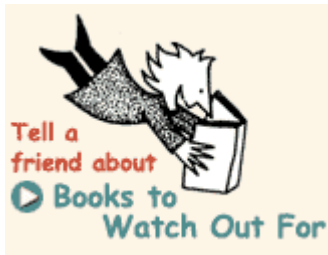




In this issue...

- [Best Books of 2005](#)

The Gay Men's Edition



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Books to Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

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covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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announces and reviews new books by and about gay men as well as other books of interest and gay publishing news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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 by Alonso Duralde

Advocate deputy arts and entertainment editor Alonso Duralde presents 101 films that will resonate with gay audiences, for reasons good, better, and outrageous.

Volume 2 Number 12*

By Richard Labonte

Favorites and Bests For '05: What 58 Writers Read

It's time for that end-of-year rite: the Top 10 list. Except that the one I've written (two actually, 10 fiction and 10 nonfiction, boys and girls in each) is for Q Syndicate only, which distributes my fortnightly Book Marks column to a few dozen community papers; I'll link to my picks in the next issue of **Books To Watch Out For** - I'm sure one of the papers that subscribes to Book Marks will have it posted on their site by then.

But then I thought, why not ask people who write (or edit) books for a living (or for the love of it) to tell me what they read and liked this year. I wrote this to about 75 of them: "Could you tell me about your favorite book of 2005 - preferably but not necessarily a book published in 2005, preferably but not necessarily a queer book."

The response was generous. Almost overwhelming. I'd hoped for reactions that were "eclectic, quirky, and informed," and that's precisely what I got. More than 120 books were mentioned by people who answered my call - but only a handful of writers were cited more than one or two times: Vestal McIntyre, Dennis Cooper, KM Soehnlein, Sam D'Allesandro - and Joan Didion. Some people wrote chatty, short notes; several wrote quite learned reviews; some discussed the thought process that led to their choices; several took time to explain why the non-queer book they favored might matter to queer readers; a couple of cheerful contrarians talked about books they *didn't* like. The variety in tone and style was a delight.

And, as it happens, only eight of the 20 books that I focused on for my best-of-'05 Book Marks column appear in the 58 snappy reviews, chatty reactions, and thoughtful mini-essays in this edition of BTWOF. Hurrah for fine writing, good thinking, and creative diversity. We'll do it again next year...

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Marc Acito

My favorite read of 2005 wasn't a gay book, but is certainly VERY gay-friendly. It's the hysterical memoir **Hypocrite in a Puffy White Dress**, by Susan Jane Gilman (Warner Books). Whether she's describing an encounter with a Maharishi who looks like "a lawn troll in drag," or her teen obsession with Mick Jagger ("Where were the magazines for 15-year-old girls in love with British bisexual cokeheads, thank you?"), Gilman's delightfully warped perspective abounds. An unapologetic sexual hedonist ("Being told to 'wait until marriage' was like being ordered to hold our breath for twelve years") she weaves hilarious tales of a youth misspent "staggering around bars in lace stockings and leather jackets, then coming home with toilet paper stuck to our shoes" as well as working in a series of dead-end jobs ("like terminal illnesses") that make you wince with recognition. Ultimately, however, it is Gilman's razor-sharp intelligence and smart-mouth feminism that leave you thinking well after the laughter fades.

Reviewer info: www.marcacito.com

(Marc is the author of *How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship & Musical Theater*, winner of the 2005 Ken Kesey/Oregon Book Award.)



Rabih Alamedinne

Well, darling, the best book I've read in 2005 was mine, of course, but it's not done yet. Seriously, the best book by far was JM Coetzee's **Slow Man** (Viking). I know it got horrible reviews, but critics are stupid. The only better book I've read recently was his **Elizabeth Costello**. I am biased. I identify so much with his writing, his bleak/vulnerable outlook, the amazing juxtaposition of great feelings in unfeeling characters. So he's not gay, but he's so good, he should be. If you want, I'll swear that I slept with him — no sex though, just cuddling.

Excerpt from an Alamedinne short story:

http://www.all-story.com/issues.cgi?action=show_story&story_id=195

(Rabih is the author of *Koolaid: The Art of War, I, The Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*; and *The Pervs: Stories*.)

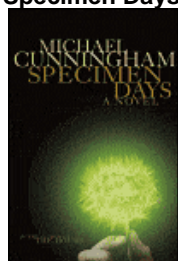
Nick Alexander

I've thought about this long and hard, and there's to be no doubt, it's Michael Cunningham's **Specimen Days** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). I would have liked to name something less successful, or less known, but, well, it's the only book I've really loved this year.

Specimen Days is a strange work, similar in so many ways to *The Hours* (**Specimen Days** is also set in three different times: past, present and future...) and yet so different from *The Hours* and from Cunningham's other novels it's hard to know quite what to make of it. My initial reaction — as I read it and shortly afterwards — was that the novel was a failure. What I usually enjoy the most about Cunningham is the love of humanity he puts across. His ability to put us inside each of his characters, and to make us understand the simultaneous presence of the good, the bad and the ugly in each of us, to show the multi-facetedness of human nature, and to understand the non-evil origins of apparently "bad" acts as well as then not-so-good origins of so many "good" ones. We grow to love and hate Cunningham's characters for their complexity, and we weep for their death at the end of the book.

It took me about an hour to read the final three pages of *Flesh and Blood ...* such were the tears blurring my vision. There's none of this in **Specimen Days**. The novel seems short, and relatively unemotional. I haven't counted, but I think it actually is word short, and this time if there was any desire to attach us to character, there certainly wasn't the time or space. At a first reading it almost feels lazy. But a few days after having finished, a distant dream slowly surfaced... Something vague yet powerful about the fundamental desire of the human race to run away from the life we have created, to return to the wild west, to the farm in the country, to escape the machines and get back to the archetypal lives of our ancestors.

Though this remains misty and is merely glimpsed through a mirage of constructed subtexts — a deformed child of the industrial revolution suffering at the hands of "the machine," a 9-11 contemporary fighting the madness of modern fundamentalist terrorism, a robot seemingly pointlessly programmed with Walt Whitman's poetry which develops an



inexplicable feeling of angst, Cunningham has expressed one of the underlying tenets of the human condition with a poetry all his own and, dream-like, it will bubble to the surface, nudging and poking that same angst in each of us. Now, months later, the book is still very much with me... And that for me is the measure of true genius.

Reviewer info: <http://www.50-reasons.com/buy.html>

(Nick is the author of *50 Reasons to Say "Goodbye"* and *Sottopassaggio*.)

[back to top](#)

Bruce Benderson

Victims by Travis Jeppesen (Akashic/Little House on the Bowery) — This isn't a gay novel per se, but its polymorphous-perverse approach to the laws of attraction includes what I'd categorize as homosexual libido. The book centers around the last days of a religious cult called The Overcomers, who are preparing for the end of their lives on earth, in a way similar to the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult. Six fragmented but ingeniously interlaced fragments paint an apocalyptic portrait of America. The humor is black and the language is stunningly musical. It's like a wedding of the best of Terry Southern and Tennessee Williams.

An interview with the reviewer:

http://www.fluctuat.net/livres/interview/benderson_eng.htm

(Bruce is the author of the memoir *The Romanian: Story of an Obsession*, winner of the 2004 Prix de Flore — one of France's most distinguished literary prizes; it's due from Tarcher, in English, in February; and of *User*, *Pretending to Say No*, and *Toward the New Degeneracy*.)

Anthony Bidulka

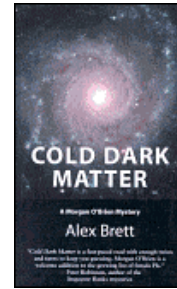
Well, I was glad this didn't absolutely have to be a 2005 book — that would mean I'd have to get cracking on the 2005 books in my massive Yet To Read pile...I don't know how you do it...but I do have two books I can recommend with confidence:

Looking for It by Michael Thomas Ford (Kensington) — There is a warmth and ease and familiarity to this book and its characters that I found myself surrendering to with careless abandon. The guys in this book were diverse but there was something I could recognize in each of them, good and bad and everything in between.

