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The Gay Men's Edition

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Volume 2 Number 13

By Richard Labonte

My Top 10 Fiction & Top 10 Nonfiction Of The Year

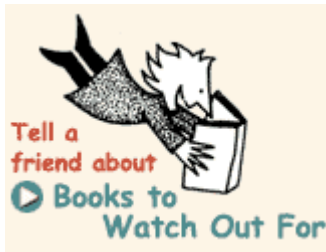
In the last issue of **Books To Watch Out For/Gay Men's Edition**, several dozen writers and editors wrote, glowingly, about their favorite books of 2005 (all read this year, though not all published this year). To make a long story short (it has to do with a dead hard drive), *this* issue of **BTWOF** was supposed to appear before *that* one – but while I was waiting for lost data to be recovered, I went ahead with my year-end issue before the end of the year...and as a result, a few authors' recommendations for good reading came in too late for the last issue, through no fault of their own. That's why seven more literate queers write about 18 more books below (58 people recommended more than 120 books in **BTWOF/GM 2:12**: for the most part, contributors certainly interpreted the expression "your favorite book" with an enthusiasm that was as quantitative as it was qualitative!)

My own Top 10 lists in fiction and nonfiction were originally written for my **Book Marks** column, which is distributed by Q Syndicate. I'm heartened by the fact that many of the (gay men's) books I really liked but that did not make my list were mentioned – so many books, so few slots – in both the last and in this installment of **BTWOF**, among them Sam D'Alessandro's *The Wild Creatures*, edited by Kevin Killian, and *Everything I Have is Blue*, edited by Wendell Ricketts (both Suspect Thoughts Press); Jay Quinn's *Back Where He Started* (Alyson Books); Dennis Cooper's *God Jr.* (Black Cat/Grove) – I opted for *The Sluts*; Michael Cunningham's *The Specimen Days* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux); Bart Yates' *The Brothers Bishop* (Kensington Books); Reynolds Price's *The Good Priest's Son* (Scribner); and Kevin Bentley's *Let's Shut Out the World* (Green Candy Press).

I'm also heartened by the fact that only seven of the books I picked for my own lists also appeared in the BTWOF selections, either this issue or the last issue. There are always more than 10 or 20 good books a year, after all! Mine that overlapped were, in fiction: *Choir Boy*, by Charlie Anders (Soft Skull); *Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, edited by Katherine V. Forrest (Cleis Press); *The Sluts*, by Dennis Cooper (Void Books and Carroll & Graf); *You Are Not the*

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About BTWOF

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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One, by Vestal McIntyre; and *You Can Say You Knew Me When*, by KM Soehnlein (Kensington Books; and, in nonfiction, *The Tricky Part: One Boy's Fall from Trespass into Grace*, by Martin Moran (Beacon Press), and *Wild Girls: Paris, Sappho and Art - The Lives and Loves of Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks*, by Diana Souhami (St. Martin's Press).

My five other fiction picks of the gay men's persuasion were *Mother of Sorrows*, by Richard McCann (which I'm surprised nobody else mentioned), and *They Change the Subject*, by Douglas A. Martin (University of Wisconsin/Terrace Books); my lesbian favorites were *Above the Thunder*, by Renee Manfredi and *Clearcut*, by Nina Shengold (both from Anchor Books); and *The Beautifully Worthless*, by Ali Liebegott (Suspect Thoughts Press).

My eight other nonfiction picks, books by and for both women and men, were: *American Ghosts*, by David Plante – another superb book that I was surprised none of the contributors to the last or this



BTWOF mentioned; *February House: The Story of W. H. Auden, Carson McCullers, Jane and Paul Bowles, Benjamin Britten, and Gypsy Rose Lee, Under One Roof in Wartime America*, by Sherill Tippins (Houghton Mifflin); *Gore Vidal's America*, by Dennis Altman (Polity); *Quicksands: A Memoir*, by Sybille Bedford (Counterpoint Press); *The Long Arc of Justice: Lesbian and Gay Marriage, Equality, and Rights*, by Richard D. Mohr (Columbia University Press); *Luncheonette*, by Steven Sorrentino (Regan Books); *My One-night Stand with*

Cancer, by Tania Katan (Alyson Books); and *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, by Peter Shapiro (Faber & Faber).

One title that I read too late to include in my own Top 10 – and that, as with the McCann novel, I'm surprised wasn't on the **BTWOF** roundups: Aaron Hamburger's **Faith for Beginners** (Random House), a smart, comic novel with wisdom and depth, about a mother and her suicide-prone gay son seeking spiritual – and finding sexual – renewal in the course of a tourist-trap tour of Israel.

This issue also includes two more reviews passed on to **BTWOF** from the *Lambda Book Report* that never was: by Kevin Killian (*Still Life for June*, by Darren Greer) and Ricardo L. Ortiz (*Dancing with Ghosts*, by Frederick Luis Aldama). In addition, two veteran *LBR* contributors keep up with new books: Jim Gladstone waxes personal about Ethan Mordden's five "Buddies" novels, and Tom Cardamone considers the personal diaries of a *Rice Queen*.

Meanwhile, the good news is that plans are for *LBR* to make a comeback: see Katherine V. Forrest's passionate, caring call for support below, and [click on those links](#) she provides, for information on how to make a donation, to fill out a survey, and to submit nominations for the Lambda Literary Foundation's annual Lambda Literary Awards – the deadline is Dec. 31. So do it now...



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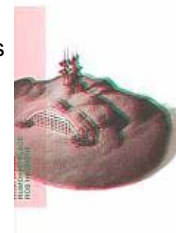
7 More Authors, 18 More Books: More Favorites of 2005

Robert Glück

Involuntary Lyrics by Aaron Shurin (Omnidawn) - This long awaited book is Shurin at his best - fire and ice! "He was swerving/toward me on that road for my possessing..." This book is a measure of the forms poetry can take, especially when it speaks about desire.

The Wild Creatures: Collected Stories of Sam D'Allesandro, edited by Kevin Killian (Suspect Thoughts Press) - I am sure others will report on this book, but I cannot refrain. Here at last is a collection by the genius cult writer and new narrative beauty. Sam died in 1988. His death was my greatest loss to AIDS, because his work was expanding my own (and others') horizons and he did not get to write enough of it.

Rumored Place, by Rob Halpern (Krupskaya) - This is one of the finest books of poetry to come out of the current crop of young writers in the Bay Area. It is a first book. Its title comes from a Robert Duncan poem, "This Place, Rumored to be Sodom." Totally ambitious, the book takes on history itself, not forgetting to be raunchy when it wants to. Here is my



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blurb for the book: Rob Halpern implodes new narrative tenets, collapsing all views of our condition and the means to express these views into each sentence at once: learned, aroused, mournful and full of hope. His book conveys the intolerable crush of the ongoing, the grand brawl of contending institutions and concepts hectically alive past their deaths. Meanwhile the self continually gains and loses ID. The intensity of what is said displays the extent of what can't be said. This emptiness travels along with the story in the future perfect tense, a negative space that has not been, an arcadia that cannot have been lost, beyond knowing but not beyond needing. It is also an orifice in the mind or body where the unspeakable of history might enter and speak.

One of These Things is Not Like the Other, by D. Travers Scott (Suspect Thoughts Press) - This is a very twisted gorgeous existential mystery page-turner, a grand novel of possession from beyond the grave. Father may know, but daddy knows best.

A novel that came out last year but that I just read with great pleasure:

Moira Orfei in Aigues-Mortes, by Wayne Koestenbaum (Soft Skull) - This writing about a pianist who is decaying (except for his sex life) is so jammed with interesting pieces of the world and sheer wicked delight that it reminds me of Nabokov and Firbank combined. The prose is incredible. It made me *jealous*.

God Jr., by Dennis Cooper (Grove/Black Cat) - Cooper is one of our masters and a new book by him is always an event. This year he published two, *God Jr.* and *The Sluts*. With *God Jr.* he makes a book so quiet it is like a cobweb. The punch comes later, after you realize that Cooper has invented a new world of grief and emptiness and drawn you very far into it with a whisper.

