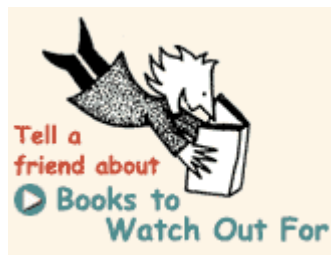




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About BTWOF

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.

The Lesbian Edition

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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More Books for Women

The Gay Men's Edition

Volume 3 Number 5

By Richard Labonte

In this edition of the **Gay Men's Edition**, I'm continuing to catch up with the books that piled up during my enforced hiatus: two genre novels with oodles of originality, two picks of the litter that couldn't be more different, a paean to goofy love, and three real treasures To Watch Out For. There's news about a new and creative UK press, *Wow-I-won-a-Lammy* quotes from three winners who didn't at all expect to top their categories, news about a book of my (co-)own, links to Internet items of interest, and some July bestsellers.

Gay For Pay: Mary Cheney and James McGreevey

Before getting to the good queer stuff, a few thoughts on three books I don't plan to read. The first, and the most offensive, is Mary Cheney's **Now It's My Turn: A Daughter's Chronicle of Political Life**. I did, in fact, try to get a review copy from the publisher, but despite several requests, nothing arrived. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that the review would have appeared in *Book Marks*, the review column that Q Syndicate - a very queer enterprise - distributes to several gay and lesbian papers; my editor there reported that PlanetOut was similarly stymied. I didn't press the issue: I don't go out of my way to write about books of questionable character anyway, and Cheney's whiny self-justification of why she was playing political footsie with her sexuality was getting enough news coverage - particularly because of its reported low sales. Who could have guessed the book would tank? Any savvy editor, I imagine. But not Mary Matalin, who heads the conservative-book imprint Threshold Editions (its debut title was Cheney's) and who has been a Dick Cheney mouthpiece over the years. Common sense suggests that most hard-line right-wingers, the Ann Coulter cultists and Rush Limbaugh loonies, would steer clear of its "queer" content; and any self-respecting gay or lesbian would sniff their shoes after walking through hypocrisy like this, from Cheney's outreach to readers on Amazon:



"Of all the experiences I've had in politics, the most unforgettable occurred during my father's 2000 debate with Joe Lieberman. Bernie Shaw, the moderator, asked whether gays and lesbians ought to have 'all the constitutional rights enjoyed by every American citizen,' and my dad responded: 'The fact of the matter is we live in a free society and freedom means freedom for everybody. We shouldn't be able to choose and say you get to live free and you don't.' Sitting in the audience, I knew I'd just heard a statement that would be recalled again and again as our country debates the rights of gays and lesbians. And I also knew that when it came to picking candidates to work for, there was no one I could have chosen better than my dad."

Um... that "freedom for everybody" would include, oh, the freedom to marry or the freedom to serve in the military, right? I'm just saying... So where were Cheney, the adorable dad, and Cheney, the out-loud, out-proud daughter, during the recent Senate and even more recent House votes on enshrining a right in the Constitution

covers the finest in thinking women's reading, plus mysteries, non-sexist children's books, and news from women's publishing. Written by the owners and staff at Women & Children First, and friends.

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 PO Box 882554
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Books for the **Lesbian Edition** should be sent to the San Francisco address.



that would be specifically denied to gay women and men? It was reported a few weeks after the book's May pub date that about 6,000 copies had sold; I'm sure the number is higher now - 9,000? If so, several editions of *Best Gay Erotica*, to cite one very gay title, have outsold it. Yay.

What's more contemptible is how Simon & Schuster opted to pander to the conservative bent of America by launching the imprint under the aegis of a political hack like Matalin, and with a book that enshrines such an obvious conflict of interest. Other Threshold titles in the pipeline include *Why I Turned Right: Leading Baby Boom Conservatives Chronicle Their Political Journeys*, edited by Mary Eberstadt; *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (that title reflects either hypocrisy or egotism), by L. Paul Bremer; and *Winning Right: Campaign Politics and Conservative Policies*, by Republican dirty trickster Ed Gillespie. Ugh. *Now It's My Turn*, Simon & Schuster/Threshold Editions, \$25, 141652049X.



