they commit these horrendous acts. McConnell has fashioned these killers' personalities and belief systems as thoroughly as permitted by the available records, noting where there are gaps because the killer was uncooperative, delusional, or dead. The result is a superbly written and engaging entrée into a cultish world of which most gay readers are probably unaware.

Christopher Lee Cochran is a writer and librarian based in Washington, D.C.



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Tales of Two Artists in Mid-Century Paris

ONE OF THE PITFALLS of any biopic is the lead actor's temptation to do a full-throttle imitation of the person whose life story is being told. Unless you're Meryl Streep channeling Margaret Thatcher or Julia Child, or Marion Cotillard as Edith Piaf, the results can seem like bad parody. A recent entry to the genre is the French film *Yves Saint Laurent*, about the young French-Algerian genius who at 21 took over the haute couture house of Christian Dior. The performance by the young Pierre Niney as Saint Laurent has to enter the annals of great star-making turns. Niney, a stage actor with the renowned Comédie Française, gives us a richly layered, three-dimensional portrait of the intensely shy Yves Saint Laurent, a gay prince from a family of the haute bourgeoisie in Oran who came of age as the Algerian War of Independence was taking root.

Saint Laurent's rapid ascent in the Parisian fashion world is seen as the result of his intense inner drive and confidence in his own talents, given public voice in his early press interviews. He makes good with the crucial help of Pierre Bergé, his lover, mentor, companion, and soul-mate. In real life, Bergé was Yves' senior by only six years but was by temperament far more stable and acted as something of a father figure. Together the two men would build the YSL fashion empire.

Two early moments set the stage for an understanding of the young genius's psychology. In 1960, Saint Laurent is drafted into the army at the time of the Algerian War, an eventuality he has feared and for which he is temperamentally unsuited. And we know why: a sensitive and creative gay man, almost painfully shy, will be asked to hold a gun and make war. Almost immediately, he suffers a nervous breakdown and enters a military hospital. Bergé goes off to attend to his lover, who has shriveled to a shadow of his former self, turning his face to the wall and barely eating. A diagnosis of manic depression facilitates his departure from military service. In the meantime, the house of Dior has fired Saint Laurent since, in his mental state, he's not capable of working, although this is merely a screen for the administration's loss of confidence in his talent: after a wildly successful first-sea-

ALLEN ELLENZWEIG

Yves Saint Laurent

Directed by Jalil Lespert
The Weinstein Company

Violette

Directed by Martin Provost
Adopt Films

son launch, his work had not fared as well in the next two shows.

Again, Bergé takes the reins, suing Dior for a considerable sum and amassing the financial support for Saint Laurent to strike out on his own with a line of haute couture. This second "crisis"—an attack upon his competence and fledgling reputation—reveals how the young YSL, obsessed with nothing but his design abilities, his compulsion to create women's clothes at the highest

artisanal level, is also a reflection of his total inability to live in the quotidian world. YSL admits to being a "cripple"; he's the sort of childlike genius who can do one thing brilliantly but cannot otherwise function in daily life.

The rest of the film is an unusually compelling account of professional triumphs played against fitful descents into the drug and

sex hedonism of the 1970s, revealing and opening the divide between YSL and Bergé. The former, having led a monkish existence while attending to the grueling requirements of spring and fall runway shows, now surrenders to the teenage rebellion he never experienced. The lovers' vacation house in Marrakech becomes the headquarters for young friends and close colleagues who share sexcapades, jokes, and cocaine. Bergé, who has already shown himself capable of tactical infidelity—screwing a favored (female) runway model who is Saint Laurent's chief "muse" in order to arouse his partner's jealousy—now must endure a series of bacchanals which draw the flail-



Yves Saint Laurent

ing Yves deeper into guilt, defensiveness, and substance abuse.

Jalil Lespert, the film's director and writer, has a shrewd eye for capturing period detail of the Paris fashion world. The early scenes of the Dior era portray a demanding backstage calculus and a prim—one would say almost conventional—public face where runway shows were strictly reserved for the elect few to be seated close to the action. The models would present in a series of regimented poses and quick whirls with nothing left to chance.

Allen Ellenzweig is the author of The Homoerotic Photograph (1992) and a frequent contributor to these pages.

Later, and much under YSL's own influence, runway shows would become extravaganzas, veritable light-and-sound shows with the fashion press eagerly priming the public relations pump.

Lespert, a successful film actor, has populated his film with excellent players at all levels. Guillaume Gallienne, another Comédie Française alum, portrays Bergé as the calm captain in the center of the storm—until he himself, at moments of stress, erupts. As YSL's early muse Victoire, Charlotte Le Bon creates a fashion model who is both beautiful and intelligent, supportive of the *enfant terrible* who is her boss and friend—and who briefly, improbably proposes marriage.

The film is peopled by a colorful sampling of fashion's now iconic characters—everyone from Karl Lagerfeld to Loulou de la Falaise. Even the aging Jean Cocteau makes an appearance in an early Dior-period scene, and we can't help but suspect that the young man with the full head of platinum hair lounging on the cushions in the Marrakech home is meant to suggest Andy Warhol. As a contrast to the staid conventions of the 1950s, the late '60s and '70s scenes throw us into a corner of bohemian privilege likewise threatened by the period's left-wing revolutionary fervor.

Pierre Niney gives an outsized performance. Saint Laurent was hardly a heartthrob; his heavy black frame glasses gave him a nerdy demeanor. Niney, slender and doe-like, has a face that, on a woman, the French would call *jolie laide*—a slightly “off” quality that lends its owner an atypical beauty, an attraction that goes beyond conventional categories. Niney's physical appeal is just that—and his performing arc from timidity to strength of will, from awkward public player to private and endearing friend, from passionate young lover to mature cynic—is a fascinating account of a quiet genius at war, first with himself and then with public expectations. Like the aria from *La Wally* that underscores one of the designer's greatest runway triumphs, *Yves Saint Laurent* is operatic in its emotional temperatures.