(*Robert is the author of several books, most recently Denny Smith: Stories, and coeditor of Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative.*)

Thorn Kief Hillsbery

Holy Skirts, by René Steinke (William Morrow); **Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity**, by Irene Gammel (MIT Press); **I Got Lusting Palate**, by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (Edition Ebersbach Berlin).

Lover of men and beguiler of women, mother of Dada before Dada was born, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's life and art declared war to end all war on post-Victorian gender codes. Her erotically charged poetry, championed by Pound and published by Hemingway, aroused even greater indignation than that of her more celebrated contemporary in smut mongering, James Joyce. These three fascinating volumes give us "The Baroness" in all her quirky, luminous glory: striding the sidewalks of Manhattan in tomato-can brassiere, composing paeans to fellatio, posing for Man Ray's camera while Marcel Duchamp shaves her pubic hair. **Holy Skirts** is an artful biographical "imagining" by a novelist, **Baroness Elsa** is a factual cultural treatise by a scholar who must have skipped class the day tedium was taught as the foundation of academic writing, and **I Got Lusting Palate** is the Baroness in her own inimitable words, all of which live up to the promise of the four in the title.

(*Thorn is author of What We Do Is Secret and War Boy.*)



Patrick Merla

Thanks so much for giving me this opportunity. My two favorite books of 2005 were both first novels published by Carroll & Graf, whose new line of gay titles is welcome indeed, no thanks to David Leavitt and the *New York Times*. They are:

The First Verse, by Barry McCrae - About a group of people, one of them a first-year student at Trinity College, Dublin, who literally live by words. At once a penetrating psychological study, a totally convincing fantasy, and a compelling mystery-thriller, in which, like a reverse *Donnie Darko*, the reality of the story may all hinge on a revelatory moment near the end (in this case a seemingly throwaway statement). Utterly riveting; it ate up three days of my life and left me wanting to ask the author how much of it was actually true. The ultimate "literary" novel, this book should be on every responsible periodical's "ten best" list - from the *New York Times* to *Out* and the *Advocate* (none of which even bothered to acknowledge its existence by reviewing it).

Acqua Calda, by Keith McDermott - Another important first novel mostly overlooked by gay and straight media alike. About a group of American and



European actors working in Sicily on an avant-garde theater production by a egomaniacal Robert Wilson-like genius auteur, as told by a true insider who knows whereof he speaks. McDermott, perhaps best known for appearing as the boy in **Equus**, opposite Richard Burton on Broadway in 1975, turns out to be a splendid writer with a unique sensibility. His tale of an actor who believes himself to be dying finding renewal and the will to live in the unlikely setting is at once entertaining, funny, captivating, and moving. (*Patrick, a mentor to many gay authors, is editor of Boys Like Us: Gay Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories.*)

Tim Miller

As long as Joan Didion's **The Year of Magical Thinking** (Knopf) is being mentioned elsewhere* (I found it *amazing*; but she is maybe my favorite writer since high school), I'll go with **The March**, by E.L. Doctorow (Random House). Alright, I admit it: I'm a giant Civil War queen! (If there were gay sex clubs with Civil War costumes, I would be there in a flash.) With that in mind, I was blown away by Doctorow's new novel, *The March*, about General Sherman's march through the South during the Civil War. This book is Doctorow's best, an amazing exploration of how race and gender narratives are transformed by the march thru Georgia and the Carolinas. The book is a soulful and poetic examination of how war changes human lives. (*Kirk Read, Blair Mastbaum, and Troy Soriano cited it in the last issue.) (*Tim is a hard-touring performance artist and teacher; some of his pieces are collected in Body Blows: Six Performances.*)

Sandip Roy

The Harmony Silk Factory, by Tash Aw (Riverhead) - though the favorite book I read in 2005 (though it was published in 2004) was **Maps for Lost Lovers**, by Nadeem Aslam (Gardner's Books). Alas, none are queer per se... (*Sandip is editor of Trikone Magazine: <http://www.trikone.org>.*)

Lawrence Schimel

My favorite books of 2005 are probably chosen for nostalgia, since they involve a return to beloved characters from previous years, in particular a new installment in Alison Bechdel's comic serial, **Invasion of the Dykes To Watch Out For**, and James Howe's **Totally Joe**, devoting an entire book now to the gay character from his spectacular middle grade novel, *The Misfits*.



(*Lawrence has edited dozens of books, published several story collections, contributed to hundreds of anthologies, and written several Spanish-language books for children.*)

Mark Simon

Was there ever a queerer, more deeply felt story than **The Little Mermaid**? Hans Christian Andersen never wrote more biographically about desire. Just published in paperback by Duke University Press, **The Stories of Hans Christian Andersen** is a standout book for me this year. The cover's an appropriate shade of lavender; the translation's a knockout. Diana Crone Frank and Jeffery Frank capture Andersen's wit and ground breaking chatty narrative voice. There's not a hint of the Victorian nursery here. Twenty-two stories from Andersen's A-list, fresher than ever and gorgeous as always in this translation. Andersen himself does not fare as well in the Franks' biographical introduction: "Since 1901 researchers have conducted a somewhat tedious debate about whether Andersen was gay." The Franks are tediously dismissive on the subject. Happily, inevitably I would say, homosexuality comes up as footnote for *The Little Mermaid*, so the Franks are not always dismissive. Even better, they give nice credit to Jackie Wullschlager's magnificent 2000 biography of Andersen, which does correctly figure Andersen's un-debatable homosexuality as a central part of his life and creativity. After reading *The Stories* you might want to read Jackie Wullschlager's biography, **Hans Christian Andersen: The Life of a Storyteller**.



(*Mark is the book-buyer for Samuel French Theatre and Film Book Store in Hollywood, and before that bought for A Different Light for many years.*)

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Writer to Writer: From Katherine V. Forrest

(Katherine, a lesbian authorial icon, and legend, and friend, sent this appeal for support for the reorganized Lambda Literary Foundation in early December; I've reprinted it here so that it will find as many supportive eyes as possible – RL)

You are my colleagues, and my peers. I need your help.

A lot has changed in our literary world and we've suffered many losses. Our Lambda Literary Foundation is continuing. We have seventeen years of continuity during which the Lambda Literary Award has become by far our most visible and most important literary award. Right now we are planning next year's ceremonies when we will again celebrate books that belong with the major literature of this nation.

Six months of suspended publication of the *Lambda Book Report* proves that we need it, and beyond that we need a publication that we can proudly call our trade journal. We are in the planning phase of making *LBR* into the reformatted, redesigned, re-imagined, high quality publication it can and should be.

We have a new executive director, Charles Flowers, who has vision and energy, a superb industry background and reputation, and the personal qualities required to represent us with distinction, and to take us into a new era. We need to support him. This is the one time when none of us can rely on someone else to make this happen. We as individuals have to do this - to whatever extent we possibly can.

Michael Nava has given us a kick-off donation of one thousand dollars. If you are receiving this message on email, then you have Internet access and that means making a donation is as easy as filling out a form. Whether you donate online or send us a check, whatever you give will matter, will make a real difference, and be greatly appreciated.

One more item. The best way to make the new *Lambda Book Report* into the best journal it can be is to have our best writers writing for it - and for the foundation to be able to pay those writers. Start planning right now to be in its pages, to review books or write a piece for *LBR*. If you have an idea for an article, a book you'd like to review, or any other items for a new *LBR*, please contact Charles at asklambda@earthlink.net. He'll appreciate your candor and enthusiasm.

This is *our* foundation. It is our best opportunity to help find, develop and support emerging LGBTQ voices. It is our best opportunity to bequeath a lasting legacy. Let's all get behind it.

I wish you and your family a happy and peaceful holiday season.