Cold Dark Matter by Alex Brett (Dundurn Group) — Any book with some contraption called The Fruit Machine, secretively developed by the government to ferret out homosexuals — and based on fact! — is gonna hook me. Add to that a protagonist who's as ballsy as they come (and I think a closet lesbian) and an author who knows how to develop setting in unexpected ways (much of the action takes place in Hawaii — think again, it's all atop a mountain where it's freezing and the air is almost too thin to breath) and I'm a happy reader.

Reviewer info: <http://www.anthonymbidulka.com>

(Anthony is the author of three Russell Quant mysteries: *Amuse Bouche*, *Flight of Aquavit*, and *Tapas on the Ramblas*.)



Malcolm Boyd



Years.)

Here's my comment for your favorite book project: **Jesus and the Shamanic Tradition of Same-Sex Love** by Will Roscoe (Suspect Thoughts Press). A first-rate contribution to a much needed, honest and no-holds-barred dialogue about spiritual issues from a queer perspective. This book clearly indicates that the time has come for all of us to open up and really listen to one another on key issues like this. Reviewer info: <http://cathedralcenter.com/malcolmboyd.htm> (Malcolm is the author of many books, including *Running With Jesus*, *Simple Grace*, and *Prayers for the Later*

Perry Brass

One book that did stand out for me: **Beyond Belief: the Secret Gospel of Thomas** by Elaine Pagels (Vintage). Beside having one of the most beautiful prose styles I've read in ages, Pagels really lets out some fascinating facts about the "gospel" of the Bible, that is, how un-literal the whole thing is, how the four gospels were really PR mechanisms for the cults that coalesced

around the four disciples who did not write the accounts published under their names (their followers, who were often sycophants did), and how the first gospel, Matthew's, is pretty straight forward and the last one, John's, is so hyperbolic that it's like the various groups got into a pissing contest to see who could throw the most bull at the faithful. It also deals with the speedy advent of fundamentalism to Christianity; they were already advocating burning heretics at the stake when Jesus's body was barely cold — like about 70 years after his death. Even while the Romans were persecuting Christians, they went after each other. Plus ca change.

My other favorite book of 2005: Emily Bronte's **Wuthering Heights**. I finally got to read it. What a revelation! That that little girl could write such a book! Stunning. Heathcliff is the forerunner of umpteen queerish characters, from Stanley Kowalski to my own Destry Powars in **Warlock**. He is explosive, passionate, barely verbal; the bad boy every good girl wants to tame, or be. When Katherine utters her famous line, "I am Heathcliff," she uncovers the transgendered soul within all of us.

Most disappointing book: **The Master** (Scribner) — when does it ever really come to life? I felt that Colm Toibin's James was a lot more of a prig than the real James ever was, or am I just indulging in wishful thinking? After all, Christopher Isherwood said about his stay in Berlin, "I'm doing all those things that Henry James could only dream of."

As for most *new* books, they seem to go right through me, and few stick. I'm also working on another novel, harder than anything I've done in a while, so nothing works in my head except that.

Reviewer info: www.perrybrass.com

(Perry is the author of the novels *The Substance of God*, *Angel Lust*, *Warlock*, *Mirage*, and others, and of *How to Survive Your Own Gay Life*.)

Bill Brent

Piano Girl: Lessons in Life, Music, and the Perfect Blue Hawaiian by Robin Meloy Goldsby (Backbeat Books) — What's most remarkable about this memoir — the perfect vacation book — is Robin Goldsby's singular and life-embracing voice. Goldsby chronicles her dilemmas with candor, wit, and just enough self-deprecation that she wins the reader's sympathy without ever straying into annoying self-pity. While her situation is not unique — it's yet another variation on the classic struggling-artist-in-Manhattan story — she reveals herself in such insightful, self-knowing detail that she lifts this tale far beyond the banal recitation it could have been. At its best, this memoir is an unforgettable recounting of the crazy situations one endures or embraces in order to survive as an imaginative spirit in a mercenary world. (My personal favorite was Goldsby's ecstatic description of dress-shopping at "Stall for the Handicapped," a clandestine boutique run by an audacious and unusually enterprising restroom attendant in the tony hotel where they both worked.) I dare any reader not to recognize himself or a loved one in at least one of Goldsby's many predicaments.

When I Knew, edited by Robert Trachetenberg (Regan Books) — This great gift book is a humorous, sometimes touching series of accounts by contributors from many walks of life. (The arts are disproportionately represented, which is hardly surprising.) A very smart and stylish browse through the often wild and wacky process of gay self-identity. Don't expect impenetrable depth here — the focus is on the one-liner — but it's a stunning, lavishly illustrated book safe enough for mother and her guests to browse. My partner and I chuckled frequently as I read aloud several of the book's more memorable vignettes. (My personal favorite was Arthur Laurents' — read it and laugh!) I would love to see an equivalent book for lesbians — only a few are included here.

(Bill Brent is the author of *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Men* and the chapbooks *This is Only a Test* and *apathy is a dangerous drug*; he blogs at <http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewblog.asp?AuthorID=9037>.)



[back to top](#)

Rob Byrnes

I'm under deadline for my third novel (eek!) so I haven't been doing as much reading as I would have liked this year. But, as always, I was captivated by the writing team of Becky Cochrane and Timothy J. Lambert, writing as Cochrane Lambert. Their novel **Three Fortunes in One Cookie** (Alyson) affectionately captures the charm of Mississippi coastal towns, especially poignant since those towns were ravaged by this year's hurricanes. But the solid storytelling isn't limited by its Southern setting and characters, as it

details narrator Phillip Powell's experience of leaving Manhattan and going back home to navigate through his past, his quirky, complicated family and friends, and his fledgling efforts to shape his own destiny.
(Rob is the author of *Trust Fund Boys* and *The Night We Met*.)

Alexander Chee

I am in love with Kelly Link's new collection of stories, **Magic For Beginners** (Small Beer Press), just out in hardcover. This book is a fairly complete list of my favorite things. She sort of summarized it best when she signed it for me: "Love, Magic, Zombies!" It's fantastical, whimsical, and dead serious and it makes me interested in short stories again.
(Alexander is the author of *Edinburgh* and the forthcoming — in 2007 — *The Queen of the Night*. He blogs at <http://truenorth.typepad.com>.)

Randy Conner

"Favorite" is an odd word in my book, as is "best." The most *intriguing* book I've read this year is Stephen Carlson's **The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark** (Baylor State University Press), which snuck in at almost midnight this year, so to speak, and which has thrown open a Pandora's box at the American Academy of Religion conference that I attended recently. I'm sad in a way, as I'm certain many are, to find that the icon of the homoerotic Jesus of the MCC and so many gay Christian fantasies/visions — an icon on which so many gay works have been buttressed — has been tarnished. Of course, I'm also a bit suspicious — is this an effort to discredit gay-spiritual scholarship? Ah, yes, and Anne Rice turning to Jesus (**Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt**), which I learned just after paying an outrageous amount to see the musical premiere of 'Lestat.' It's a bit like the moon after the lunar landing: we can still dream. In my dream, Judas and John and Mary Magdalene will always be kissing Jesus, and out of love, not betrayal (that I leave to the Vatican and Stephen Carlson).
(Randy is the author, with David Hatfield Sparks, of *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*.)

Dennis Cooper

This list of "10 books I've read and really liked in 2005 (in no particular order)" is reprinted from Cooper's fine blog:
<http://denniscooper.blogspot.com>.

Ingrid Caven by Jean-Jacques Schuhl (City Lights) — The first new novel in twenty years by this giant of avant-garde French literature. Crazy and really brilliant and inspiring and so entertaining.

Lunar Park, by Bret Easton Ellis (Knopf) — I'm on record as a massive fan of Bret's writing. He continues to enlarge his work in the most fascinating ways, and I think this is yet another pinnacle for him.

Look Slimmer Instantly! by Jerome Sala (Soft Skull) — Sala's a great poet. You could hate poetry and still love his stuff. There's a long poem sequence in my upcoming poetry book called "7 Poems for Jerome Sala" that's an homage to his style. He's just awesome.

Notice by Heather Lewis (Serpents Tail) — This would have been Lewis's second novel after her highly acclaimed debut **House Rules**. No one would publish it. She committed suicide not long ago, and now it's being published. Read this and know how wrong and idiotic major publishing house can be.