The second book I won't be reading is former New Jersey governor James McGreevey's *The Confession*, due in September from Regan Books (\$26.95, 0060898623). I'm not unsympathetic to the fellow's closeted quandary, as a public figure trying to keep his private life private, and I'm not unsympathetic to the trauma, terror even, that coming out later in life can invoke. But McGreevey's not the only public figure to slink into freeway rest stops for sex, and he wasn't that terrific a governor, and he was dumb enough to appoint his boy toy to a sensitive post-9/11 security position. Give me - anytime - the autobiographical honesty and refreshing good character exemplified by *Tab Hunter Confidential: The Making of a Movie Star* (paperback due in October, Algonquin Books, \$14.95, 1565125487), or the sleazy, heartfelt, and unrepentant reality of Aiden Shaw's *My Undoing: Love in the Thick of Sex, Drugs, Pornography, and Prostitution* (Carroll & Graf, \$15.95, 0786717432).

Wayne Besen, author of *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth*, is similarly aggrieved by Cheney, somewhat more kind to McGreevey:

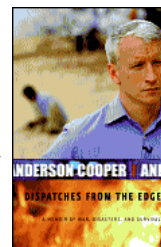
"In the shadow of Mary Cheney's apologist memoir, *Now It's My Turn*, comes an apology from former New Jersey Governor James McGreevey in his new book *The Confession*. With Mary receiving a million dollars for her 'tell nothing' and McGreevey receiving a half million for his 'tell-all,' it has suddenly become quite lucrative to announce one's homosexuality. Perhaps, next year's National Coming Out Day should be held in a bank? Cynicism aside, McGreevey's book is a tome that hits home with an agonizing and gut-wrenching portrayal of life in the closet."

The full column:

www.waynebesen.com/2006/05/mcgreeveys-confession.html

And the third book - well, I'm ambivalent, in a "who cares" kind of way. I'm referring to lanky newsfox (but not on Fox News) Anderson Cooper, whose emotive professional autobiography, **Dispatches from the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters, and Survival** (HarperCollins, \$24.95, 0061132381) is, this month at least, number three on the Windows Media general bestseller list - surely a sign of wish-fulfilment on the part of gay readers, though Cooper of CNN continues to be coy about his dalliances.

"Cooper's memoir leaves some questions unanswered," writes reviewer Erica Barnett. "There's frustratingly little about his personal life, for example." Exactly. Ho-hum. I'd rather read new memoirs by Rigoberto Gonzalez (*Butterfly Boy*) or Lucy Jane Bledsoe (*The Ice Cave*) than spend time with a stuttery journalist who works his brother's suicide or his father's death (but not his Vanderbilt-mother's millions) into this reminiscence of every tragedy he's covered.



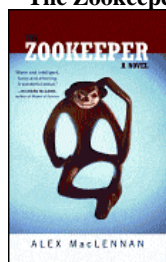
Two Genuine, Cock-Eyed Takes on the Gay Mainstream

The Zookeeper, by Alex MacLennan, Alyson Books, \$14.95, 1555839363
Someone Like You, by Timothy James Beck, Kensington Books, \$14, 0758210353

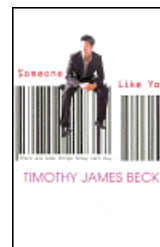
Gay novels about men yearning for boyfriends, juggling boyfriends, or finding their boyfriends a pain in the butt - emotionally speaking - are plentiful. Gay novels set primarily in a zoo, or entirely in a mammoth shopping mall: now, those are

something special, even when they're also mostly about those pesky boyfriend creatures. Like these two stylistically disparate but accomplished works of fiction.