-Katherine

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A Monumental Romance, Shamefully Under The Gaydar

a review by Jim Gladstone

How's Your Romance?, by Ethan Mordden (St. Martin's Press, \$23.95) - The pleasant surprise when I walked into Giovanni's Room, my local queer bookstore, on a Saturday afternoon a couple of months ago, was the arrival of *How's Your Romance?*, a new volume of Ethan Mordden's remarkable autobiographical linked story collections. The unpleasant surprise was that the book's arrival was, in fact, completely unexpected. As an avid follower of gay men's fiction, I remain rather stunned that this fifth – and, per its subtitle ("Concluding the 'Buddies' Cycle") – final book in this seminal series has been published to so little buzz or marketing fanfare. It's shamefully under the gaydar. Since the series' first volume, *I've A Feeling We're Not In Kansas Anymore*, was published 21 years ago, Mordden – perhaps better known for his other series, a decade-



by-decade history of the Broadway musical – has crafted a portrait of a gay Manhattan community that, in its accumulated two decades of intimate glimpses, has coalesced into something truly monumental.

In the first three books - *Kansas* (1985), *Buddies* (1986), and *Everybody Loves You* (1988) – Mordden etched the Greenwich Village lives of writer-narrator Bud (Mordden's own real-life nickname), his upstairs neighbor, school-teacher Dennis Savage and their circle of village people friends – superstars, drag queens, boy toys, leather men, porn stars – with such finely observed humor and precise emotional detail that readers were able to feel the richness between their proudly stereotypical surfaces. Over the course of this initial troika, Mordden made a case for a willfully ghettoized society that he deemed Stonewall – a tight-knit, all-male world that celebrated its differences from 'mainstream' society and provided its own self-sufficient eco-system of empathy for all who wanted to join. By the time the stories – which reach back to the late 1970s - began to cover life in the mid-80s, they were tinged with the shadow of AIDS and the ever more complex relationships between Bud, Dennis, and their significantly younger boyfriends.

After a nine-year absence, the men of Stonewall returned in 1997 with what, to this aficionado, is the series most accomplished, honest, and wrenching book, *Some Men Are Lookers*. In that collection, not only have the characters aged nearly a decade – leading to redefined relationships and a degree of personal development not possible in the chronologically clustered observational stories of the first three volumes – but the whole separatist gay utopian ideal of Mordden's Stonewall has begun to feel older, almost quaintly anachronistic on the cusp of the metrosexual 2000s. Like the community bookstores in which the *Buddies* series has primarily been sold, the *Buddies* series had begun to evince an ache of painful nostalgia; having achieved a certain sense of pride – even triumph – the characters were faced with a hovering question: *Now that the world has evolved, how will we do the same?*

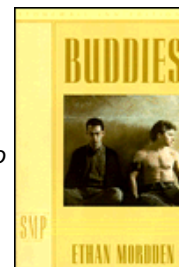
The stories in these books have a tremendous cumulative power, they're pointillist dots that form a masterpiece in aggregate. While *How's Your Romance?* is perhaps not as strong a collection as its predecessors, it provides a necessary coda, seeming to suggest a generational torch passing, in both life and literature. The new book's most energetic stories focus not on Bud and company, but on Bud's interactions with the twenty-something cohort of his young Chelsea Boy cousin, Ken. In remarking on the interplay of Ken and company – gym-buffed, entrepreneurial, and at the center (rather than the margin) of the New York lifestyle, Mordden seems to be acknowledging the rise of a new sort of gay community, a descendant of Stonewall, in which his own role is that of wise elder rather than leading man. He is now more of an expert on the past than on the present, more an emeritus anthropologist than a true participant-observer. With any luck, some as-yet unknown Chelsea Boy scribe will take up the Mordden mantle and reveal the depth and nuance beneath a new era of stereotypes. For now though, do yourself a favor and read all five of the books in this series if you haven't already. In addition to reveling in his brilliant social observation and anecdotal skills, you'll discover that Mordden is one of the most singular prose stylists of the past couple decades, all sharp detail, snappy theoretical riff, and quick-clipped dialogue. As I mentioned up front, the publication of *How's Your Romance?* is the conclusion of a monumental project. Do drop by and pay tribute to our past.

(Jim Gladstone is author of The Big Book of Misunderstanding and of Gladstone's Games to Go)

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Developing A Taste For Mordden's Bittersweet Comic Tales

(A few years ago, Jim Gladstone was asked to preface an InsightOut Book Club special edition of what was then merely Mordden's "Buddies Trilogy," I've a Feeling We're Not in Kansas Anymore, Buddies, Everybody Loves You – later a quartet, and this year, two decades later, a quinary. Here's that preface, with the hope it will spur newcomers to the Buddies oeuvre to go back to the beginning -RL)



Scotch. Kumquats. Asparagus.

These are the sorts of things I'd always assumed made up that shady realm commonly referred to as "acquired taste." It's stuff that makes most kids spit, but makes lots of adults feel tingly and speak

rhapsodically. Many of these adults, of course, are themselves the expectorating tykes of yore.

I'd always thought this whole acquired taste business was pretty strictly a food thing. Well, food and *New Yorker* cartoons.

Then I discovered Ethan Mordden's *Buddies* books. Or, to be more accurate, rediscovered.

In 1997, an editor asked me to review *Some Men Are Lookers*, Mordden's decade-later return to the characters he created in his original threesome of *Buddies* volumes: *I've A Feeling We're Not In Kansas Anymore* (1985), *Buddies* (1986), and *Everybody Loves You* (1988). When I first encountered these bittersweet comic tales of life in Manhattan's gay ghetto, I was mightily put off by their portrayals of free-range sex, gender role-play, and oddly structured relationships. In taking on the new book for review, I promised myself I would do the requisite homework. I knew that just like that time I was assigned the sequel to a novel about Jesuit missionaries in outer space, I was going to have to bite the bullet and go back to the originals. And to me, reading the *Buddies* books was even more daunting than a double-dose of Vatican-sponsored adventures on the planet Rakhat.

Almost ten years earlier, I was a stumbly newcomer to all things gay, living in an underwear- and beer can-strewn off-campus apartment at the University of Pennsylvania (whose alumni, unbeknownst to me, included one Ethan Mordden). Alongside the futon, plopped amidst the boxer briefs and empty Buds, were the *Buddies* books. They were not mine. They belonged to my first boyfriend, a gay prideful caterer and fine disco dancer who, in the spirit of Mordden's own true-identity-blurring character nicknames, will here be known as Boy Perky.

I didn't allow myself to really absorb the content of Boy Perky's original editions of the *Buddies* books. I would flip them open now and again and find myself discomfited from the very first story, "Interview with the Drag Queen," in which "Miss Titania soothed Carl's hole with her tongue and slowly worked it open."

Ohmigod and please pass the J.D. Salinger!

"It sounds fun," said Boy Perky, who, I imagined, wore rainbow flag Pampers as a toddler. "Let's try it. Or at least rent a video of it!"

I would sheepishly turn the trilogy's pages, made uneasy by Mordden's clever references to sex in the Fire Island dunes, nights at the opera, cruising on Christopher Street, 1940s movie trivia.

I don't want these cliches to be my life, I grumbled.

"Have you seen Miss Cranky?" called Boy Perky. This was his nickname for the fleshy pink dildo he'd coaxed me into buying him as a Valentine's gift.

In retrospect, I think that while Boy Perky comfortably bought into gay stereotypes, I needed to *grow* into them. As a newly out 20-year-old, my own taste in gay literature leaned toward coming-out stories; I wanted to read about guys my own age seeing the world crack open for the first time, gaining their first shaky footing on promising new terrain. But I didn't want the books to go much further than that. I didn't want an instruction manual on how to proceed as a gay man. I was armed with the necessary arrogance of youth: I wanted to invent my own life, in some completely original way.

Not to mention, I was scared. The world of Ethan Mordden's *Buddies* trilogy is largely a world before AIDS. By the end of the third volume, *Everybody Loves You*, some shadow is beginning to fall, but for the most part, Mordden's milieu in these stories is, epidemiologically speaking, ancient history. When I was coming out in the mid-1980s, I felt a real impulse to run away from the first post-Stonewall generation. I'll now admit, with both embarrassment and contrition, that I somehow linked Mordden's characters, along with their symbols and styles, with a disease. And so I shut the books on them.

After graduation, Boy Perky and I went our separate ways. I soon learned that he had taken off to explore Europe with a man twenty years our senior. The very thought of it frightened me.

I stayed home and read.