The Wild Creatures by Sam D'Allesandro (Suspect Thoughts) — One of the best of the so-called "New Narrative" writers. Died very young from AIDS. This is his collected prose. He was so good, and, shit, he would have gotten so great.

Comfort and Critique by Peter Sotos (Void Books) — Sotos has always been a significant writer, but there's something new happening in his fiction over the last couple of books that I can't quite put my finger on but which is taking his work to an even higher level, I think.

The Evil Queen: A Pornolexicology by Benjamin Perez (Spuyen Duyvil) — This novel came out of nowhere, for me at least. Daring and very smart and full of structural thrills. It deserves much more attention than it's gotten.

Crush by Richard Siken (Yale Series of Younger Poets) — A very strong new poet with a big voice. Easily the best book of poems that happen to be gay that I've read in a long time.

White by Marie Darrieussecq (Gardeners Books) — One of the more impressive contemporary French writers. Her prose has this terrific precise yet very hazy quality, and its interior is very deep in the strangest way.

Moira Orfei in Aigues-Mortes by Wayne Koestenbaum (Soft Skull) — Best known for his poetry and voluptuous nonfiction, Koestenbaum's first



novel is a wicked, merry making, pillaging, high order romp. (Dennis' two recent novels are *The Sluts* and *God Jr.*)

Wayne Courtois

Thank you for thinking of me in soliciting comments on the best queer books of 2005. I can't say I'm caught up on my reading — that'll never happen — so there are a lot of books published in 2005 that I haven't read yet; but I did want to mention **God Jr.**, by Dennis Cooper. I should be mad at him; his last novel, **My Loose Thread**, sent me back into therapy, which cost me a bundle. But he's one writer that I try to keep up with. I can't compete with your typically elegant review that appeared in *GMax*, but I will take this opportunity to vent. Some reviewers have referred to **God Jr.** as Cooper's "richest, deepest" novel. This is bullshit. Cooper's books don't lend themselves to marketing terms. They just *are*, like found objects. He works hard to make them that way: you can almost see the holes where words have been taken out. How does he create such stark prose? Does he write with a chisel?

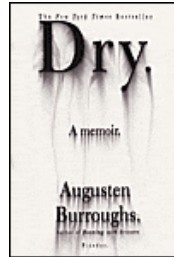
I am one of those who claim that Cooper's writing has a direct effect on your state of mind. Surfacing from one of his narratives, you go to the mirror and learn what it's like to look at yourself without pity. If you don't like what you see, score a point: not liking what you see is a step on the road to... what? It's a terrible dark trail that you have to follow, and at the end you may know less than when you started. Score another point.

God Jr. is a departure for Cooper in that there are no gay characters, but you don't have to broaden your definition of "queer" very much to see it as a queer book. Our hero is a man who has killed his son in a car wreck, pretends he can't walk, stays stoned one hundred percent of the time and, over the course of the narrative, systematically relieves himself of everything that has any meaning in his life. All he's left with is an inane video game that his son liked to play. The last third of the book consists almost entirely of Jim's encounters with different arrangements of pixels. While there are no easy conclusions about whatever meaning Jim's journey may have, I choose to believe that being left with nothing may be enough: when everything else is gone, then guilt can leave too. Not that there's any easy comfort to be taken in the ambiguous ending of the book. Cooper's world remains his world, where the frailty of human connections is enough to give the reader an enduring chill.

I know that **The Sluts** also came out this year, but I have to take a breather before starting in on it. Therapy isn't getting any cheaper. (Wayne is author of the novel *My Name is Rand*.)

Jameson Currier

My favorites reads of 2005 were **Dry** by Augusten Burroughs (Picador) and **The Wild Creatures** by Sam D'Allesandro. In 2005 I read all of Burroughs' oeuvre — after resisting him because of all the media attention he gets — and have come to the conclusion that he deserves all the media attention he



gets, because he is a truly gifted writer. My favorite work of new fiction in 2005 is also an old work of fiction. I am an avid fan of Sam D'Allesandro's short stories and own an original copy of his first collection of fiction, **The Zombie Pit**, published in 1989 by The Crossing Press shortly after D'Allesandro's death. I am pleased that Kevin Killian and the gang at Suspect Thoughts have re-issued his work for a new generation of readers. Books I am most looking forward to reading in 2006: **Hard**, a novel by Wayne Hoffman (Carroll & Graf), and **The Bill from My Father**, a memoir by Bernard Cooper (Simon & Schuster).

(Jameson is the author of *Desire Lust, Passion, Sex; Where the Rainbow Ends*; and *Dancing on the Moon: Short Stories About AIDS*, which a decade after it was published has just been released in France by CyLibris, as *Les Fantomes*.)

Matthew Fox

The book that I read this year that I enjoyed the most was **The Line of Beauty** by Alan Hollinghurst (Bloomsbury USA). A little predictable, perhaps, but for a good reason. The same reason that the book is on all these top-ten lists, and the same reason it won the Man-Booker Prize: it's a stunning piece of literary fiction. No book in recent memory has given us such delectable sentences or so effortlessly tackled massive subjects. Hollinghurst hunts big game: the folly of conservatism, the legacy of Henry James, the



literary value of decadence, the depth of beauty of everything that surrounds us. It is a brilliant and admirable book.

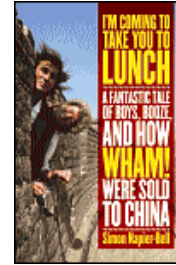
That one was, of course, released in 2004. If you need something from this year, I'd say that **You Are Not the One** (Carroll & Graf) would have to take the cake. This collection of short stories, by New York queer writer Vestal McIntyre, renders with endless humor and compassion the need of marginalized people to find acceptance while holding on to their uniqueness. In McIntyre's hands, the things that people are willing to give or take in this pursuit comes off as both obvious and shocking. The stories are a little rough around the edges, but this is part of the collection's charm and points to a sense of honesty one rarely finds in an author's first book.

Reviewer info: <http://www.citiesofweather.com>

(Matthew Fox is the author of the story collection *Cities of Weather*.)

Jim Gladstone

Well, my guilty pleasure of the year was undoubtedly the nonfiction **I'm Coming to Take You To Lunch: A Fantastic Tale of Boys, Booze, and How WHAM! Were Sold to China** by Simon Napier-Bell (Wenner Books). I picked up the galley at BEA simply because it seemed so ridiculous and had one of the most garish covers I've seen in ages. A big part of me thought I wouldn't actually read it. Well, I'm glad I did. Napier-Bell, a now-66-year-old pop music impresario who wrote hits for Dusty Springfield and managed everyone from Mark Bolan to David Sylvian to, yes, WHAM!, is a raconteur par excellence, and as open about his sexuality as he is about his cunning business machinations and all-around joie de vivre. It's sometimes hard to believe this is a true story because there's all sorts of outlandishness afoot, from politically skullduggery to George Michael's raging egomania. Amid all the fun, I also learned some cool PR schemes. I only wish there was an audiobook version, with Napier-Bell telling all his wicked tales aloud.



On the literary front, I found Jonathan Safran Foer's second novel, **Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close** (Houghton Mifflin), a delightfully entertaining and emotionally powerful read. This surprised me, as I almost didn't give it a shot, so disappointed was I with his lauded debut, *Everything Is Illuminated*, which I found repetitive and show-offy. This new one, about the grieving process of a goofy little 9-year-old brainiac whose father was killed in the 9/11 attacks, just swept me away from the very first paragraph. The experimental elements in the prose — interwoven narratives, old letters inserted in the contemporary mainframe story, etc. — added depth rather than distracting. And the much criticized visual fillips mostly struck me as garnish and, while not adding much, also didn't take away from the main dish. The narrator is not necessarily a little gay boy. But he might as well be, for all his acute emotion and observation of the world from an alienated, but charmed perspective.

I read a very smart debut thriller this year that had some buzz on publication but didn't catch fire. **Cast of Shadows**, by Kevin Guifoile (Knopf), is hardly the post-mod humor novel you might expect from a sometime McSweeneyite, although it is literally postmodern, in that it's set in an altogether believable near-future where the anonymous use of cloned DNA is one of the options for human reproduction. That issue itself — explored with nuance at both scientific and moral levels — makes the book of interest to GLBT readers, but it's a corker of a read for pretty much anyone. Nutshell plot: fertility doctor's teenage daughter is raped and murdered, doctor gathers killer's genetic material from slain daughters' clothing and sets into motion the raising of a duplicate from infancy in a loonily credible nature vs. nurture observational experiment. Lots of scary fun... and lots to think about, too.