YOU HAVE TO HAND IT to the French for making a biopic about a writer known in the United States, if at all, only in academic and feminist circles. Of course, *Violette*, an examination of the ravaged emotional and romantic life of a deeply personal writer who found her greatest supporter in the far more famous Simone de Beauvoir, was not targeted for an American audience. And it hardly matters if you have never heard of Violette Leduc. Martin Provost's film is a steadily absorbing account of an insecure woman coming of age in Nazi-occupied France, struggling to find her emotional balance and her voice, feeling ugly and unloved, who drove her friends to distraction and her small circle of literary companions and mentors nearly to despair. Born out of wedlock, Violette's relations with her mother were constantly fraught, and during the harsh wartime and its aftermath, she relied on the black market to earn a living and acquire what few creature comforts—especially food—sustained her.

Spurred to her earliest literary efforts by the homosexual writer Maurice Sachs, an ethically suspect character rumored to have collaborated with the Nazis, she finds the wherewithal to deliver her first book-length manuscript, anonymously, to the door of Simone de Beauvoir, already a known literary figure. “Castor”—as Jean-Paul Sartre called de Beauvoir, his longtime companion—immediately recognizes a unique voice in Leduc


and helps get her first book published with the prestigious house Gallimard.

Provost and his co-screenwriters have chosen a literary format to tell their story. The film proceeds in a series of chapters, each named for a character who enters Violette's life as she struggles to gain recognition in an already crowded postwar literary field. Fortunately, despite her alternately aggressive and defensive behavior, she is introduced to literary notables like the former convict Jean Genet, himself championed by Jean-Paul Sartre, and the wealthy manuscript collector Jacques Guérin, heir to the Parfums d'Orsay fortune. Aware of her shame as illegitimate, the two men proudly proclaim their similar bastard status, turning it into an emblem of defiance. Yet Violette is slow to understand that Guérin's homosexuality disqualifies him as a suitable love interest. Perhaps she allows for the possibility because her own sexual identity is rather more fluid. While her essential interest seems to be in women, she has had a youthful marriage and an abortion, and earlier she pined for Maurice Sachs' attentions despite his unreliability.

However, Violette—the socially awkward “ugly duckling”—misconstrues Simone de Beauvoir's professional and sympathetic counsel, twisting Violette toward sexual jealousy and a near stalker obsession. De Beauvoir, at once deeply intellectual and worldly, negotiates her acolyte's emotional demands with steely skill. Indeed, the push-and-pull between the two women is a mother-daughter conflict on a higher plane, the only difference being the erotic undercurrent on Violette's side.

In the end, the film concentrates on the power differential between the operationally emotional Violette, whose writing, we come to understand, is an angry cry from the heart, and the coolly rational de Beauvoir. As Violette, Emmanuelle Devos gives a courageous performance, daring us to find her as annoying as some of her friends do. But her “bad” behavior is revealed as so much the product of emotional and psychic deprivation that we root for her in spite of ourselves. Sandrine Kiberlain plays de Beauvoir with appropriate sang-froid and reserve as the primly elegant Castor's career jumps ever higher toward her groundbreaking *The Second Sex*, a feminist manifesto hardly appreciated by her male counterparts in the phallographic postwar world of Parisian letters. Violette's sexual jealousy of Simone mixes with professional envy—a heated, enraging envy that we've already seen displayed at a rehearsal of her friend Genet's *The Maids*—yet de Beauvoir forces Leduc to reckon with her demons through writing books of piercing honesty.

Leduc was possibly the first French woman to describe her sexual awakening with another girl at school, or to detail adult sexual experience of the kind that only men could traditionally write about. At de Beauvoir's urging, Leduc makes public her past abortion at a time when the procedure was still illegal in France. The story moves toward Leduc's first great public success after more than a decade of struggle. *La Bâtarde* (*The Bastard*) made her popular, it would seem, not despite but because of its unflinching emotionality and nakedness.

Violette is as much a film about the loneliness of the long-distance artist as it is an examination of a woman's frantic quest to speak her own truth in her own voice. To peg it as a feminist or lesbian film because its themes so manifestly speak to those issues would be to miss another point: that to be an artist is often equivalent to being an outsider in one's own homeland. 

A Child of the Sixties

JUST AS *Deep Throat* made hardcore pornography more acceptable for the masses in the 1970s, it was *The Bed*, a much lesser known art film shot in California in 1968, that would usher in the era of full-frontal nudity in mainstream films. The director, James Broughton, was a pansexual, avant-garde poet and filmmaker whose whimsical poetry and surreal films first put him on the map in the 1940s. A founding member of the San Francisco Renaissance—along with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, and the rest—and one of the originators of West Coast experimental filmmaking, his pioneer work from that time is remarkable for its sex-positive sensibility and hints at the much more explicit work he would make in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. *Big Joy*, a documentary about Broughton's life, is a fascinating and entertaining examination of the most famous and interesting poet you've never heard of.

Although he never achieved the name recognition of similar artists from his time, such as Allen Ginsberg or Kenneth Anger, Broughton's work was a seminal influence on both the beat and hippie generations. This connection is apparent in clips from Broughton's films and in poetry readings that appear in the documentary. Many of the talking heads interviewed in the film—including Armistead Maupin, George Kuchar, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—describe his style as “whimsical,” “childlike,” and “ecstatic.” All true. Despite the nudity and sexual themes, it would be an understatement to say he was a Peter Pan. He had a wonderfully childlike exuberance and bohemian approach to life that makes it easy to understand why the beats and hippies loved him so much. But it also explains why many will perhaps find him cloying, like a twelve-year-old Dr. Seuss, albeit with the face and body of Walt Whitman. From his “Hymn to Big Joy”:

He He Oh He
 He is the completest zany of a He
 He is the immaculated jeu d'esprit
 He is the aorta's jigamaree

He Oh He He
 His is the reekingest smell of free
 His is the deafening fart of glee
 His is the jocosity's apogee

Oh He He He
 laughtiest daffiest verity

This childlike approach to life and art was accentuated by Broughton's androgynous voice and mannerisms—think Carl Sandburg crossed with Truman Capote—which makes you wonder how things might have turned out for him had he been

Jim Farley is an associate editor of this magazine.