From my earlier interest in coming-out stories, my taste in gay literature moved on to contemporary work that addressed AIDS head-on, books like John Weir's *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket*, Alan Barnett's *The Body & Its Dangers*, and David Feinberg's laceratingly funny *Eighty-Sixed*. Next came an ongoing interest in domestic and social dramas in which contemporary gay men and lesbians do not exist in self-selected or demonized subcultures, but struggle to integrate themselves in the heterogeneous world at large, including the works of David Leavitt, Michael Cunningham, and Doug Sadowick's dazzling *Sacred Lips of the Bronx*. For years, my reading was all about what's now, and what's next. I never looked

back.

Here's the thing about acquired taste. You really do grow into it. A kid doesn't *acquire* a liking for asparagus by being force-fed a spear or two every day. With some trepidation, he decides to take another nibble years later and is taken aback to find that he enjoys the complex flavor. When it comes to food, it turns out that the notion of acquired taste is backed by science. Kids' taste buds have different sensitivities to chemicals than adults' do. It's about immaturity. Things really do change as we get older. And if we're brave enough to go back and try something again, years after we first spat it out, we are sometimes amazed at the new pleasure we find.

When my editor assigned me to write about *Some Men Are Lookers* in 1997, I finally sat back down with its three predecessors and, to my surprise, found them quite delicious. With ten years in the gay world under my belt, I found the sexy, bitchy surfaces of these stories much less threatening (and I recognized how expertly styled they are, with dialogue as pitch-perfect as you'll find anywhere).

Through my experiences both in reading and in living, I'd also developed an ability to see beyond these surfaces to recognize the heart of Mordden's work, a fiercely intelligent and unsentimentally poignant comprehension of gay psyches. He illuminates our need for deep friendships that might include, but must transcend, sex. He limns our desires both to form newfangled families, and to find points of reconciliation with our old-fashioned families.

Yes, the original trilogy's stories happen to be set amidst the celebratory, in-your-face gay scene of the late '70s and early '80s. But when I reacquainted myself with the tales' four central characters - writer Bud, schoolteacher Dennis, and their younger companions, Little Kiwi and Cosgrove - in the more circumspect mid-90s Manhattan of *Some Men Are Lookers*, it became clear to me that what Ethan Mordden has to tell us about timeless human yearnings transcends the relevance of the particular historical moment in which each tale happens to be set.

Reading these books, and exploring the continuity of these richly drawn characters, from the exuberance of the post-Stonewall moment to the ambiguity of the AZT era, can help provide a bracing literary antidote to one of the biggest ongoing problems within the gay community, the generational rift that spun out of AIDS.

Just out of college, I was terribly quick to assume that Boy Perky had no reason to be spending time with a man who was gay before there was AIDS. They were different species, weren't they?

If you came of age in the '80s or beyond, read the *Buddies* trilogy with an open heart and an open mind. Don't think of it as nostalgia. When you recognize yourself (well, a wittier version of yourself) in Ethan Mordden's tenderly drawn characters, you'll feel reconnected to a body of literature and a generation of men that deserve our attention, and our affection. Perhaps, as I did, you'll learn that a work of fiction can be an acquired taste, and that, through the prism of reading, you can see your way to becoming a more mature person.

(And, rounding out the Mordden overview: "*While AIDS is present in these stories, it is aging that provides the greatest moments of poignancy,*" Gladstone wrote in a short 1997 review of the fourth book in Mordden's series, *Some Men Are Lookers*):

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/31/bib/970831.rv122840.html>

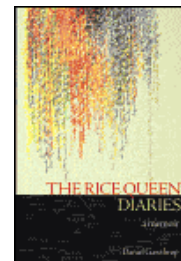
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Race-Based Desire: One Guy's Un-Sanitized Reflections

a review by Tom Cardamone

The Rice Queen Diaries: A Memoir, by Daniel Gawthrop (Arsenal Pulp Press, \$16.95) - This is a "diary" with footnotes. Reflections footnoted are thoughts reformed, scrubbed to perfection before being presented. So *The Rice Queen Diaries* offers readers an exploration of sexual attraction and self-discovery, but without the accidental honesty, the fragmentary nature of a true, real-time diary, those messy shards of broken glass that refract instead of reflect, offering abstractions that lure the reader (and more importantly the diarist) closer to the truth than any polished mirror. But the desire here is race-based, a topic as challenging as it is



intriguing, one rarely reviewed in gay culture, and when it is, often sanitized through academia. So even if caution is the only approach available, this is still a book of *participation*. The author's erotic explorations are loaded with subconscious colonial ambition; it's hard not to imagine him, pith helmet atilt, typing away about trysts with young Asian men. But that's only a surface reading - it's a determinedly self-conscious sex-tour. If he does indeed wear that hat it's a purposeful dunce cap. Daniel Gawthrop isn't looking forward, toward the next sweaty escapade, in his book, but backwards, seriously seeking out what ignited this delirious dive, sent him tumbling until, submerged in a jungle-like bathhouse world of active stereotypes, his cute "houseboy" bites the hand that feeds, literally. Nothing ruins a vacation so much as the sight of your own blood.

This is a ten-year survey of obsession, from the emerging sexuality of a Vancouver boyhood to full-blown racial cruising in Toronto. As his preference for Asian men takes hold, Gawthrop notices that certain automatic boundaries and assumptions apply to relationships between gay Caucasian and gay Asian men. As this psychological arena crystallizes, he has love affairs in and with Thailand; he moves there after his first visit. Though the various sexual sub-and-not-so-sub-cultures of Thailand are relatively well known, Gawthrop expounds on them with a definitive amount of new insight. Plus his chapter on Vietnam is a marvelous bit of actual reporting - it's unlikely you'll read elsewhere of cruising beneath Communist flags at a swimming pool in Ho Chi Minh City.

Well-turned prose and a breezy attitude toward sex makes this book a quick read, almost too quick; rather matter-of-fact observations deserve closer attention, specifically the fetishistic treatment of his lovers. Too many lithe brown fingers mystically caress, too many rose-petal lips purse throughout that, even if stereotypes are recognized and condemned under the rubric of socio-economic injustice, I can't help but wonder if friendship and love forged with the total recognition of such exploitation might not just be a more canny type of exploitation.

Then again, what discussion of race isn't a total minefield? Well, this one is a minefield laced with footnotes. And I found them a wee bit defensive, a way to fortify an observation with someone else's authoritative-sounding opinion. Quotes from Asian sources are offered as well, which makes even better mortar. In fact, I think I'll do the same thing. I'd like to amend this review by calling for a second opinion as well. Someone from Thailand, please. Let's hear the voice behind the smile oft described in *The Rice Queen Diaries*. It might offer praise, condemnation or added insight. Though who knows, we might just hear one long, frustrated scream.

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'Icy Perfection Coalescing': Darren Greer's U.S. Debut

a review by Kevin Killian

Still Life with June, by Darren Greer (St. Martins Griffin, \$13.95) - In *Still Life with June*, the U.S. debut of Canadian novelist Darren Greer, many narratives coalesce into a vision of darkness with the icy perfection of a snowflake. Cameron Dodds ekes out a grim living in a Canadian city that might be Toronto or Ottawa. He's thirty years old, the age when many young writers decide that since they have not yet published a novel, they're losers. He attends meetings of a writers group in a local chain bookstore that serves free coffee, but he does little in the group save refuse, like Bartleby, to comment on the work of his fellow losers. One member of the group, a published novelist called Dagnia Daley, rules the roost and hates him.



To pay the rent for himself and his adorable cat, Juxta (short for "Juxtaposition"), Cameron staffs a drug treatment center he calls the "Cocaine Corral." This job puts him on an intimate basis with many ex-cons whose back-stories he steals and publishes under a variety of pseudonyms, including Darren Greer (the same name, you'll notice, as the author of the novel under review). It was around this page that I started getting a wee bit of a headache, as the story launched into a postmodern meditation on the nature of identity and the misery of everyday life. "I can forgive God His cruelty," Cameron fumes. "I can forgive God His indifference. But what I cannot forgive God is His silence." An out gay man, Cameron's half in love with one big lug who's killed eleven people. "Iroquois Pete" is the only one he

knows, or so it seems to Cameron, who speaks the truth about human existence and who doesn't take shit from anyone.