Other favorites for the year included short stories by Vestal McIntyre — **You Are Not the One** (Carroll & Graf) — and Haruki Murakami — **After the Quake** (Vintage), and Malcolm Gladwell's follow-up to *The Tipping Point*, **Blink** (Little, Brown). I also enjoyed re-reading one of the most under-acclaimed gay-themed novels of the past couple decades, Warwick Collins' **Gents** (Orion), which deftly handles sexuality, race and religion in a compact and entertaining fashion.

Reviewer info: <http://www.gogladstone.com/main.html>

(Jim is the author of the novel *The Big Book of Misunderstanding* and the book of games *Gladstone's Games to Go*.)

Stephen Greco

Since I'm in the midst of organizing the judging for this year's Ferro-Grumley Awards, I should probably not comment on any LGBT titles I have loved from the past year. But I do want to mention one of my very favorite books from last year, that though not about gay life or gay characters is the kind of book that could have been written only, I think, by a gay man: **The Ha-Ha** by Dave King (Little, Brown). The very design of King's portrayal of a man of normal intelligence who cannot speak attests to the power of the gay imagination to yield fresh insights into the conditions of life at large. Nobody last year got the delicate interaction in a character's mind between intention and expression as well as King did. (Stephen is the author of the story collection *The Sperm Engine*; his 30-page story "Kate Neiring" is available as an amazon.com digital download for just 49 cents.)



Aaron Hamburger

You Are Not The One by Vestal McIntyre (Carroll & Graf) — This was not only my favorite story collection of 2005, but also one of my favorite story collections in recent memory. The stories are tender and funny, but they also have a memorable bite to them. I also enjoyed the way McIntyre can take clever concepts, like a man with a fetish for sex in a car wash, or a kidnapped kid in a kangaroo mask, and then spin them into poetry. I'm looking forward to seeing what he'll do next.

Reviewer info: <http://www.aaronhamburger.com>

(Aaron is author of the novel *Faith for Beginners* and the story collection *The View from Stalin's Head*.)

Brent Hartinger

The Commitment: Love, Sex, Marriage, and My Family by Dan Savage (Dutton) — This is a sequel-of-sorts to Savage's 2000 memoir, *The Kid* (which I also loved), about his and his boyfriend's decision to adopt a child. This time around, Savage and his boyfriend of ten years try to decide



whether or not to "tie the knot," and make a formal commitment of their relationship — an option that even D.J., their six-year-old "kid," firmly opposes. As always, Savage is laugh-out-loud funny, but this is also a book with great heart. I've read all the books out lately that give the arguments why gays should have legal marriage under the law. But same-sex marriage isn't really about facts or arguments; ultimately, it's about emotion, about families, and about the human beings involved. In **The**

Commitment, Savage presents his family as a case-study-of-sorts. The result is more powerful than a thousand newspaper essays. My runner-up would be Lori Lake's **Have Gun, Will Travel** (Regal Crest Enterprises), a lesbian thriller with a crackling pace. It's a cliché, but I couldn't put it down!

Reviewer info: <http://www.brenthartinger.com>

(Brent is the author of the YA novels *The Geography Club*, *The Order of the Poison Oak*, and *The Last Chance Texaco*, and the forthcoming *Grand & Humble*; he blogs at <http://www.livejournal.com/users/brentsbrain>.)

Trebor Healey

All the books I've been reading are from years past. But just now I'm right in the middle of Karl Soehnlein's new book, **You Can Say You Knew Me When** (Kensington) and wow, there's some great stuff in it, so that's my pick. It's a highly insightful, entertaining, and poignant story that blows right through the boundaries of gay literature and takes on what it is to be not just gay, but male and human, in this crazy postmodern world. Soehnlein's scene of Jed and Jamie hiking through the coastal mountains above Half Moon Bay is satorial, solid, beautifully crafted, and one of the most remarkable, memorable, and must-read scenes to come out of gay lit in ages. Think *Brokeback Mountain*, but with a more contemporary scope.

Reviewer info: <http://www.treborhealey.com>

(Trebor is the author of the novel *Through It Came Bright Colors* and the forthcoming poetry collection *Sweet Son of Pan*.)



Scott Heim

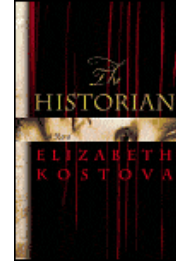
Ice Haven, by Daniel Clowes (Pantheon) — Should I be embarrassed that it's categorized as a "graphic novel"? I guess not, since its character development, quirkiness, and stylistic complexity are on par with some of my favorite literary novels.

(Scott is author of the novels *In Awe* and *Mysterious Skin* [a hit film this year, directed by Gregg Araki, who was just nominated for an Independent Spirit Award] and the forthcoming *We Disappear*. He blogs at <http://www.etherweave.com/scottheim/weblog/index.html>.)

Greg Herren

I would have to say my favorite book of 2005 was **The Historian** by Elizabeth Kostova (Little, Brown). While the book wasn't queer in any way, I can't remember the last time I read something so well-written, well-researched, and so engrossing. It was also refreshing to read a vampire-themed novel in which the vampires were really, really bad, rather than misunderstood romantic figures.

(Greg is author of the mysteries *Jackson Square Jazz*, *Murder in the Rue St. Anne*, *Murder in the Rue Dauphine*, and the forthcoming *Mardi Gras Mambo*; he blogs at <http://www.livejournal.com/users/scottynola>.)



George Ilsley

Well, thanks for asking. It's always so much more fun to talk about someone else's book. I've chosen three:

Michael Cunningham's **Specimen Days**, published in 2005 but not necessarily a queer book (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Divided into three sections, past, present and future, and along with most readers I'm all love it, love it, then what the heck? Talking lizards from another planet? And this is why I am listing this book. Because it was a challenge. All three sections concern the search for and the meaning of soul, the ghost/god in the machine. The essential Star Trek questions, really, typically posed by Spock/Data: What does it mean to be human? And is that different from the experience of other life forms? This book is thought provoking, and surprisingly risk-taking for going where it goes. This is not a "safe" book for Michael Cunningham, as it is his first book since *The Hours*. Readers do not want "science fiction" thrust upon them. Critics have been puzzled by that third section (indeed, to my surprise, they have largely glossed over and downplayed the unspeakable plot twist).

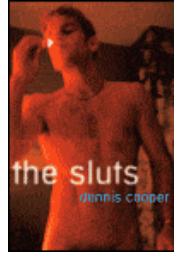
Also a favorite is a memoir, **The Tricky Part**, by Martin Moran (Beacon Press). This one is totally gay through and through. The writing here is bright and engaging, even when grim, and the story unfolds in life-like layers. Marty Moran, as an adult, deals with the impact of his paradoxical feelings around a sexual relationship which started years and years before, when he was 12, with an adult male. **The Tricky Part** also explores a topic almost taboo in the gay world: sexual addiction and obsession as an expression of damage and a vehicle of self-destruction. Throw in a couple of suicide attempts, a hero child, and a love for musical theater and there you have it: a young gay life in a nutshell. Somehow this is all very moving and inspirational, partly because the writing is smart, vivid and authentic. The author is an actor who won an Obie for his one-man play based on the same material.



And finally, chosen from outside the box, is Hari Kunzru's novel **Transmission** (Plume). I was really excited by the voice here and the character Arjun who does well with computer programming but is otherwise somewhat naive and unworldly. He ends up in a hi-tech ghetto in the U.S. as a no-green-card subcontractor getting paid very little and learning too much. Wickedly intense scenes of cubicle life, soul-sucking corporate culture, and the hollowness of the American dream. There are a couple other story lines as well, involving Bollywood, computer viruses, the intersection of old and new worlds, and whatnot. Completely engaging. There is a little bit of queer content (still, more than *Specimen Days*). I enjoyed this author so much I immediately read his previous novel, *The Impressionist*. (George is the author of *Random Acts of Hatred*; his next book, *ManBug*, is a spring title from Arsenal Pulp Press.)