JIM FARLEY

Big Joy
The Adventures of James Broughton
 Directed by Stephen Silha
 and Eric Slade
 Frisky Divinity Productions

born with a voice with more gravitas, like Allen Ginsberg.

But as the film explains through interviews and archival footage, Broughton's fey mannerisms and androgynous persona are the key to understanding his life and art. Like many gay artists, he had a tortured relationship with his mother, who despised him for being effeminate. In one revealing segment, we learn from Broughton's child-

hood diary that, in an effort to “cure” himself of his effeminacy, he asked his mother to subtract a quarter from his allowance every time he acted girly. This struggle with traditional gender norms would persist for most of his life, and it partly explains why he spent years in Jungian analysis and had affairs with both men and women, including film critic Pauline Kael, who helped him make his second film, *Mother's Day* (1948), a surrealist black-and-white celluloid poem in which childlike adults play hopscotch, twirl hula hoops, swing on swing sets, and so on. After having had such a joyless child-



James Broughton and Joel Singer

hood, it's no wonder Broughton's first serious attempt at filmmaking would be about the importance of play, even for adults. It was his signature theme, one he would explore for the rest of his life.

Although they never married, Kael and Broughton had a daughter together, and Kael introduced him to his first long-term male lover, Kermit Sheets. Sheets was an actor, director, playwright, and founder of Centaur Press, perhaps best known for publishing Anaïs Nin's first work of fiction, *House of Incest* (1936). Sheets collaborated with Broughton on several films, including *The Pleasure Garden* (1953), which was given a special jury award at Cannes by Jean Cocteau for Best Fantastic-Poetic Film, which resulted in Broughton being offered a job directing a commercial film. When he declined the offer because he was more interested in writing poetry at the time,


Pauline Kael told him it was the biggest mistake of his life.

Always one to follow his own drummer, Broughton focused on writing poetry for over a decade and didn't make another film until 1968, when he made *The Bed*, his first color film. A 22-minute paean to hippiedom, the film has no plot, just beautiful, mostly naked bodies—male, female, gay, straight, black, white, young, old, lizard, snake—playfully cavorting on a big brass bed that has somehow found its way into a meadow. Besides being so incredibly relaxed about nudity for its time, the film is also casual regarding drug use, as in one scene where a couple smokes a joint in bed. In another scene, a priest played by Alan Watts gives a dying man (Kermit Sheets) last rites before he dies in bed. Broughton himself stars in the film, as a grizzled Pan-like figure who plays saxophone in the nude while sitting on the bed's brass headboard. This film has such an iconic feel to it—could it be the most quintessentially hippie film ever made?—one wonders why it's not better known, at least among art film aficionados outside of San Francisco.

After *The Bed*, Broughton continued writing poetry and making playfully erotic art films with a distinctly West Coast vibe, films full of dance and joy, magic and myth. He died in 1999, at the age of 85. The makers of *Big Joy* were able to use unlimited footage from his films, having secured permission from Joel Singer, his last lover and the executor of his estate. The clips are beautifully photographed and often very sexy, although the eroti-

cism is tempered by Broughton's whimsical sense of humor, at least in the clips shown in the documentary.

In addition to being a great introduction to Broughton's work, the film's exploration of his complicated sexuality serves as a fascinating case study of how homophobia is bad for both gay *and* straight people. Although he had relationships with both men and women, and even got married in 1962—on the advice of his Jungian therapist and fellow experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who both thought it would “straighten him out”—Broughton began to identify more as a gay man in the '70s. Indeed, while teaching film at San Francisco Art Institute, he fell in love with the aforementioned Joel Singer, a student, and left his wife and children to be with him.

Broughton and Singer would stay together and collaborate on films until Broughton died almost 25 years later. In interviews with his ex-wife and adult son—his two daughters declined to be interviewed for the film—it's obvious that Broughton's coming out was extremely traumatic for his family. But considering his history and the nature of his work, it's hard to believe his wife could have been caught unawares. It's unclear whether the acrimonious breakup was a classic case of a narcissistic artist who callously followed his muse and his groin or a bitter wife who wanted nothing more to do with her newly gay husband. In any event, the viewer is left with more questions than answers on this issue. 

B R I E F S

The English Poems of Richard Crashaw

Edited by Richard Rambuss
University of Minnesota Press.
449 pages, \$35.95

“No English poet was more enraptured by the image of God enfleshed, uncovered, and rendered corporally vulnerable than was Richard Crashaw,” Rambuss observed in an earlier study of the 17th-century devotional poet's desire to become “Christ's Ganymede.” Rambuss' welcome new edition of Crashaw's long unavailable poems allows readers to explore for themselves what Rambuss calls Crashaw's “devotional rhapsodies” rung on what is outside “Christ's excitingly vulnerable male body ... that can be used to open and enter it (whips, nails, thorns, spikes, spears, knives, his own pen), as well as what can be made to stream out from it, once penetrated, in an unending flow (blood, tears, water, wine, ink, honey, cream, and inseminating ‘dew of Life’).” Rambuss' introduction addresses the history of the poet's reputation, in particular the denigrating association of his religious nonconfor-

mity (his conversion to Roman Catholicism) with sexual nonconformity (effeminacy). And his glosses yield such fascinating information as a brief history of the representation of Christ's genitals in European art and a summary of the patristic and medieval legend that, because Christ could not take on human nature while “the vice contrary to nature” was being practiced on earth, all of the world's sodomites were eradicated at the moment of the nativity when a bright light appeared in the sky. Clearly, this is not a book for the spiritually faint of heart *or* for the sexually conservative.

RAYMOND-JEAN FRONTAIN

These Things Happen

by Richard Kramer
Unbridled Books. 256 pages, \$16.