The story properly begins when Cameron, who has written a series of articles for a *Village Voice*-like city tabloid on urban espionage, is asked by the successful novelist Dagnia Daley to report on his upstairs neighbor, a concert pianist called Dean. For a weekly fee, Cameron agrees to sift through Dean's garbage and in general to find out what he's up to, who he's seeing, if he's taking his pills (he is her ex, Dagnia explains, so shiftilly you know she's lying.)

In another plotline, one of Cameron's clients commits suicide, leaving behind a severely disabled sister, the roly-poly June. Cameron decides, in a snap move provoked as much by existential ennui as by any other reason, to pretend to be Darrel Greene so he can visit June often in her city ward. (Again, we are shown how similar the name "Darrel Greene" is to his pseudonym/real name "Darren Greer." The unself-conscious "retard" June brings love and laughter into his life, as he takes her to the park to play, brings her to the Modern Art Museum where she loves the Warhol soup cans and the messy Pollock drip paintings. He also has the satisfaction of knowing he's doing something good on the one hand, even as his pursuit of the upstairs neighbor leads him into ethical waters both murky and kind of erotic.

I hope to avoid spoilers but let me say that few in the novel are who they pretend to be. Everyone's got a bleak secret, often concerned with horrid Canadian childhoods and the feeling of being a loser. I had a few reservations about Greer's writing. Cameron tells the same jokes over and over again. Like many of us, he is intrigued by the way "pianist" sounds like "penis," and he uses the phrase "the penis" to describe his upstairs neighbor - first time around it was sort of cute, but after twenty-five times I was so over that. Nevertheless, he's big-hearted, like a Tom Spanbauer hero, and even though he's been hurt he still wants to help others. The complexity of Greer's characters elicits our admiration and the shell game he plays with who's who and why will leave you dizzy, bewildered, and anxious to see what sort of book he produces for us next. *Still Life with June* is one of those novels that grabs you by the throat and tells you that despite everything, life is worth living. "When you give someone something," muses Cameron, "even if that something is a lie, even if that someone wouldn't know the difference between a Radio City Music Hall chorus girl and Geraldo Rivera, you've given the world just a little bit more hope with which to fight its next crop of bad guy stuff."

(Kevin Killian lives in San Francisco. He's the author of two novels, *Shy* and *Arctic Summer*, as well as many other books including his latest, *Island of Lost Souls*, a memory play)

Author info: www.darrengreer.com

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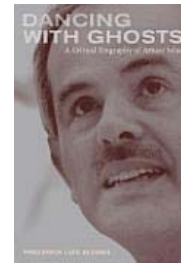
'Confessions Of A Brown Angel': A Quietly Remarkable Life

a review by Ricardo L. Ortíz

Dancing With Ghosts: A Critical Biography of Arturo Islas, by Frederick Luis Aldama (University of California Press, \$19.95)

The gay Chicano educator and writer Arturo Islas died of AIDS-related illness in 1991; he was only 52 years old. In his lifetime he witnessed the publication of only two of his three finished novels, and of none of a sizeable collection of shorter works in prose and verse. Those two published novels (*The Rain God*, 1984, and *Migrant Souls*, 1990) gave Islas a brief taste of mostly critical success, which had cruelly eluded him in the decade preceding their eventual appearance. The years following his death saw the publication of a third novel (*La Mollie and the King of Tears*, 1996), and finally (in 2003) of a volume of his *Uncollected Works*, edited by the emerging Islas scholar Frederick Luis Aldama.

Aldama has now followed the 2003 collection with *Dancing With Ghosts*, a "critical biography" that undertakes the dual task of (first) telling Islas's life-story and (second) telling it in relation to the already strongly autobiographical elements of both Islas's fiction and poetry. Aldama derives his information from a variety of sources, including interviews with many people (family members, friends, colleagues and students who knew Islas during his life), but primarily from the enormous store of Islas's personal and professional papers which reside in the Special Collections department of



the main library at Stanford University, where Islas earned all his academic degrees, and where he taught, with considerable success, for almost the entirety of his professional life.

The fact that almost all of Islas's creative work is so directly autobiographical (and confessional) poses the chief critical opportunity, as well as the chief critical challenge, to the biographer. On the one hand, part of the strong fascination of Islas's best fictional work can be attributed to the brilliance and the artfulness with which Islas himself transforms his life-experiences into the stuff of highly stylized "literary" fiction; Aldama's work in this respect satisfies most as it confirms (especially for those of us who are already fans of Islas) how closely in fact his two most seductive pieces (*The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls*, comprising together the "Angel family saga" and based quite directly on the "saga" of his own) adhere to both the contours and the arc of Islas's quietly, sadly remarkable life. On the other, that very resemblance of such fine existing work to the life that the biographer needs to retell in order to both confirm and complete its predecessor, certainly obligates in the biographer an acute awareness of the very high (especially aesthetic) standard to which his own written account of the same life might potentially be held.

Aldama chooses, rightly, to exempt himself from such an unfair, and arguably inappropriate, comparison. More useful than graceful, Aldama's biography succeeds nevertheless, and as he intends, as an impressive synthesis of criticism and scholarship; it sets valuable groundwork for future scholarship, which is now not only inevitable, but indeed even possible, thanks exclusively to the information about, and the insights into, Islas's life and work that Aldama makes newly available in this volume. *Dancing With Ghosts* clearly stands in both complementary and supplementary relation to all the creative work whose course of production it recounts; Islas's personal life, from his modest beginnings in Depression-era El Paso, Texas, through his conflicted negotiations of and eventual reconciliation with his family's traditional (and homophobic) Chicano culture, to his equally ambivalent grappling with the privileged and often threatening aspects of the cultural elitism he encountered across his four decades at Stanford, to his life-long battles with serious illness (polio in the '40s, ulcerative - and near-fatal - colitis in the '60s, HIV and AIDS in the '80s and '90s), to his coming to a difficult and hard-won sexual self-realization as a gay man of color from the 1960s on, can now finally appear to the reader, thanks to Aldama, more completely than it could in the characteristically fragmented, understated and suggestive form it most often took in Islas's major fiction.

The critical and scholarly strengths of *Dancing With Ghosts* should by no means, however, preclude future writers from consulting Islas's archive for additional and alternative ways to read Islas and his work; for all its success at achieving its stated goals, *Dancing With Ghosts* is by no means exhaustive of its chief subject. The Islas who most powerfully emerges for the first time in this volume is actually Islas the cultural and intellectual activist, in the period extending from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to the late-'80s "culture wars," the one who found himself strategically positioned to help transform the way that the most privileged institutions in US higher education went about the work of teaching culture to their students; Islas was pivotal, in ways that we can only now fully appreciate, in ensuring that the paragon of human excellence and achievement that we in this country identify with artistic genius could no longer be assumed to be male, or white, or straight, or privileged by class. The Islas who emerges in Aldama's book just enough to suggest that he needs more attention is the Islas who over three decades of teaching wrote out, word-for-word, every lecture he ever delivered on a literary topic; one can only hope that some future scholar will compile and publish that material, if only to help those of us who care determine more fully how Islas understood his own work in relation to the vast body of literary material (American, Latin American, global) he admired enough to teach.

For now, thankfully, we can learn much from Aldama, both about who Islas really was, and who else we might still discover him to have been.

(Ricardo L. Ortiz is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Georgetown University; his book project, Diaspora and Disappearance: Cultural and Political Erotics in Cuban America, will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in late 2006)

Introduction to the book:

<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9580/9580.intro.html>



Two Writers Who Blog, From Abroad: Hamburger & James

Aaron Hamburger, whose second book (after the story collection *The View from Stalin's Head*) is the fine novel, *Faith for Beginners*, is a few months into his one-year residency at the American Academy in Rome – and about halfway through his second novel. His blog entries aren't frequent, but they are generous. From the Nov. 1 entry: a bit about his interregnum back in the US for a book tour:

"What is the point of a book tour? I'm convinced it's more than the event itself. It's an opportunity to turn the publication of the book, which is really no more than opening a box and putting copies on shelves, into a happening worth marking by local bookstores, media, and readers. Your book gets placed in a prominent position in the store a week beforehand. Your reading gets listed in local newspapers. You sometimes do interviews. You shake hands with booksellers and audience members, several of whom (to my great delight) had read my first book and had eagerly been awaiting my new one.