The Zookeeper is MacLennan's first novel; he used to work at the San Francisco Zoo, so he knows his big cats, his slithery reptiles, and his elephant shit - background that infuses this maturely melancholy story with engaging verisimilitude. It's about Sam Metcalfe, adrift in a job he likes - zookeeper, natch - but nonetheless aware that something substantial is missing in his life. It could be love, but he's not sure that Dean, the man he meets at a dinner party, is The One. Or it could just be that he hasn't learned to trust his own needs and emotions. MacLennan writes about Sam's close circle of friends, and about Sam's caring family, with engaging warmth and comfortable insight - writerly talents that elevate a tale often told into something special to read.



Someone Like You is Timothy James Beck's fourth novel. It's more modest than MacLennan's in emotional heft, and it lands a bit lower on the literary food chain, but is no less special, if only because the setting - the Mall of the Universe - is so darned unique. Like all of Beck's books - rather seamlessly assembled by a quartet of writers, quite marvellously so - this one is about a quirky circle of friends, gay and straight; at its center is Derek, a young queer man who's let himself be buffeted about by happenstance. He's the reluctantly kept boy of a wealthy hotelier, lives in a posh hotel attached to the mall, and sells shoes in the Mall's most venerable department store (and, as it happens, one of the four authors once sold shoes for a living, in Manhattan: "write what you know" is at work in this book, too). Beck's humor is way more broad than MacLennan's, but both books share a cocked-eyebrow take on the gay mainstream that is so very refreshing in genre fiction.



A *Zookeeper* interview:

www.metroweekly.com/feature/?ak=2205

An interview with half of Timothy James Beck:

www.alyson.com/html/thedeal/deal_interview.html

The "Beck" writing team:

www.timothyjamesbeck.com/biography.html

And "he" has a big fan in the Philippines - Eon, who writes a terrific blog:

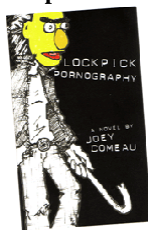
<http://hastydevil.wordpress.com/bibliophile>

<http://hastydevil.wordpress.com/2006/05/28/someone-like-you>



My Two Very Different Books of the Month

Lockpick Pornography, by Joey Comeau, Loose Teeth Press, \$14



I learned about *Lockpick Pornography* when its author, Joey Comeau, emailed me about contributing an excerpt from the novel to *Best Gay Erotica 2007*, which unfortunately had just closed. Curious to know what I might have missed, I checked out the several chapters of the story available for free online (the finished book, the one with a price on the cover and a spine holding it together, is about 30 percent longer, with fewer typos). It was definitely excerptable - but as fiction, has a lot more going for it than just erotic content.

Lockpick is a bit raw around the story-telling edges, but the narrative buzzes with an anarchic anger and an infectious humor that mark Joey - his online persona is so darn appealing that it's hard to call him Comeau - as a writer to watch out for; for readers of a certain age, nostalgic for the era of vibrant queer energy exemplified by the 'zines of a decade ago, it'll be a trip down memory lane: the zippy novel's passion for being anti-establishment, fueled by a cheerful youthful rage, is irresistible.

What's it about? In brief, a quartet of friends, reveling in their gender fluidity, royally pissed, with exuberant juvenility, at heterosexual norms - but not at all cozy with mainstream gay politics, either. They're firebrands with more instinct than philosophy, a raucous crew always violating boundaries. I haven't had as much fun reading a short novel in years.

And for a book without representation in any of Canada's chain bookstores - it's not even listed at either chapters.indigo.ca or amazon.ca - *Lockpick* has done pretty well; the initial printing of 1,050 copies sold out in just a few months; there's a second printing of 2,000 now available.