Richard Kramer, a screenwriter, producer, and director for such shows as *Thirtysomething*, *Once and Again*, and *Tales of the City*, has written a first-rate coming-out novel with an ingenious twist: the coming out is not that of the main character but of the adults raising him. After his parents' divorce, Wesley,

who is straight, is being jointly raised by his father Kenny and his new gay partner George. They share custody of Wesley with his mother. Wesley's best friend Theo, who *is* gay, comes out at a student assembly right after he's elected to class president. When Theo is later gay-bashed and Wesley is hurt defending him, tensions and unspoken feelings among all parties are brought to the surface. In particular, George and Kenny must face some truths about themselves that seem self-evident to the younger generation. The novel displays many of the same charms (and some of the frustrations) of the author's TV shows: delightfully witty dialogue, multiple points of view, and surprising insight. Indeed the character of George is one of the more endearing and fully realized in recent gay fiction. My one caveat would be not to be dissuaded from reading this book by its somewhat amateurish cover design, as what's inside will appeal to fans of Kramer's television projects (forty-somethings?), among other potential readers.

DALE W. BOYER

Up from Mormonism

“COME OUT as a wanderer. Come out as a questioner. One day it won’t matter. But it still does.” The author of this exhortation is Tyler Glenn, the lead singer of the alt-rock band Neon Trees, who came out in *Rolling Stone* earlier this year. Glenn’s confession coincided with the release of the band’s third studio album, *Pop Psychology*, a title reportedly inspired by the therapy he sought after a minor meltdown back in 2012 and the cancellation of some tour dates. He went on, in a Facebook post, to urge his fans: “Come out as you. That’s all I really can say. That’s what I’d say to me at 21, the scared return Mormon missionary who knew this part of himself but loved God too. You can do both. Don’t let anyone tell you [otherwise]. All my love and hope, and for now, back to the music.”

What about the music? If the song “First Things First” is any indication, music (as opposed to faith or fame) was Glenn’s first love. Over a foot-stomping beat made for the stadium, he sings, “I don’t want to be so famous/ I just want to sing until I die.” That’s the album’s final track, whereas its first, “Love in the 21st Century,” zips along at an even quicker tempo with Glenn decrying the “broken heart technology” of modern (on-line) love. The words are sometimes weak-minded—“so sweet” rhymes with “click delete”—but, collectively, *Pop Psychology* goes down like an energy-drink of pure power-pop, both whiney and wonderful in the tradition of Weezer and The Strokes.

The album’s psychology is another matter. The object of “Text Me in the Morning” is a “damsel in distress,” but rather than rushing to her aid, the singer seeks only to be her friend: “All the other boys just want your sex/ But I just want your text.” “Sleeping with a Friend,” the album’s first (and best) single, peaked at number 51 on the U.S. *Billboard* chart. (The club remixes, by Kat Krazy and Ra Ra Riot, reposition the song on the dance floor, which is where it truly belongs.) Some interpret the song’s “friend” as the object of gay desire, but the lyrics are more ambiguous than that. “Teenager in Love” is the gayest song of all, with Glenn singing, “He’s a teen, a teenager in love/ What a tragic attraction.” He channels his idol Morrissey (whose naked, life-size image inhabits Glenn’s Utah home) with a cryptic allusion to unrequited same-sex love: “I’m a fool with a curse and crush.” Still, there is something a little puerile about a grown man like Glenn—who came out at age thirty and doesn’t drive—still trapped in such a teenage wasteland. Then again, he’s self-

COLIN CARMAN

Pop Psychology
Album by Neon Trees
Island Records

aware enough to admit, on “Living in Another World,” “I’ve been going through an awkward phase.”

Some of Glenn’s stuntedness could stem from the fact that he knew he was gay at age six but had to survive in the Church of Latter Day Saints. He and guitarist Chris Allen, whom Glenn calls his “other half” (musically speaking), grew up in Murrieta, a predominantly Mormon suburb of San Diego, before moving to Utah where they later ruled the music scene in Provo. Due to the support of the Killers (also with Mormon roots), Neon Trees signed with a major label and, on their 2010 debut “Habits,” delivered high-octane hits like “Animal” and “1983.” This must have been liberating considering the Church deemed Glenn’s clothing “distracting,” and, on a two-year mission to Nebraska, he was forbidden to play secular music. He would go into a closet, he told *Rolling Stone*, where he jammed in secret.

The significance of a gay Mormon boy retreating into an



Tyler Glenn of Neon Trees

actual closet is hard to miss. Anyone familiar with the musical *The Book of Mormon* knows the comic number “Turn it Off,” in which Mormon missionaries offer each other a bit of friendly advice, which is to sublimate their gay desires. “Just go click/ It’s a cool little Mormon trick,” sings Elder McKinley, “When you’re feeling certain feelings that just don’t seem right, treat those pesky feelings like a reading light/ And turn ’em off!” Now that Tyler Glenn has finally flipped the switch, Neon Trees sounds better than ever, even if some of that raw rock id that powered *Animal* has softened. “We’re both young hot-blooded people,” he sings, “to become one, it could be lethal.”

Colin Carman PhD teaches British and American literature at Colorado Mesa University.

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

Rehoboth Beach Independent Film Festival. Nov 5-9.

Santa Barbara Outrageous LGBTQ Film Festival. Nov 6-9.

Indianapolis LGBT Film Festival. Nov 7-9.

New York Queer Experimental Film Festival. Nov 11-16.

Puerto Rico Queer Filmfest. Nov 20-26.

Miami Classic Gay Film Festival at Sea. Jan 1-15, 2015.

EVENTS

LGBT Leaders Conf. will bring together hundreds of openly LGBT leaders in government, advocacy, and business. In Washington, DC, Dec. 4-7. Visit: www.lgbtleaders.org

Gay Christian Network Conf. Annual assembly for fellowship and support. In Portland, OR, Jan. 8-11. Visit: www.gcnconf.com

National Multicultural Conf. and Summit, a biennial conference hosted by the American Psychological Association, will meet in Atlanta, Jan. 15-16, 2015. Visit www.apa.com and check "events."