Then there are the unforeseen wonderful small moments you never expected. I heard from friends of mine I hadn't heard from in years, including two men who came out to me for the first time. In Atlanta, I met a gay man who'd just escaped to the big city from the small town where he'd felt trapped for years and was enjoying his new life of freedom. In Washington, I was met at the airport by a "media escort," which is a person who makes a living by picking up authors in town for book signings and taking them around the city for the day. My media escort turned out to be a smart, insightful social worker with whom I shared a thoughtful conversation about religion and the role of faith in progressive politics. In L.A., I was adopted for the weekend by the synagogue Beth Chayim Chadashim, where I was treated like a rock star."

Life back in Rome: <http://aaronhamburger.com/blog.html>

Callum James is a book collector, book dealer, and writer (recent stories in *Men & Ink* and *The Best of Both Worlds*, and perhaps in the forthcoming anthology *Inside Him*) living in Portsmouth, on the South Coast of the UK. He peppers his blog with cogent thoughts on books and their charms.

In his Dec. 6 entry, he laments an unattainable object of desire: *"It's just one of those things I suppose. I'm forever seeing things on eBay that I would dearly love to have but know I won't be able to compete for. But today I found perhaps the greatest 'object of desire' I've ever come across. The typed manuscript of the SRD novel, Neveronya. Nothing I can do about it, it's bound to soar through the roof and frankly, I couldn't really afford the starting price at the moment. Sigh..."*

In a Dec. 3 entry, he praises the poetry of Richard Siken: *"One of the most beautiful books of poetry I've read in a long time in a darkly sour kind of way..."*

And his Nov. 25 entry praises two books. The first is Luke Sutherland's *Venus as a Boy*: *"A young man grows up on South Ronaldsay in Orkney suffering bullying and abuse. He slowly becomes aware of his singular gift, which is to give people the kind of sexual experience that makes them see angels. He embarks upon a journey to the mainland and through Scotland ending up in London working as a hustler."* The second (and, sort of, third) book he writes about is Gilbert Adair's 1988 novel *The Holy Innocents*, which was rewritten by the author from the screenplay based on it for the Bertolucci film *Les Innocents*, and republished in 2003 as *The Dreamers*. James prefers the original.

And bits of his fiction appear on another blog:

<http://silverbirchjunction.blogspot.com/>



'Heartbreaking' Letters, Queer Books Back in Chelsea

On the eve of the premier of *Brokeback Mountain* in Jackson Mountain, Wyoming, Matthew Testa talked to Annie Proulx: *"Excuse me, but it is not a story about "two cowboys." It is a story about two inarticulate, confused Wyoming ranch kids in 1963 who have left home and who find themselves in a personal sexual situation they did not expect, understand, nor can manage. The only work they find is herding sheep for a summer - some cowboys! Yet both are beguiled by the cowboy myth, as are most people who live in the state, and Ennis tries to be one but never gets beyond ranch-hand work; Jack settles on rodeo as an expression of the Western ideal. It more or less works for him until he becomes a tractor salesman. Their relationship endures for 20 years, never resolved, never faced up to, always haunted by*

fear and confusion. How different readers take the story is a reflection of their own personal values, attitudes, hang-ups. It is my feeling that a story is not finished until it is read, and that the reader finishes it through his or her life experience, prejudices, worldview and thoughts. Far from being "liberal," Hollywood was afraid of the script, as were many actors and agents. Of course I knew the story would be seen as controversial. I doubted it would even be published, and was pleased when The New Yorker very quickly accepted it. In the years since the story was published in 1997 I have received many letters from gay and straight men, not a few Wyoming-born. Some said, "You told my story," some said, "That is why I left Wyoming," and a number, from fathers, said, "Now I understand the hell my son went through." I still get these heart breaking letters..."

http://www.planetjrh.com/testa_2005_12_07_proulx.html

David Leavitt asks: "Is Brokeback Mountain, as it's been touted, Hollywood's first gay love story? The answer - in a very positive sense, I think - is yes to the love story, no to the gay. Make no mistake: The film is as frank in its portrayal of sex between men as in its use of old-fashioned romance movie conventions. Its stars are unabashedly glamorous. The big-eyed Jake Gyllenhaal is a far cry from Proulx's small, bucktoothed Jack Twist, just as the blond, square-jawed Heath Ledger is nothing like her Ennis Del Mar, 'scruffy and a little cave-chested.' Yet, even if, in their tailored jeans and ironed plaid shirts, Gyllenhaal and Ledger sometimes look more like Wrangler models than teenagers too poor to buy a new pair of boots, the film neither feels synthetic (in the manner of the abysmal Making Love) nor silly (in the manner of gay porn)."

The Slate article: <http://www.slate.com/id/2131865>

Ed White's forthcoming memoirs, *My Life*, is previewed – though the book's not as dishy as White is in person, writes John Freeman:

"By some accident of real-estate karma, a single street in Manhattan is home to three of America's most illustrious figures in gay arts and letters. At the end lies the apartment of the poet John Ashbery; further along one will find Martin Duberman, the essayist and historian who unyoked scores of gay men from self-hating therapy with his memoir *Cures*. Finally, near 8th Avenue, where muscle-heads promenade like peacocks on Saturdays, a spitting distance from the cafes and leather shops of the gayest corner of the gayest city of America, lives Edmund White. Right next to a church."

<http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/interviews/article308162.ece>

"Many of us came to the work of British novelist Alan Hollinghurst for the sex in his first novel, *The Swimming-Pool Library* in 1988, but we have stayed - as we do in all good relationships - because we found someone who understands us." Andy Humm interviews Hollinghurst as *The Line of Beauty* appears in paper:

http://www.gaycitynews.com/gcn_445/powersofobservation.html

Hollinghurst interviewed in the Harvard Crimson. "A gay British guy and a straight American teenager walk into a café..."

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref+509644>

In praise of Fran Lebowitz, still acclaimed after all these years (and only two books): "Lebowitz proved to me that being a humor whore was an ultimately pointless endeavor. Unless you're true to yourself, you'll regret it the morning after. Either that, or you'll end up with some manner of comedy STD... and nothing is more painful than an infected sense of irony." Bill Gbron celebrates the writer with big hair in PopMatters:

<http://www.popmatters.com/features/mft/lebowitz-fran-051102.shtml>

Jesse Green on Sarah Schulman, the playwright: "Though her speech is armored with jargon, the effect is often mitigated, in person, by her almost maternal warmth. Still, I found myself repeatedly preparing to flinch as she stalked me for bad motives, tired agendas and prejudices; when she thought she spied one she pounced as if to drag it from behind some trees and let it rot in the sun."

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/24/news/sarah.php>

Aaron Hamburger discusses his creative inspiration, the gay scene in Israel, living the literary life in Rome – and his new novel, *Faith for Beginners*:

<http://www.sovo.com/2005/10-21/arts/books/books.cfm>

A Chelsea card shop adds queer books (and more) to its mix. "...expect no overwrought answers from (Rainbows and Triangles manager Nathan Siegel) when asked why the neighborhood needs a bookstore. 'Because gay people write and read books,' he says, his eyes wide with indignation."

<http://www.newyorkblade.com/2005/10-21/locallife/main/main.cfm>

Zheng Yuantao, an editor at gaychina.net since 2001, is translating gay themed Western literature in "an attempt to bring the finer points of gay culture to a wider audience."