Kevin Killian

For me, the book of the year I nominate is **The Sluts** by Dennis Cooper, published by Void Books in the very first weeks of January 2005 (and reprinted by Carroll & Graf in October). After the attenuated, fleecy heights of *Period*, I frankly could not imagine Cooper ever writing again, for like late



period Beckett, *Period* had said everything, had gone everywhere writing could go, or so I thought, then in raced **The Sluts** and chopped and changed my preconceptions. Wildly procedural, under heavy constraint, but teeming with the raw vigor of anonymous sex, it tells a Rashomon like story of a slut for hire called Brad, sex with whom is rated online by a panel of users whose identities shift and meld like the wind and the water. He looks younger than he is, that's why these guys like him. And also he allowed himself to be "raped" and "killed." It's a brutal and unsettling story, but it's so freshly told it's like the work of some kid. For my runner-up I nominate **God Jr.** (Grove/Black Cat), Cooper's other novel of the year, which addresses the problem of artistic innovation in yet another, equally startling way. What a year for our boy, it's like the year (1936) in which Gary Cooper made *The Wedding Night*, *Peter Ibbetson*, and *Desire* all in one 12-month period.

(Kevin is the author of *Shy*, *Little Men*, *Argento Series*, *I Cry Like a Baby*, and *Bedrooms Have Windows*; with Lew Ellingham, of *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance*; most recently, he edited a collection of the late Sam D'Allesandro's stories, *The Wild Creatures*; Dennis Cooper is editing a Kevin Killian reader for Carroll & Graf.)

Krandall Kraus

I have been reading some pretty unsatisfying mysteries lately and so I decided to read someone I was always told was the master, the writer's writer of mysteries, and someone whom I've been saving to read in my dotage. I like the idea of knowing there are writers of true quality unread and waiting for me to crack open their pages. So I read **The Spy Who Came In From the Cold**. I had, of course, seen the classic movie and wanted to read the book and make the comparison. Le Carre truly is the master. He does something that is rare, at least for this reader: he literally makes me hold my breath with anticipation and suspense. After reading *Spy* I decided to start at the beginning of his works and make my way through.

What a delightful surprise to find that his early works are every bit as engaging. **Call for the Dead**, his first, is a real mind-teaser, and he masterfully walks the reader through the protagonist's thought process as he tries to unravel the mystery. The solution, as usual, is right in front of us all the time, but we could never guess it in a million years. **A Murder of Quality**, which takes place at a boys' school and features a gay housemaster, is lovely and moving. Very tender and written so beautifully.

The third book may be my favorite. **The Looking Glass War** is written in three sections following three characters on dangerous assignments. The climax will have you chewing your nails. I am in the process of studying Le Carre's technique, hoping to learn how he achieves such suspense, so I might improve my current novel. I would recommend any of these four titles, all of which have a "queer" character, and it is intriguing to study the narrator's attitude toward these people. He is sympathetic but confounded by their proclivity. He considers it "schoolboy behavior" that everyone engages in but would do well to leave at school upon graduation. Very British. Someone might take a politically correct attitude toward Le Carre over this, but it would be beside the point. It is simply some of the best writing of the 20th century in any genre. Simon & Schuster has republished all the titles in their Pocket Books imprint with a new introduction by the author, which is a real treat to read, especially for writers, because Le Carre is filled with criticism for much of his work and he gives an historical and biographical note to each one.

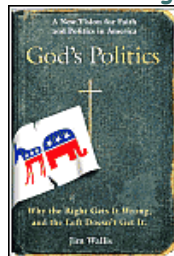
(Krandall is the author of *Bardo*, *Love's Last Chance*, *The Christmas Poems*, *The President's Son*, and, with Paul Borja, *It's Never About What It's About: What We Learned About Living While Waiting to Die*.)

Michael Lassell

I wasn't planning to respond to your query because I haven't read a book this year that I would call a favorite or even recommend particularly. Except Harry Potter 6 (**Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince**). The darker they get, the more I like them. Mostly I read mysteries and most of them are pretty much... well, just what they are. I haven't been really excited about a book since I read **The Da Vinci Code** four years ago. But I do keep on reading.

(Michael is the author of *Celebration: The Story of a Town* and *Disney on Broadway*, and of the poetry collection *A Flame for the Touch That Matters*.)

Brian J. Leung



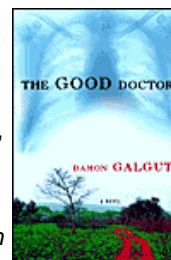
God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It by Jim Wallis (HarperSanFrancisco) — I really appreciate Wallis' thinking in this book because he fairly points out the dangerous ways that the Right and Left use religion. Secularism isn't the answer, but nor is the creation of a wholly evangelical nation. (Brian is author of the story collection *World Famous Love Acts*.)

Shaun Levin

The Good Doctor by Damon Galgut (Atlantic Books) — A disturbing and very subtle book by fellow South African writer. It is his voice more than anything that carried me through the story, the kind of voice that makes you want to sit closer and catch every word he says. A quiet, thoughtful, relentlessly observant storyteller. His other books are brilliant, too.

Reviewer info: <http://www.shaunlevin.com>

(Shaun is the author of *A Year of Two Summers* and *Seven Sweet Things*, and editor of the arts journal *Chroma*.)

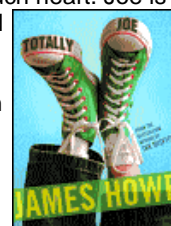


David Levithan

Hands down, my favorite book of the year is James Howe's **Totally Joe** (Atheneum). There are few books I've read that have so much heart. Joe is one of the sweetest, most charming characters around, and his voice and his beautiful and funny confusions are pitch-perfectly written. If you don't care about him after ten pages, then you're worse off than the Tin Man. I read this in full swoon, and it still makes me smile months later. I can't recommend it enough.

Reviewer info: <http://www.davidlevithan.com>

(David is author of the YA novels *Are We There Yet?*, *The Realm of Possibilities*, and *Boy Meets Boy*, which is also available for listening from Full Cast Audio.)



Paul Lisicky

Veronica by Mary Gaitskill (Pantheon) — I can't think of anyone else who writes about the mysteries of sexuality and attachment with such beauty and scalpel-like incision.

School of the Arts by Mark Doty (HarperCollins) — Yes, I should be flogged for listing my partner's book, but this collection of poems is major: a reinvention of voice and a formal breakthrough. Check out the sequence titled "The Vault."

A Bill from My Father by Bernard Cooper (Simon & Schuster) — This doesn't officially come out till January 2006, but I just read it in galleys and loved it. A perceptive and hilarious account of the writer's ongoing relationship with his father. It both broke my heart and made me happy to be alive.

(Paul is the author of the memoir *Famous Builder* and the novel *Lawnboy*, which will be reprinted in 2006.)

Michael Lowenthal

Here are two top-top-top-notch books that I read in 2005, one of them published in this year, and gay, the other published many years ago, and not at all gay.

You Are Not the One by Vestal McIntyre (Carroll & Graf) — Vestal McIntyre's fiction, like his name, demands double-takes. His stories are marked by strangeness of the most wonderful kind — I would call it "queerness," since he and many of his characters are queer, except that people might then want to bury him in some subcultural crypt — strangeness not for its own sake, or for the wink-wink showing off of literary transgression, but the genuine strangeness that arises from a keenly tuned ear for the offbeat. Vestal's stories often make us feel exactly the opposite of what we expect to feel (which is, of course, the only hope for human improvement): he can make us feel the humor in a kidnapping, or the poignancy — yes, the poignancy — of a married man getting a blow job from a hooker in the midst

of a car wash. I've been waiting 10 years for the world at large to be able to share my enthrallment to Vestal's tragic hilarity and his funny pain. Now, lucky for the world, this book has been published.

Kafka Was the Rage by Anatole Broyard (Vintage) — This memoir of Greenwich Village life in the late 1940s, by the former *New York Times* book critic, is written with such preternatural precision, with metaphors so wild and wildly spot-on, that I felt, as I read (and then immediately reread) it, as if I were reading in a gorgeous foreign language in which I had suddenly, miraculously been given fluency. It's full of sex and art and jazz, of characters too much larger-than-life to have been anything other than real. I underlined passages on every single page. I felt: here at last is the book that will teach me how to write.