Creating Change, the national conference on LGBT equality, will be held in Denver, CO, Feb. 4-8, 2015. Sponsored by the NGLTF. Go to: www.creatingchange.org

A Time to Thrive is a national conf. to address issues facing LGBTQ youth. Sponsored by the HRC. In Portland, OR, Feb. 13-15, 2015.

New York LGBT Expo. The largest business expo of its kind will be held Feb. 28-March 1, at the Javits Convention Center. More info at: www.thelgbtexpo.com

IGLTA—Int'l Gay & Lesbian Tourism Ass'n—will hold its annual convention in L.A., April 11-14. Visit: www.igltaconvention.org

Feature Films*

Appropriate Behavior (directed by Desiree Akhavan) A Persian woman in Brooklyn with a conservative family and a demanding ex-girlfriend sets out on a private rebellion and pansexual adventures.

Blackbird (Patrik-Ian Polk) A 17-year-old choirboy struggles to come out in an African-American family in Mississippi.

Boys (Mischa Kamp) Danish romance about two male track athletes who can't help falling in love.

Drunktown's Finest (Sydney Freeland) A transsexual prostitute is one of three main characters who struggle with the hardships of life on a Navajo reservation, all the while searching for love.

Eastern Boys (Robin Campillo) Thriller about a French man who picks up an Eastern European boy at Paris' Gard du Nord—and gets way more than he bargained for.

Lady Valor: The Kristin Beck Story (Mark Herzog, Sandrine Orabona) Documentary about a transgender Navy SEAL.

Lilting (Hong Khaou) Two people from different worlds—a grieving Asian mother and a gay British lad—are brought together by the death of the man they both loved.

Paolini (Abel Ferrara). Biopic about the famed Italian director reconstructs the last hours of his life before his murder in 1975.

Power Erotic (Lawrence Ferrara) Documentary explores the role of power and dominance in contemporary gay male sexuality.

Pride (Matthew Warchus) Based on a true story about the 1984 UK miners' strike and how a group of GLBT activists raised money to help the affected families.

Regarding Susan Sontag (Nancy D. Kates) Documentary tells the life story of the (mostly) lesbian writer and public intellectual who wrote "Notes on Camp" and many influential books and essays.

Saugatuck Cures (Matthew Ladensack) Two best friends, one gay and one straight, embark on a road trip across the USA posing as ex-gay ministers to scam church-going folk—but all for a good cause.

Toy Soldiers (Erik Peter Carlson) revisits an intense night of sex and drugs when a group of friends confronted their secret demons.

** Most are screening at film festivals; some are in general release.*

Theater / Dance

Tail! Spin! re-enacts gay sex scandals (think Mark Foley and Larry Craig) in a comedy starring *SNL*'s Rachel Dratch. At the Culture Project, 49 Bleeker St., NYC.

Straight White Men A man and his three adult sons confront changing times and their loss of privilege as straight white men. At the Public Theater in New York City until Dec. 7.

The Battle of Midway: Live! Onstage! A camp musical about the famous naval battle. At the Costume Shop in San Fran, Nov. 14-30.

Stardust David Roussève/REALITY take their multimedia dance performance to Seattle, Nov. 20-22. Tells the story of an African-American teenager coming to terms with being gay.

The Anarchist David Mamet's psychological drama is all about a lesbian anarchist inmate on the day of her parole hearing. At the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco, Jan. 2-17, 2015.

Finding Neverland Based on David Magee's movie, tells the story of J. M. Barrie and his life with the family that inspired *Peter Pan*. Opening at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre, NYC, April 8, 2015.

Art Exhibitions

Montezland In-depth portrait of the legendary pre-Stonewall drag performer Mario Montez (1935-2013). At ONE Art Gallery & Museum in West Hollywood to Jan 11, 2015.

The Classical Nude and the Making of Queer History Traces its theme from Antiquity to the 19th century. At the Leslie-Lohman Museum in New York City, Oct. 18 to Jan. 4, 2015.

Anthony Friedkin: The Gay Essay Exhibits 75 photos of gay life in the tumultuous years after Stonewall (1969). At the de Young Museum in San Francisco to Jan. 11, 2015.

Robert Mapplethorpe: Photographs from The Kinsey Institute Collection marks the first public showing of these photographs. At Indiana University's Grunwald Gallery, Bloomington, to Nov. 22.

Nicholas F. Benton

'Extraordinary Hearts:

Reclaiming Gay Sensibility's Central Role in the Progress of Civilization'

(Lethe Press, 2013)

(Destined to Become an Enduring Classic)

The following is excerpted from a review by gay pioneer and frequent *Gay & Lesbian Review* contributor Steven F. Dansky.

The pivotal element of Nick Benton's thought-provoking and audacious book *Extraordinary Hearts: Reclaiming Gay Sensibility's Central Role in the Progress of Civilization* is disclosed upfront in the subtitle. The subtitle recognizes the existence of the gay sensibility—an idea that continues to generate controversy decades after first proposed in the 20th century. Further, the subtitle asserts the gay sensibility has an overarching purpose for all humankind. For gay men in particular, the proposition of the gay sensibility became the bedrock of identity—the prism through which reality is experienced, perceived, and interpreted.

In 1970, Benton was a founder of Gay Liberation Front in Berkeley, California and a frequent writer for *The Berkeley Barb*, a weekly underground newspaper. Then in 1972, along with Jim Rankin he published *The Effeminate*, a short-lived newspaper that urged "gay men to align politically with the goals of the feminist movement to overthrow the influence of the brutal straight male paradigm dominating society in favor of a new paradigm based on genuine gender, racial and cultural equality."

The key question the early LGBT movement confronted head-on during the 1970s was, "What does it mean to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?" The early phases that defined the modern LGBT movement were closely linked with identity politics—the belief that identity should be the principal focus for political struggle.