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-11/11/content_493739.htm

Although Jack Fritscher's memoir-novel, *Some Dance to Remember*, occasionally slows to a crawl, persevere for a strong and culturally engaging read, says Greg Marzullo in the *Houston Voice*:

<http://www.houstonvoice.com/2005/11-25/arts/books/book-back.cfm>

Teen-tale and sci-fi storyteller Mark Kendrick (*Desert Sons*, *Into This World We're Thrown*, *Stealing Some Time*, the forthcoming *The RyeLerran Gateway*) emerges as "an iUniverse star," sells 10,000 copies of his books, and discusses why he went the print-on-demand route... and what it took to make it work:

<http://blogcritics.org/archives/2005/10/10/111642.php>

Author info: <http://www.mark-kendrick.com>

Wicked and *Son of a Witch* author Gregory Maguire talks to *USA Today* about being both popular, and a subversive: "I am always rather proud of both, to the extent that those are valid descriptions of me. How subversive could I really be? I'm a father of three young kids, a practicing Catholic, a registered voter who does vote, a taxpayer, a volunteer on boards of local charities, etc.? Yet I am also an openly gay married man, a critic of the current administration, an occasional public dissenter about Vatican policy and practices. And there's probably a file on me in Washington somewhere because I visited Nicaragua as a member of Witness for Peace when Americans were strongly recommended to keep their feet out of Managua. No part of the above is anti-American, so 'subversive' is perhaps more flattering than accurate."

http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2005-10-12-gregory-maguire-interview_x.htm

James McCourt on Dennis Cooper's *God Jr.*: "When I talk about Dennis Cooper's writing, I tend to become excited beyond enunciation, sounding something like Joyce's Molly Bloom, all heated up there in her bed over life and love: Yes, because it's very important, yes, because I've been wanting for ages to do a bit of justice on behalf of a body of work of a certain genius and the most Los Angeles kind of writing since whenever ... since Raymond Chandler..."

<http://www.calendarlive.com/books/bookreview/cl-bk-mccourt2oct02,0,3145953.story?coll=cl-bookreview>

The Romantics guys were finalists in Planet Out's "Entrepreneur of the Year Awards" for 2005 – though two men and their perfume company won:

<http://www.planetout.com/content/slideshow/splash.html?coll=602&order=2&navpath=/topics/money/entrepreneur/>

Praise, with profound regrets, from Michael Bronski, for a new book on an old Harvard scandal: "It would be difficult to imagine a more intriguing topic for a book: in 1920, Harvard's esteemed president, A. Lawrence Lowell, put into action an inquisitorial secret court to ferret out, expel, castigate, and humiliate homosexual students. The result of this judicial burlesque was a

score of ruined lives and several suicides. It would also be difficult to imagine a worse book on this topic than William Wright's *Harvard's Secret Court: The Savage 1920s Purge of Campus Homosexuals*. Given the clumsiness of Wright's organization, the laxness of his writing, the lurid excess of his rhetoric, and the paucity of his historical analysis, it's amazing that *Harvard's Secret Court* has any narrative drive at all. But this story is so compelling that the book is a page-turner."

<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/arts/books/documents/05119970.asp>

Gore Vidal, unqueer icon:

<http://www.washblade.com/2005/12-9/arts/books/icon.cfm>

Gay men don't read in New Zealand?

<http://www.gaynz.com/news/default.asp?dismode=article&artid=2898>

Nominations are still open for the Gaylactic Spectrum Awards for queer SF/fantasy writing:

<http://www.spectrumawards.org>

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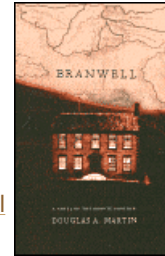
Branwell: A Novel of the Bronte Brother, by Douglas A. Martin (Soft Skull)

Kings in Their Castles: Photographs of Queer Men at Home, by Tom Atwood (Terrace Books)

Katharine Hepburn: The Untold Story, by James Robert Parish (Advocate Books)

Celebrating Hotchclaw, by Ann Ellen Shockley (A&M Books)

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/051205-bookmarks.html>



Potato Queen, by Rafaelito V. Sy (Palari Publishing)

Heroes, by Patrick Fillion (Bruno Gmunder)

101 Must-See Movies for Gay Men, by Alonso Duralde (Advocate Books)

Wild Girls, by Diana Souhami (St. Martin's Press)

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/051121-bookmarks.html>

They Change the Subject, by Douglas A. Martin (Terrace Books)

Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star, by Tab Hunter with Eddie Muller (Algonquin Books)

Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963, by Gavin Butt (Duke University Press)

Murder on the Mother Road, by Brenda Weathers (New Victoria Press)

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/051107-bookmarks.html>

The City of Falling Angels, by John Berendt (The Penguin Press)

Swimming in the Monsoon Sea, by Shyam Selvadurai (Tundra Books)

The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson: The Pretty Boys and Dirty Deals of Henry Willson, by Robert Hofler (Carroll & Graf)

The Iron Girl, by Ellen Hart (St. Martin's Minotaur)

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/051025-bookmarks.html>



The Commitment: Love, Sex, Marriage, and My Family, by Dan Savage (Dutton Books)

Wounded, by Percival Everett (Graywolf Press)

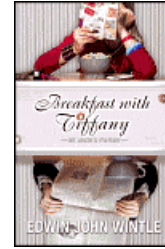
The Rice Queen Diaries, by Daniel Gawthrop (Arsenal Pulp Press)

In Too Deep, by Ronica Black (Bold Stroke Books)

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/051010-bookmarks.html>

Three Fortunes in One Cookie, by Cochrane Lambert (Alyson Books)
Center Square: The Paul Lynde Story, by Joe Florenski and Steve Wilson (Advocate Books)
Clearcut, by Nina Shengold (Anchor Books)
Rode Hard, Put Away Wet: Lesbian Cowboy Erotica, edited by Sacchi Greene and Rakelle Valencia (Suspect Thoughts Press)
<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050926-bookmarks.html>

How's Your Romance?, by Ethan Mordden (St. Martin's Press)
Breakfast with Tiffany: An Uncle's Memoir, by Edwin John Wintle (Miramax Books)
Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times, by Morris Kaplan (Cornell University Press)
Crashing America, by Katia Noyes (Alyson Books)
<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050829-bookmarks.html>



What We Do Is Secret, by Thorn Kief Hillsbery (Villard Books)
Hitting Hard, by Michelangelo Signorile (Carroll & Graf)
My One-night Stand With Cancer, by Tania Katan (Alyson Books)
No Sister of Mine, by Jeanne G'Fellers (Bella Books)
<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050815-bookmarks.html>

God Jr., by Dennis Cooper (Black Cat/Grove)
The Next World, by Ursula Steck (Bella Books)
Diary of a Drag Queen, by Daniel Harris (Carroll & Graf)
Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco, by Peter Shapiro (Faber & Faber)
<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050801-bookmarks.html>



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University of Chicago, Kensington, Alyson: BTWOFs

Religions and queers, from University of Chicago Press:

Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800, by Khaled El-Rouayheb, \$32.50 - Attitudes toward homosexuality in the pre-modern



Arab-Islamic world are commonly depicted as schizophrenic. On the one hand, Arabic love poetry, biographical works, and bawdy satires suggest that homosexuality was a visible and tolerated part of Arab-Islamic elite culture before the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Islam supposedly considers homosexuality an abomination and prescribes severe punishment for it. The paradox is explained in this expansive book, which draws on poetry, belles lettres, biographical literature, medicine, physiognomy, dream interpretation, and Islamic legal, mystical, and homiletic texts. (Dec.)

Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, by John Boswell, \$23 – *A propos* gay marriage and gay priests, circa now: “Boswell’s study of the history of attitudes toward homosexuality in the early Christian West was a groundbreaking work that challenged preconceptions about the Church’s past relationship to its gay members when it was first published 25 years ago. The historical breadth of Boswell’s research (from the Greeks to Aquinas) and the variety of sources consulted make this one of the most extensive treatments of any single aspect of Western social history.” (Dec.) A John Boswell page:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/index-bos.html>

Fiction, pictures, and advice from Kensington/Citadel:

James Dean: Behind the Scene, edited by Leith Adams & Keith Burns, \$19.95 – Fifteen years after its first edition, this collection of photographs, personal letters and studio correspondence is back in print to mark the 50th anniversary of brooding-boy’s death. (Jan.)

One Night Stand, by Ben Tyler, \$14 – Paper edition of Tyler's tasty tale of lusty callboys and the wealthy clients willing to pay for their salacious (but smartly safe) sexual shenanigans. (Jan.)