Reviewer info: <http://www.etherweave.com/mlowenthal/index2.html>

(Michael is the author of the novels *The Same Embrace* and *Avoidance*, and the forthcoming *Charity Girl*, due early in 2007.)

Elliott Mackle

Liquor and **Prime**, by Poppy Z. Brite (Three Rivers Press) — Set in New Orleans' once-sizzling world of hot chefs, ambitious restaurateurs, endless corruption, and alcoholic high life, Poppy Z. Brite's new series essentially creates a new genre — the restaurant thriller. Chefs John Rickey, an intense, big-thinking concept man, and Gary Stubbs, his tireless partner and emotional rock, known as G-man, begin their adventures as likeable twenty-something line cooks. In **Liquor** (2004), the men perfect their kitchen chops in a series of third-rate restaurants. Hard work pays off. With shady backing, the innocents lease a former paint factory in a low-rent neighborhood. What they don't know is that a man was tortured and shot in the place 20 years earlier, that the murder was never solved and that powerful people want to keep it that way. **Liquor**, the new restaurant, is an immediate success, but not before Rickey faces mortal danger in a chilling replay of the earlier killing on the same spot.

Prime, the 2005 sequel, a sexier yarn, begins two years later. **Liquor** has won a James Beard Award as the best new restaurant of the year. Rickey, temporarily lured to Dallas as consultant to a failing shrine to haute cuisine, creates a restaurant to suit Big D's culinary preoccupations: "Prime, A Global Palace of Beef." Unfortunately, success does not please the restaurant's backers. Rickey and G-man are gay male heroes for the post-AIDS age. The novels they inhabit offer a five-star menu of satire, wit, colorful characters, soft-focus sex and butt-tingling action. Two more are reportedly on the way. (Elliott Mackle's novel, *It Takes Two*, was a finalist for the Lambda Award as Best Gay Men's Mystery of 2003.)

[back to top](#)

William Maltese

While I thoroughly believed my favorite book of 2005 was going to be Elizabeth's Kostova's **The Historian** (Little, Brown), with its update on my favorite vampire of all time, Dracula (sorry, Lestat!) it wasn't to be. While, I ended up finding the novel chockablock with interesting bits of historical and vampirical information, none of it seemed, in my opinion, to be successfully incorporated into any kind of interesting and/or feasible storyline. Minor characters kept getting killed left and right while the main characters (can historians really be all this boringly stupid!), just continued on their merry bumbling ways to what has to be one of the most anticlimactic endings in all of literature. What I ending up appreciating most about this book was how it sent me running in search of Bram Stoker's **Dracula**, the latter enjoyed by me so many years ago that I thought for sure the Stoker volume's sense of foreboding would probably be diminished with the passing of time.

Bram and the Count, though, didn't disappoint the second time, anymore than they did the first, which catapulted **Dracula** to the head of my 2005 favorite-books-read list. My advice: skip **The Historian** and go right for the still thoroughly creepy real thing.

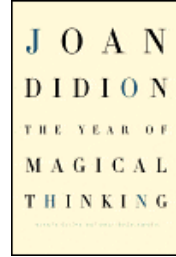
Reviewer info: <http://www.williammaltese.com>

(William is author of the plot-lead sci-fi epic *Bond-Shattering*, published by NighwaresBooks.)

Blair Mastbaum

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion (Knopf) — Sad, insightful meditation on grief, loss, loneliness, sadness. I saw her read here in New York; it was painful because she started crying. The book is also about couples and how dependent one gets on his/her boyfriend/girlfriend. When

reading the book, I thought mostly of my boyfriend, Scott Coffey, and how my life would be without him, how I would handle his death, how I'd rather die first, but then feel guilty for being so selfish. This triggered the thought about why many gay boys don't ever want or desire a long-term relationship, how they can perhaps dodge this one painful bullet by remaining free of a primary relationship through their lives.



Also (here's the gay one), **What We Do Is Secret** by Thorn Hillsbery (Villard) — I think he's a masterful writer. He's a poet, especially with this novel, his second. I'd imagine even his emails are cleverly written. This book

takes place in black and white and it's a good thing. I'm not sure why I think this, but the images are the punk rock version of what the film *Manhattan*, by Woody Allen, looks like.

Reviewer info: <http://blairmastbaum.com>

(Blair is author of the LamGay Fiction Debut Lammy award for *Clay's Way*, and also appears in the independent film *Ellie Parker*, directed by his boyfriend, Scott Coffey.)

Tommi Avicoli Mecca

Why, surprise, my favorite book would be **That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation**, edited by Mattilda, aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore (Soft Skull Press). Why? Because I'm in it? Of course...not! It's because it looks at rebellious out-of-control non-yuppie non-assimilationist alternative outrageous revolutionary excess-prone wonderful queers. Need I say more?

(Tommi is a bred-in-the-bone queer Sicilian and committed social activist who worked with me at A Different Light Bookstore for many years.)

Billy Merrell

I'm thrilled to recommend the book **Crush** by Richard Siken (Yale University Press). It was the latest recipient of the Yale Younger Poets series and was the outstanding choice of Louise Gluck. Siken's poems are informed, emotional, and accessible, yet they're also remarkably active and challenging. I haven't enjoyed a book of poetry so much since I first discovered Mark Doty. That said, the two's poems would not be easily classified together, other than for the queer poets that crafted them. Can I also remind everyone of the YA novel **Are We There Yet?** (David Levithan, queer author, Knopf). Though it doesn't have queer characters, it's my favorite of Levithan's, and it hasn't gotten the attention it deserves.



(Billy is the author of *Talking in the Dark*, a collection of personal narrative poems; is coeditor of the May 2006 "queerthology" *The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing About the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Other Identities*; and blogs at

<http://talkinginthedark.blogspot.com>.)

Marshall Moore

It's morning here in Korea, but here's what my pre-caffeinated brain came up with: **Bangkok Tattoo** by John Burdett (Knopf) — Intriguing sequel to his brilliant, unclassifiable thriller/snarkfest *Bangkok 8*.

(Marshall is author of the novel *The Concrete Sky* and the story collection *Black Shapes in a Darkened Room*; he blogs about life in Korea at http://www.livejournal.com/users/articulate_ink, and about writing at <http://www.livejournal.com/users/msminpdx>.)

Alvin Orloff

I've got two favorite novels of 2005. First, there's **You Can Say You Knew**



Me When by Karl Soehnlein (Kensington), a compulsively readable slice of life story about a crazy mixed-up kid (well, young man) who reconnects with his dead father through a lost journal and bombs around San Francisco in the dying days of the dot-com bubble, cleverly analogized to the waning days of the Beatnik era, while getting high, cheating on his boyfriend, and not being very career focused.

Second, there's **Choir Boy** by Charlie Anders (Soft Skull), a romp through the gender identity crisis of a young teen wrapped in the bosom of a clueless, uncaring family and church. The pleasingly light tone and dry wit, while enjoyable in themselves, also herald a new age in which the subject of transsexuality need no longer

be tragic or even weighty.

Reviewer info: <http://www.alvinorloff.com>

(Alvin is the author of *Gutter Boys* and *I Married an Earthling*.)

Robert Patrick

My favorite of 2005? I'm reading it right now, Daniel Curzon's "non-fiction narrative," **What a Tangled Web** (IGNA/Booksurge), an hilarious, horrifying story about a teacher whose life is poisoned by Internet slander.

Reviewer info: http://www.glbtc.com/literature/patrick_r.html

(Robert is author of many, many plays (see above), of the novel *Temple Slave*, and of the faaabulous CD-ROM memoir *Film Moi, or Narcissus in the Dark*; email him at Rbrtrck@aol.com.)

[back to top](#)

Felice Picano

Try these on: a more mixed lot you'll probably not receive:

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed by Jared Diamond (Penguin Books); **Interpreter of Maladies** by Jhumpa Lahiri (Mariner Books); **Last Night and Other Stories** by James Salter (Knopf); and **The Strange Case of Charles Dexter Ward** by H.P. Lovecraft (Library of America Series).

Reviewer info: <http://www.felicepicano.com>

(Felice is author of a heck of a lot of good books, most recently the memoir *Fred in Love*.)



Scott Pomfret

Cutty, One Rock by August Kleinzahler (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) — This collection of essays is pretty good, but the final essay with the same title as the collection is brilliance itself. Kleinzahler, a poet, writes about his pugilistic gay hustler brother with humor, deep affection, a poet's playfulness with time, and a Jersey boy's bluntness.