Defining and securing the gay sensibility is Benton's central undertaking in *Extraordinary Hearts*, a collection of one hundred essays outlining our raison d'être and mission. He disentangles the intractable puzzle that has to be solved, the Gordian knot of the gay sensibility, by isolating the gay sensibility from sexual orientation: "[D]ifference is what I call a 'gay sensibility,' and it is more pervasive for one's personality than sexual orientation, usually preceding it. This, and not sexual orientation alone, is the central, defining feature of homosexuals." This idea informs each and every essay: the gay sensibility is the modus operandi, a method among others, by which humankind can evolve toward "universal rights and democratic values . . . against the tyrant." The tyrant is "brutal straight-male dominion" that prevents "the empowerment of those otherwise subservient."

Benton is fearless—he names names. He believes the early gay male faction of the LGBT movement was seized, and he accuses Michel Foucault, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs, among others, of hijacking what had the potential to be a progressive movement. Energized by post-modernism and the hedonist counterculture, the movement turned from life-affirming values into "a dominant obsession with self-centered, pleasure-seeking sexual acts. No love, no romance, no rela-

tional commitments, but sheer carnality for its own sake." Benton recommends mostly writers and poets: Christopher Isherwood, Larry Kramer, Walt Whitman, and Tennessee Williams; but, he also acknowledges those who fought for social justice: Nancy Davis, Barbara Gittings, Harry Hay, Frank Kameny, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Lilli Vincenz.

The essays in *Extraordinary Hearts* are a core curriculum, and many are heart-wrenching and painful to read. When Benton writes about what he terms the AIDS Dark Age, the "descent into the hell of radical hedonism," there are truths and half-truths, and he falters on a tightrope of victim-blaming versus personal responsibility. Randy Shilts' *And the Band Played On*, published in 1987, was the first major account of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and it contains chilling quasi-biblical narratives of innocence corrupted—naïve young men lured by San Francisco pleasure-seeking degenerates into unspeakable debauchery. Benton as-

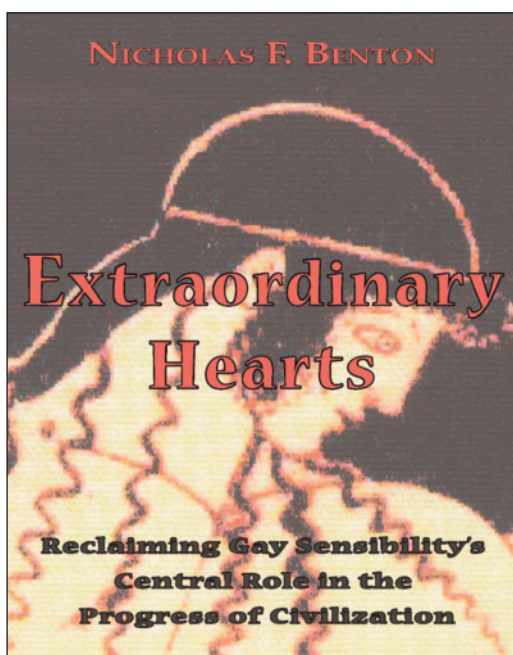
serts that Foucault visited S&M gay bathhouses in San Francisco nearly daily in the fall of 1983, knowing he had AIDS. There have been countless discourses on pathology, criminality, perversion, and promiscuity perpetrated against LGBT people. But, make no mistake about Benton's theories or intentions—this is a man who has devoted his life to social justice. Many of us are survivors of the countercultural madness that gripped us prior, and during, the outbreak of the epidemic. We shoulder intolerable grief, having lost loved ones, family, political heroes, creators and mentors. Benton yields to the ultimate truth—" [T]here was no one to tell us, no historical precedents, no guidelines, for defining who we are and what our purpose on this planet is."

Despite several missteps along the way in *Extraordinary Hearts*, Benton emerges as a singular cultural mentor and pathfinder to be taken seriously. The essays are repetitious; of course, a book is a different genre from a newspaper column where a message can be

insistent week after week. Benton offers these essays as a refrain. After all, this is someone with a message. Ultimately, this collection is far more complicated than a clarion call against one ideology in favor of another. It's visionary. The reader is summoned to consider an end to power dominance—a terminal rebuke to a death-dealing patriarchy favoring instead empathic and relational, life-affirming creativity within a community invigorated by soul-searching.

(For more than 50 years, Steven F. Dansky has been an activist, writer, and photographer. He was a member of Gay Liberation Front, NY; a founder of *Effeminate*; a frequent contributor to *The Gay & Lesbian Review*; publisher of *Christopher Street Press*; and a founder of *OUTLoud: Oral History from LGBTQ Pioneers*.)

(The complete review as published in the Falls Church News-Press can be read at www.fcnp.com.)



At the Heart of a Bay Area Revival

ART HISTORY can be a dry affair: a reinterpretation for the umpteenth time of the Mona Lisa's smile. But sometimes it can bring to light an undervalued artist or an overlooked cultural moment. An example of the latter is an exhibition titled *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle*, whose importance extends beyond the San Francisco Bay Area and American cultural history to encompass GLBT history as well. The show's title refers to Robert Duncan's 1960 volume of poetry, *The Opening of the Field*, whose cover sported an illustration by his partner Jess. The word "field," argues co-curator Christopher Wagstaff, is "a metaphor for the cosmos or an expanding state of aware-

JAMES CASSELL

An Opening of the Field Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle

Curated by and Michael Duncan
and Christopher Wagstaff

At the Pasadena Museum of
California Art to January 11, 2015

Hermes, Edward Corbett, Eloise Mixon, Philip Roeber, Ronald Bladen, Harry Jacobus, and Virginia Admiral (known mainly as actor Robert DeNiro's mother). The show illustrates and gives coherence to their common bonds, providing, perhaps for the first time, an understanding of their ideas and influences. But it primarily brings to the fore the two men at the center of this mid-20th-century cross-fertilization for whom life and art were inseparable.