Gay Parenting: Complete Guide for Same-Sex Parenting, by Shana Priwer & Cynthia Phillips, \$13.95 – It's said that 180,000 same-sex couples are already raising kids in America; this couple, with three children, cover all the legal bases for others wanting to burp babies. (Feb.)

Mardi Gras Mambo, by Greg Herren, \$14 – In this paperback original sequel to *Jackson Square Jazz* and *Bourbon Street Blues*, it's (pre-Katrina) carnival time in New Orleans, and former go-go boy Scotty Bradley plays around, not nicely, with the Russian mob. (Mar.)

Herren blogs: <http://www.livejournal.com/users/scottynola>

Someone Like You, by Timothy James Beck, \$14 – One beautiful sister, Vienna, mad at men but still looking. One hairdresser with a scissor-sharp tongue, Davii, craving a nice guy to come home to. One kept man, Derek, ready to make some changes in his life. One babe magnet, Christian, charming and savvy and cool. They're four friends shopping for love, in this warm comic novel from the writing team that wrought *I'm Your Man*, *He's The One*, and *It Had to Be You*. (Apr.)

Meet Timothy, Timothy, Becky, and Jim:

<http://www.timothyjamesbeck.com/tjbfaq.html>

Debut fiction, myth inverted, much erotica: new from Alyson

10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Find Real Love, by Joe Kort. \$14.95 – From the author of *10 Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives* – aha! we sense a theme – comes this advice book about decoding sexual fantasies, struggling for gay manhood, not belonging, and dealing with parental role models... and about both finding and becoming Mr. Right. (Dec.)

Author info: www.joekort.com



Ultimate Gay Erotica 2006, edited by Jesse Grant, \$15.95 – Ya' got your *Best Gay*, ya' got your *Hot Gay*. Round out your '06 collection with this "ultimate" anthology. (Dec.)

Running Dry, by M. Christian, \$13.95 – At 154, Los Angeles painter Ernst Droud is merely middle-aged – and stunned when he receives a cryptic letter from the lover he last saw in 1913...when he killed him. Prolific editor and short story writer Christian's first full-fledged novel is a stunner. (Jan.)

Author info: <http://www.mchristian.com>

Best Gay Love Stories 2006, edited by Nick Street, \$14.95 – Stories. Short. Original. Romantic. Passionate. Sniff. You might cry. Or maybe cum. (Jan.)

Mordred, Bastard Son: The Mordred Trilogy, Part One, by Douglas Clegg, \$24.95 - Clegg's heroic recasting of the life story of Mordred, bastard (and in other accounts, heinously villainous) son of legendary King Arthur, is a nifty way of making an oft-told tale fresh again - and more queer than it's ever been. (Jan.)

Author info: <http://www.douglascllegg.com/>

Dorm Porn: Raunchy Tales of Boys on Campus, edited by Sean Fisher, \$14.95 – Sex in the dorms. Huh. Who ever knew (wink wink)? (Feb.)

Rock Starlet, by Stewart Lewis, \$13.95 – This gay rock star sings it loud and, to the dismay of his manager and record company handlers, a little too proudly flamboyant; Lewis's debut novel is about the fruitless butchering up of a boy in the band. (Mar.)

Back Where He Started, by Jay Quinn, \$14.95 – Paper edition of Quinn's exquisite exploration of gay fatherhood, domestic heartbreak, and picking up

the pieces at the far end of midlife. "Warm, funny, winning, and real," said Paul Lisicky. (Mar.)



Bestselling Books At Giovanni's Room - December 2005

Gay Interest

Brokeback Mountain, by Anne Proulx (Scribner, \$9.95) - This award-winning story of a romance between two gay cowboys coincides with the release of the film starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger.

Close Range, by Anne Proulx (Scribner, \$14.00) - A collection of award-winning stories about loneliness, quick violence, and the wrong kinds of love (includes "Brokeback Mountain").

Words to Our Now, by Thomas Glave (U. of Minnesota, \$25.95) - In these essays, Glave draws on his experiences as a politically committed, gay Jamaican American.

Sons, by Alphonso Morgan (Lane Street Press, \$14.95) - In 1990's Brooklyn, a teenage boy struggles with his sexuality in the age of Hip-hop.

Tab Hunter Confidential, by Tab Hunter (Algonquin, \$24.95) - Actor and heartthrob Hunter reveals his rise to fame and demands of the studios in this best-selling tell-all memoir.

Maurice & Alec in America, by Fred Carrier (Author House, \$14.95) - Maurice & Alec flee England and a rigid class society that would keep them apart.

Millionaire of Love, by David Leddick (Southern Tier, \$19.95) - A unique story of the depth and beauty of romantic obsession between old and young men set in exotic European locales.

Boys in the Brownstone, by Kevin Scott (Southern Tier, \$22.95) - A collection of witty, affectionate - and disturbing - tales of the city with a colorful assortment of characters.

Rainbow Road, by Alex Sanchez (Scribners, \$16.95) - Sanchez's bestselling "Rainbow series" concludes with an unforgettable road trip for the boys.

This Gay Utopia, by John Butler (Starbooks, \$16.95) - An erotic novel of a small East Coast town where homosexuality is encouraged.

General Queer Interest

Out in History, by Thom Nichols (Starbooks, \$16.95) - A collection of brief but informative profiles on famous queer historical figures.

What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality, by Daniel A. Helminiak (Alamo Square, \$14) - This updated edition explains that faulty translations of the Bible condemn homosexuality.

50 Fabulously Gay-Friendly Places to Live, by Gregory A. Kompe (Career Press, \$24.99) - A wonderful reference guide to queer-friendly locales and communities.

Provincetown, by Karen Christel Krahulik (NYU Press, \$29.95) - An accomplished history of the New England town that has become so welcoming to queer folk.

City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves, by Marc Stein (Temple, \$22.95) - A remarkable history of queer Philadelphia and the post-WWII lesbian and gay experience.

The Complete Guide to Gay and Lesbian Weddings, by K.C. David (Thomas Dunne, \$16.95) - Planning a wedding? Let this book help with thoughtful advice and wonderful nuptial notions.

Loving Someone Gay, by Don Clark (Celestial Arts, \$16.95) - One of the best books offering a positive profile of queer identity.

And Tango Makes Three, by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson (Simon & Schuster, \$14.95) - A delightful picture book featuring an embrace of all sorts of families, especially a pair of penguin dads.

The Giovanni's Room website: www.gioannisroom.com



The Writers Write About What Was Written: Some Letters

BTWOF:

Wow! I printed out the 2005 list of BTWOF and have re-read it several times. What a fascinating assortment of tastes and points of view... every one of

them valid and every one of them telling by offering an insight into the contributor. Thanks for the opportunity to put in my two cents!
-Jay Quinn

BTWOF:

This was a great issue! I love reading all these varied opinions on books. And now of course my already stupidly long reading list has mushroomed. But it's still exhilarating, as I love books.
—Marilyn Jaye Lewis

BTWOF:

Thanks for this. What great fun to read the entries - an excellent way to make a list of must-reads.
—Shaun Levin

BTWOF:

What an *interesting* list! And what a clever idea of yours...
—Brent Hartinger

BTWOF:

A fascinating list, and a fascinating project, certainly one that bears repeating in future years. I was especially surprised not only by how few of the recommended books I'd heard of, but by how few of the *recommenders* I'd heard of: just one or two more than half of the folks you asked, by my count. Do you have an especially eclectic group of friends.... Glad to see so many other folks recommended Vestal's book.
—Michael Lowenthal

BTWOF:

What a surprise! And how lovely! My little book needs all the help it can get, and this is a big help.
—Vestal McIntyre

BTWOF:

Thanks for the great end of year cheer. So much nicer than reading apologia, insanity, and downright stupefying stupidity from either our White House or its Gap-assed media flacks. It is amazing, if not even startling to me, that gay books in any form continue. I mean, I'll be doing this till I either die or go so senile I can't read anymore, but the deniability of genuine feelings is really upon us, and here in NY-Oz where the horses change color at will, it becomes stylish to repeat that queer men and their "culture" are either out of fashion, or existence. Of course, I don't believe that, but some do.
—Perry Brass

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