(Scott, with his partner Scott Whittier, launched a successful line of gay romance novels — info at www.romentics.com.)

Andy Quan

I loved the shape, language, honesty and wit of the autobiographical stories in Kevin Bentley's **Let's Shut Out the World** (Green Candy Press). And though not a gay poet, discovering Gerald Stern this year - and his collection **Last Blue** (WW Norton) - made me feel glad to be alive.

(Andy is author of the collection of gay erotica and sex writing, *Six Positions*.)

Jay Quinn

Creating this list forced me to ask myself some tough questions, not only about why I liked the books included on my short list, but what makes a book important to me. These two aspects of critical thinking, I think, shed some light on not only my tastes in literature, but also on the demands I try to meet as a writer myself.

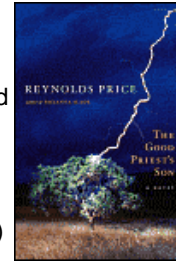
My own work is often concerned with differing concepts of family, and the differing constructs of family play a significant role in each of the books on my list. I am also intrigued by the shadows of foreboding even in the brightest light of the atmosphere in books by others. This sense of tone and color in a book creates an emotional atmosphere that lends richness to a book. And, I feel the more successful a book is, the more deftly rendered the psychological atmosphere that permeates it will be. Finally, I look for a definite awareness on the part of the author that places a work squarely in a certain place and time. The better this is handled in terms of communicating the milieu of the characters, the more readily I can perceive their lives continuing after the conclusion of the book. I want, and need, to believe the people I have come to know so intimately in the work have lives I can imagine moving forward in time and space as they leave me at the end. The following novels best embody these notions.

Saturday by Ian McEwan (Doubleday) — A look at the utterly commonplace occurrence of evil in the contemporary world by a modern master. McEwan gives us a completely intimate view of a single day in the life of an unapologetically upper-middle class professional Londoner as he confronts the threats of living in the post-9/11 world. Brilliant.

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro (Knopf) — The sheer artistry Ishiguro employs in creating a very probable shadow world is amazing. As an

exploration of living life as an "other," this book is richly atmospheric and maddening as you come to comprehend the characters' ultimately predestined fate. Amazing.

The Good Priest's Son by Reynolds Price (Scribner) — Once again, a post-9/11 book by a modern — if often overlooked — gay master. The personal fallout in one man's life as it changes incrementally as surely as the world is being redefined around him. What remains to cling to, who do you turn to when the ground gives way and you realize your choices have come back to haunt you? Very well done.



The Brothers Bishop by Bart Yates (Kensington Books) — Though it could be faulted for being a little over the top, this sophomore novel makes Bart Yates a gay author worth paying attention to and watching carefully. This book has a great deal of subtlety if you can overlook (as you should) some of its more crudely rendered points. Its main character is complex and more intuitive and self-knowing than a surface read reveals. I thought about this man often after I read the novel. He stayed with me and I grew in understanding and empathy for him. That, I think, is the mark of a successful writer. Bart Yates is even better than he's given credit for. As he continues to grow and mature in such giant steps, I think he will contribute a great deal to gay literature. (Jay is author of the novels *Back Where He Started* and *Metes & Bounds*, and the memoir *The Mentor*.)

Lev Raphael

Bush on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President by Justin Frank (Regan Books) — An in-depth look by a noted psychiatrist into the family pathology of the Bushes, and one of the few books to discuss the president's alcoholism. Puts the president's policy decisions in a new light.



Them: A Memoir of Parents by Francine du Plessix Gray (Penguin) — A memoir of the novelists' fascinating, maddening Russian emigre parents who influenced the fashion world in New York in the '40s, '50s, and '60s. Sweeping, gorgeously written, comic and shocking.

Caravaggio: Painter of Lives by Francine Prose (Eminent Lives Series) — Prose offers the perfect introduction to the wild life and stunning talent of the *peintre maudit*. She helps you enter the period and each painting, but you'll need a book of Caravaggio's prints as you read because the book doesn't have enough of them.

The March by E.L. Doctorow (Random House) — An amazing, hypnotic re-imagining of Sherman's march through the Carolinas told via people high and low. The prose is stunning, the vision panoramic. Thrilling and sobering.

The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour by Joan DeJean (Free Press) — Champagne, diamonds, umbrellas, nightlife, coffee cafes, full-length mirrors. The French invented or popularized all of these and more. This is a splendid, witty examination of a time of great creativity subsidized by Louis XIV wanting to make France culturally pre-eminent. (Lev is the Lambda-winning author of *Dancing on Tisha B'Av* and 16 other books. His latest are *Writing a Jewish Life*, out in December, and *Secret Anniversaries of the Heart*, due in January.)

Matt Rauscher

I'd have to say Nick Alexander's **Sottopassaggio** was my favorite book of 2005. In times when so many Amazon readers are giving one-star reviews to books, complaining about sloppy writing and editing, it's nice to see an independent voice that does it all better than the others. It's a great sequel about a character so many readers can relate to. (Matt is author of the novel *The Unborn Spouse Situation*.)

Kirk Read

Three (sorry!) of my favorites from 2005:

Joan Didion's **The Year of Magical Thinking** (Knopf) — Reading this book made me wonder what it would be like if we were fortunate enough to have a president who was an arch, feline, 70-year-old intellectual woman.

Matthue Roth's **Yom Kippur a Go-Go** (Cleis Press) — This is a compulsively readable memoir. Matthue is the most adorable punk rock dyke in a straight boy's body ever. And I mean that.

Everything I Have is Blue, edited by Wendell Ricketts (Suspect Thoughts Press) — This anthology of stories by queer working class men is utterly

necessary and beautifully curated — it's a real gift to our ever-growing library.
(Kirk is author of the memoir *How I Learned to Snap*.)

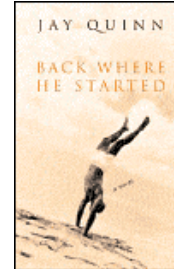
Mark Roeder

I can't pick a favorite, but *one* of my favorites is **The Bridge Across The Ocean** by Randy Boyd (West Beach Books). I truly missed the characters when I finished the book and to me that's the mark of a truly great novel. (Mark Roeder is the author of several novels, most recently *Outfield Menace*, *Masked Destiny*, and *The Soccer Field is Empty*.)

David Rosen

Back Where He Started by Jay Quinn (Alyson) — This stunning, emotion-packed novel absolutely took my breath away. So fresh, so well-written, so generous in its storytelling, so full of life and love! Jay Quinn takes the "gay romance novel" and "family saga" genres major steps forward with this tale of the breakup of one longtime relationship and the beginning of new lives. This is not so much a story told — it is a world, a family, a father-son experience created. It made me cry, it made me cheer, it made my heart beat faster.

(David founded the queer book club InsightOut five years ago for Bookspan; after 16 years in the book club biz, he went to work for art book publisher Harry N. Abrams.)



D. Travers Scott

Hands down, **The Wild Creatures: Collected Stories of Sam D'Allesandro**, edited by Kevin Killian (Suspect Thoughts Press) — Sam's work has haunted me since I first read him in the early 90s. He's still much of what I aspire to.

(Trav is the author of the novels *One of These Things Is Not Like the Other* and *Execution, Texas: 1987*; his many websites are at <http://homepage.mac.com/dtraversscott/Menu6.html>.)

Clint ("Bob Vickery") Seiter

My pick would be **A Brief History of Everything** by Ken Wilber (Shambhala). Wilber is a philosopher in the "integrative consciousness" school, and he writes prolifically about the evolution of human consciousness. **A Brief History of Everything** is an overview of his major ideas. Wilber writes with such clarity and intelligence that the reader can follow him through some pretty deep subjects and not get lost. The book isn't for everybody, but for those interested in the subject of human consciousness, it's a fascinating read.

Reviewer info: <http://www.quartermoonpress.com>

(Clint's work as Bob includes the story collection *Play Buddies* and the audio takes *Manjack*.)