Jess started life as Burgess Franklin Collins, a nerdy if handsome introvert, the product of a conservative family. A chemist, he fulfilled his service during World War II by helping to produce plutonium for the Manhattan project. "When they dropped the bomb I knew science was made by black magicians," he later said. This theme, society's idolization of scientific advances at the cost of spiritual awareness, persists throughout his work. In the late 1940s, Jess had a dream about the coming annihilation of the world. Shortly thereafter, he left science, severed ties with his family, moved to San Francisco, became simply "Jess," and began to study art. A heavily wax-crayoned work on paper from 1959 shows his continued fascination with mass destruction. The darkened back of a man is seen against a vivid sky, his right arm pointing to a fiery mushroom-like column of light in the upper right. The sun is lower left and off-center. The thickly textured piece, echoing Van Gogh in its style and Albert Pinkham Ryder in its allegorical content, is titled *Qui Auget Scientiam Auget Dolorem* ("Who Increases Science Increases Grief").

Robert Duncan, the more outgoing of the two, was the adopted child of Theosophists. His parents believed their gifted son had lived in Atlantis in a past life, and they encouraged his early interest in the arts, literature, and philosophy. While both were Californians—they met in San Francisco in the summer of 1950—Jess and Duncan's backgrounds could not have been more dissimilar. And yet, despite Duncan's absences due to teaching assignments and lecture circuit tours and Jess's preference for staying at home and working, in their 37 years together (ending at Duncan's death in 1988), they complemented and supported one another creatively. They



Jess: The Enamored Mage: Translation #6, a portrait of Robert Duncan, 1965

ness." After runs at New York University and American University in Washington, D.C., the show has now arrived in southern California.

Although a few of the mid-century Bay Area artists represented here are somewhat well-known, the majority are hardly household names. Among them are Helen Adam, George

James Cassell, an artist and writer, lives in Silver Spring, MD. His work was recently seen at the Studio 21 Gallery in Washington, DC.

believed their gifted son had lived in Atlantis in a past life, and they encouraged his early interest in the arts, literature, and philosophy. While both were Californians—they met in San Francisco in the summer of 1950—Jess and Duncan's backgrounds could not have been more dissimilar. And yet, despite Duncan's absences due to teaching assignments and lecture circuit tours and Jess's preference for staying at home and working, in their 37 years together (ending at Duncan's death in 1988), they complemented and supported one another creatively. They

were a model for many friends—straight, gay, and otherwise—of how to be in a committed relationship.

In the 1940s, before settling in San Francisco, Duncan had traveled abroad and spent a few years in New York. In a film shown in the exhibit, Duncan describes how he tried unsuccessfully to find employment there. Not wishing to hide his homosexuality, he was denied jobs because of it, or, on the other hand, was offered employment *because* of it. In the end, he preferred to wash dishes. While sexual freedom was certainly not a fact of everyday life in the Bay Area in the post-war years, the atmosphere in San Francisco, compared to the rest of America, was somewhat more conducive to “doing your own thing.”

At the entrance to the exhibit, a short documentary film takes the viewer inside the house that Jess and Duncan shared in San Francisco’s Mission District. It was a world unto itself, filled with books and art, including Jess’s paintings and collages (or “paste-ups” as he called them) and Duncan’s large, wax-crayon-on-paper drawings. Also on the walls were works by friends including: Wallace Berman, best known for his complex photo collages; Edward Corbett, a great and under-appreciated West Coast abstractionist; the eccentric poet and collagist Helen Adam; George Herms, who created startling mixed-media assemblages from found debris; and R. B. Kitaj, an anomalous figurative artist who drew on influences as disparate as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Jewish history and culture. Some of the works were gifts or were traded for another’s work. The commercial sale of art was not part of this crowd’s vocabulary.

In mid-century America, the focus was largely on East Coast artists, notably the abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko. Although touted as the first flowering of an authentically American art movement, abstract expressionism had multiple roots in Europe. Inherent in it was a rather doctrinaire view of art history. It sought to cleanse the canvas of all narrative information, such as any figurative components. The painting was to be distilled down to its purest elements of color and line. In contrast, artists on the West Coast were less confined by orthodoxies. To be sure, the West had its share of great abstract expressionists—Clyfford Still, another of Jess’s teachers at CSFA, being the best known. But Still was tolerant of artists who deviated from pure abstraction in their work, as did the circle around Jess and Duncan, who borrowed from a diversity of sources.

While two-dimensional works comprise most of *An Opening of the Field*, the show also includes stone sculptures, assemblages, Duncan’s handmade books of poems, and a 37-minute film by filmmaker-poet James Broughton. “The Pleasure Garden,” both satire and allegory aimed at societal repression, perfectly sets the stage for the exhibit. Made in 1953 and shot in London’s Crystal Palace Gardens, Broughton’s Chaplinesque short film follows several eccentrics as they cavort in an Edenic setting in which their nemeses, Col. Pall K. Gargoyle and Aunt Minerva, attempt to rein in any kind of physical or emotional expression. In the end, the two moralizers are expelled from the garden and the inhabitants can again pursue their desires.


The art of Jess, Robert Duncan, and many of those affiliated with them was infused with Romanticism and myth. Writes

Christopher Wagstaff: “myth for these two artists involves the disclosure in time of what is primordial and time-free.” Dreams, too—as well as a belief in the transformative importance of the imagination and the idea that art can involve joyful play—characterize their works. For them, art and life were interchangeable: a canvas, a drawing, a poem was not so much a thing confined by its *finishedness* as something alive and ongoing. In a statement regarding his aesthetics, Duncan asks, “Why should one’s art then be an achievement? Why not more an adventure?”

Of the two, I think Jess was the stronger and more original painter. But then, Duncan was first and foremost a poet. (A complete collection of his poems is to be published soon.) Duncan’s writings, with their allusions to dreams, mythologies and fairy tales, clearly informed much of Jess’s work. The two often collaborated, with Jess providing the visual elements for Duncan’s poetry, such as Jess’s ink-on-paper illustration for his 1955 poem “The Song of the Borderguard.” With its spare lines and monochromatic blacks and whites perfectly balancing one another, it recalls the work of the late-19th-century artist Aubrey Beardsley and art nouveau.