K.M Soehnlein

The book I can't get out of my mind this year is a memoir that features a teenage boy whose parents send him to therapy because he has too much bounce in his walk; his glamorous, occasionally suicidal mother, who drags him around the globe as part of her dubious mission to promote world peace; his grotesquely self-interested stepmother, dripping in jewels and scorn, whose every utterance seems designed to wound; and an 11th hour cameo by a transvestite at a Catholic funeral — all set against the backdrop of San Francisco's usually tight-lipped upper class. **Oh, the Glory of It All** (Penguin), written by heterosexual author Sean Wilsey, may be the queerest straight-boy-coming-of-age story I've ever read. Wilsey's prose is confident, hilarious, brutally frank and absolutely addictive. It's a long book — probably about 50 pages too long — but I read through my borrowed hardcover in about two days, then promptly went out and bought a copy to keep.

An interview: <http://www.kqed.org/weblog/arts/2005/09/writers-block-km-soehnlein-reads-from.html>

(Karl is author of *The World of Normal Boys* and *You Can Say You Knew Me When*.)



Troy Soriano

This gave me an always welcome chance to lust after books. I'll choose these two books of 2005:

The Year Of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion (Knopf) — Readers often get abstract clichés in books about death; this is devastatingly clear and elegant. Didion makes a careful map through her grief with this book, and turns it over to us, hands trembling. Not a queer book.

Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems by Camille Paglia (Pantheon) — Paglia does indeed bring her impressive academic credentials to bear on the poems, but that's not all she brings, oh no; her '60s radical, fiery Italian immigrant, and beauty-loving Madonna fan all come out of the closet to shine bright light on a wide breadth of poems from Shakespeare's sonnets to Joni Mitchell. The result is half hardcore poetry class, half pure lesbian sass. Paglia's close reading of Frank O' Hara's poetry I found especially educative; O' Hara's lovely poems have until now been inscrutable for many of us. Very queer author, much queer content.

Reviewer info: <http://www.troysoriano.com>

(Troy is author of the novel *The Beginning* and of *Blue Year In A Red State: A Survey Of Heartland Opinions*.)

Joel Tan

Darren Greer's **Still Life With June** (St. Martin's Griffin) — Writers are liars, crazies, and fakes, and Greer's narrator proves this tenfold. It's an easy, funny, curious read with its share of complicated, high fallutin' stabs at the problematics of memory and identity, not to mention assuming a dead man's identity and adopting a dead man's developmentally disabled adult sister. And then there's the overworked Mexican transgendered sex surrogate. Convince your friends with expendable income to buy it, then borrow it, read it, but make sure not to return it.



(Joel is editor of *Best Gay Asian Porn*, *Queer Papi Porn*, and the forthcoming *Inside Him: Gay Erotic Fiction*, as well as the self-published chapbook *El Canto de Animal* and the forthcoming poetry collection *Type O Negative*.)

Patricia Nell Warren

My fave 2005 book was **1421: The Year China Discovered America** by Gavin Menzies (Harper Perennial) — The incredible forgotten story of how a Chinese fleet discovered America more than half a century before Columbus. I love history and especially cherish books that sweep away old myths and conventional views.

Reviewer info: <http://www.wildcatintl.com/partners/pnw.html>

(Patricia is the author of several bestselling novels, including *The Front Runner* and *The Wild Man*.)

Don Weise

Boy, that's a tough one. I hate to say that many gay books I start, I don't finish. Or I buy them and never get around to starting them at all. The bulk of my time is spent reading submissions for C&G needless to say. But when I free read, it tends to be catch up reading — stuff like **The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket** (John Weir) or **The Persian Boy** (Mary Renault) — more so than new titles.



Of new books, certainly Katherine Forrest's **Lesbian Pulp Fiction** anthology is extraordinary for its breadth, intelligence and insight. However, I'm reluctant to name this since I'm biased; not only is it published by the old employer, I sit on the board of the Lambda Literary Foundation with Katherine and I adore her. Plus, it's one of the last projects I came up with for Cleis before I left. So of course I love it.

Two other books: Felice Picano's **Fred in Love** (Terrace Books), which is a sweet cat book (and I have a fondness for cat books) that I enjoyed; and Jess Gregg's memoir **The Tall Boy** (Permanent Press), which a friend gave to me but I've only started reading recently; what I've read, however, is fascinating for its window into pre-Stonewall gay life in Los Angeles. These aren't weighty enough for me to call "best" or "favorite" books of 2005. Which I wouldn't claim they are. Just two that come to mind that I enjoyed.

God knows there are so many others I want to start; like the gay history of Harvard or the new Siegfried Sassoon biography. I'm also interested in **Wild Girls**, Diana Souhami's new biography of Natalie Barney and her lesbian

circle in Paris, not to mention Edmund White's memoirs, (**My Lives**, Ecco Press) which come out next spring.

There's also a brilliant new writer, Patrick Ryan, whose first novel **Send Me** is due out in January from Dial Press. Patrick is a New York based writer who, I predict, will go on to be ranked as one of the most notable talents. He's easily as good if not better than most of the guys from the "golden age" of gay lit during the 1980s and early-1990s. I've read the galley and am jealous as hell that I'm not publishing him. I'm thrilled however to welcome him onto the scene. But you're not counting galleys read this year, right? Maybe I should read something new this weekend and report back! (Don is an editor at Carroll & Graf.)

Greg Wharton



My favorite books that I read in 2005 that came out in 2005 — if my memory serves me correctly, since I read a buttload: **Anansi Boys** by Neil Gaiman (William Morrow); **Crashing America** by Katia Noyes (Alyson Books); **You Can Say You Knew Me When** by K.M. Soehnlein; and **78 Reasons Why Your Book May Never Be Published & 14 Why It Just Might** by Pat Walsh.

But there are many others that may or may not qualify...

Favorite book from 2005 I'm currently reading that will probably make my favorite 2005 list because it is so good:

Specimen Days by Michael Cunningham (Farrar, Straus and Giroux); favorite books that I am currently reading or have read or have reread in 2005 that weren't released in 2005 that seriously deserve to be on a favorite list (because older books deserve as much attention, love, and praise, as new ones...): **War for the Oaks** by Emma Bull (Orb Books); **In Watermelon Sugar** by Richard Brautigan* (Vintage UK); **Mojo: Conjure Stories** edited by Nalo Hopkinson (Aspect Books); **Horse and Other Stories** by Bo Huston (Amethyst Books/OP); **My Tender Matador** by Pedro Lemebel (Grove Press); and **Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West** by Gregory Maguire (Regan Books); favorite (second) novels I've read in 2005 that are not currently in print, but that will be in the near future because Suspect Thoughts has contracted them: **An Ideal for Living** by Marshall Moore (author of **The Concrete Sky**), and **V** by Jennifer Natalya Fink (author of **Burn**).

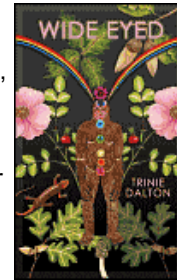
(* Because they are worthy and are good for my soul, I reread at least one Richard Brautigan each and every year.)

(Greg is the publisher of Suspect Thoughts Press.)

Dave White

Wide Eyed by Trinie Dalton (Little House on the Bowery/Akashic) — She's an East Side L.A. lady who writes about ghosts, blood-stained bathroom tiles, Wookies, elementary school crushes, "Slumber Party Massacre," Marc Bolan, Pavement songs and feminist donut shops. Everything about her weird miniature stories is magical and funny. In a perfect world she'd be your cool stoner neighbor and you'd listen to records together. And I love **101 Must See Movies For Gay Men** by Alonso Duralde (Alyson Books), because my partner wrote it, and he let me contribute a category of film that I like to refer to as the "Fuck Shit Up" genre...

(Dave is a contributor to 2004's *Mondo Homo*, author of the forthcoming *Exile In Guyville*, and blogs at www.livejournal.com/users/djmrswhite)



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Richard can be reached at tattyhill@gmail.com, at 613.264.5409, or at 7-A Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 2J3 Canada. Books for review, author news, interesting links — all appreciated.

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*Numbering Note: Due to a numbering error on my part there is no Volume 2 Number 9. My apology to those who track such things. Volume 2 Number 8 was the "rescued" summer issue of the *Lambda Book Report* that BTWOF published online at www.btwof.com/LBR/issue.html. Volume 2 Number 10, a bonus issue, was the Premiere Issue of More Books for Women. -CS

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Many thanks!
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