Jess’s relationship with Duncan also contributed to Jess’s use of sexual imagery. His *A Thin Veneer of Civility (Self-Portrait)*, an oil wash on canvas from 1954, is in its soft beauty among the show’s most striking and powerful works. From a distance, the nude, boney male figure in the long vertical canvas—its predominant colors muted browns, yellow, and a warm red—appears to be leaning back and... what? Urinating? Masturbating? On closer viewing, we see that he is actually using a ball of string to play with a cat that’s turned over on its back at his feet. Above in the upper right is a faint image of his lover Duncan’s head. “Tender, tongue-in-cheek, and pointedly sexual, the painting blithely breaks nearly every taboo of its time,” remarks Michael Duncan in the superb exhibit book.

Jess said that a dream is the perfect collage, the elements artlessly and seamlessly fitting together, conveying the dream’s own logic. His “paste-ups” present what is undoubtedly a dream-like world. Filtered through a Freudian prism on the interior psyche, collage has its roots in Cubism, evolving and flourishing under Dada and Surrealism, as seen in works by earlier 20th-century artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst (to whom Jess acknowledged a debt). It is arguably the most narrative of all modern art forms. Like a novelist, the collagist has a story to tell. But the process, rather than being preconceived, is somewhat serendipitous. The collage elements—magazine cut-outs, pieces of fabric, found objects—are often haphazardly assembled, products of the mind’s conscious and unconscious riffing off visual juxtapositions and puns.

Through collage, Jess, as a gay man and a misfit in 1950s America, was able to express his alienation, anger, anxieties, and homosexual longings. He used contemporary advertising materials and text—for example, ads for shaving cream and sportswear. He found, and sometimes made explicit, the underlying homoerotic elements of this imagery. In some collages, handsome, muscular and unclothed men appear in sexual positions. He used satire and humor fearlessly, poking fun at himself and his own urges. Defying convention, he could bend hetero-oriented material into homoerotic juxtapositions, exacting a kind of revenge upon the dominant culture that had rendered invisible his preferred mode of erotic expression. 

Outing the Stars of Yesteryear

THE INTERSECTION of Hollywood and Highland is undoubtedly the center of tourism in Tinseltown. The Dolby Theater, Grauman's Chinese Theater, the Wax Museum, and countless other destinations vie for the attention of visitors from all over the world. Just south of Hollywood Boulevard is the Max Factor building, a sprawling art deco structure where the makeup pioneer worked his magic. Now home to the Hollywood Museum, the building alone is worth the price of admission.

A current exhibition, *Reel to Real: Portrayals and Perceptions of Gays in Hollywood*, occupies the entire third floor—and it is fascinating. Presented by the Hollywood Museum in partnership with L.A. City Council member Mitch O'Farrell and ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, the exhibit covers nearly 120 years of queer Hollywood history, from an image in the 1895 short film commonly called "Gay Brothers," which features two men dancing together, to artifacts from HBO's *The Normal Heart* and a comprehensive display of the gay wedding from *Days of Our Lives* that aired last April.



From the "Wall of Portraits" at the Reel to Real Exhibition

Co-curator Bob Pranga says that he was "thinking about the comfort level of our visitors, many of whom would not be especially interested in a 'gay' exhibit. We tried to mix genres and people and to cover this expansive history. The title, *Reel to Real*, is meant to suggest how a person's life had to be constructed to work in the industry back in the day, and how

CHRIS FREEMAN

Reel to Real: Portrayals and Perceptions of Gays in Hollywood

Curated by Bob Pranga and
Steve Nycklemore
The Hollywood Museum

different it is now." The installation includes a wide range of issues and information, including performances in front of the camera, set designers, hair and makeup people, and politics, which is represented by material from *Milk* and from a display featuring supportive comments about same-sex marriage from Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.

Among the more mainstream content, there's plenty of Ellen DeGeneres, whose

coming out in 1997 was a watershed event in pop culture. The Clampett's truck from *Beverly Hillbillies* is part of the display on Nancy Culp, who portrayed everyone's favorite 1960s career woman, Miss Hathaway. Juxtaposed to the Clampett's jalopy is the classic black Thunderbird convertible with its leopard skin interior in the space dedicated to camp heroine Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. As Pranga notes, "Cassandra Peterson says that she learned about makeup and costumes from working in gay bars with drag queens."

The first panel in the exhibit features a crucial quotation from Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*: "We have cooperated for a very long time in the maintenance of our own invisibility ... and now the party's over." A video screen looping segments from the documentary based on Russo's classic book accompanies the quotation and sets the scene for the whole experience.

There's much more to see in this fascinating queer history. From the pink-tiled powder room in Roddy McDowell's house (you'll see photos of Mae West and Christopher Isherwood, among many others), to costumes belonging to Liberace and female impersonator Charles Pierce, to the Oscars for *Milk*, and to the 2014 GLAAD award and dress belonging to Jennifer Lopez, there's something here for everyone. More than a thousand items are displayed elegantly and with a touch of gay flair. The visitor feels a little bit like Dorothy must have felt when she woke up in the colorful land of Oz. Her ruby slippers are there, too, right by a screen showing clips from *Brokeback Mountain*.

Perhaps most striking is the "Wall of Portraits," images of more than a hundred actors and actresses who've played gay over the years, including Tim Curry as Dr. Frank N. Furter, Quentin Crisp as himself, Laverne Cox as the transgender star of *Orange Is the New Black*, and a young Wilson Cruz in *My So-Called Life*. It's a walk down memory lane, but it's also an educational display, showing the range and the significance of gay visibility in Hollywood. The museum has received a lot of positive feedback, and, as museum founder and president Donelle Dadigan observed, "our visitors are enjoying the opportunity to learn more about the history of Hollywood through *Reel to Real*, and we see it as contributing to greater understanding and acceptance, both in Los Angeles and in all corners of the world."

Chris Freeman teaches English and Gender Studies (including a course called "Queer LA") at the University of Southern California.

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