Read much of it online: www.lockpickbook.net

Even better, order the book here so you can keep it by your bed and show it off to your friends (payment only by PayPal, it seems);

www.looseteeth.ca/store

And there seem to be almost as many accolades online as there were copies of the first printing: a smattering of the commentary follows, the better to convey the flavor of the book:

This UK blogger sums it up with more precision than any of the dozen or so reviews available online (www.ebbybrett.co.uk/blog):

“*Lockpick Pornography* is a book about a boy. It is about a boy in search of the feeling that he’s a part of something queer and strong and worthwhile. When he reads about ‘the movement’ in the paper, or sees queers interviewed on TV, he doesn’t feel like a part of that. He doesn’t feel like he’s represented by that toned down image they’ve created to help straight people “tolerate” gay people. He wants to be a part of something more honest. He goes to lesbian bars dressed as a drag king. He struggles to reconcile his belief that gender is a construction and an illusion with his complete lack of attraction to women... *Lockpick Pornography* is a book about figuring out what it means to be anything anymore. It is a book about trying to make a difference.”

From an appreciative interview in *Junk Magazine* by Kathy Cacace...

KC: If you could sneak your book to unsuspecting school children, or even their unsuspecting parents, would you?

JC: Oh man, would I ever. In a way, the Internet lets me do that. I get a lot of emails from 14 and 15-year-old kids. Like, "Is it okay to mail you cash for your book? I'm queer and I don't want my mom to know, so I can't use her credit card. Will you mail it in a plain envelope?" or like "I don't want my mom to see a book with 'pornography' in the title."

KC: Do you send them the book?

JC: Yes. It used to freak me out a bit when a kid would write to me and tell me about their life, and their asshole parents, and what it was like being where they were, the Midwest, or Texas, or wherever. I don't know what to say sometimes, and so sometimes that email just sits there unanswered. Or I say like "I'm glad you like the book, and I'm sorry your parents are fuckers." Also, sometimes they try to talk dirty, and I don't respond to those emails at all. I'm glad they found the book, though. I wish I'd found Kathy Acker's *Rip Off Red*, *Girl Detective* at 14. Or like, Dennis Cooper.

www.junk-mag.com/further/20060103cacace.htm

In another interview, with the spot-on title “Bert is No Gay Ghandi” (makes sense when you’ve read the book), Jim Munroe asks: “Is your superhero team based on friends that you have or friends you wish you had?” and Joey Comeau responds, “I actually wrote some of my friends into the book as characters. I mean, they *are* characters. But no, the main characters are all sorts of composites or just make believe. I guess that’s allowed in fiction these days, using your imagination. Oh, and there’s a little bit of Michelle Tea and Kathy Acker in the main dyke characters”:

http://nomediakings.org/books/bert_is_no_gay_gandhi.html

A warm review from *Shunpiking* - “Equal parts satire and adventure, *Lockpick Pornography* embeds us with an angry underdog. ‘I’m tired of the moral high ground,’ he tells his friend as they plot to vandalize symbols of condescending tolerance in social order”:

www.shunpiking.com/ol0302/0302-BR-PED-makings.htm

Zachary Houle in *PopMatters* is supportive of the energy but slightly condescending: “Ultimately, *Lockpick Pornography* is the kind of book that works best if you're angry, confused, leftist, and, perhaps, queer (in more ways than one)... an angry screed against the world. Nothing wrong with that - this reviewer did the same thing six years ago by selling out 250 copies of a self-published chapbook titled *Working in the Bowels of Hell*, which is perhaps all you need to know about that project and what said writer thinks about it now. Still, *Lockpick* is at its best when it is angry. The sex and violence are so well done, in fact, that one reads this and kinda wishes the speechifying and manifesto-ness, particularly in the first chapter, could have been toned down somehow. While Comeau's work isn't quite as satisfying yet as one might wish it were, you have to admire the guy's chutzpah and directness, and love the fact that he's utterly circumventing the ‘norms’ of how one is a success in the publishing world.

www.popmatters.com/books/reviews/l/lockpick-pornography.shtml

Saint Mary’s University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Joey graduated this spring with a degree in linguistics - he really is not just an angry punk - hailed the book in a press release with lots of interesting history, while making the point in the first paragraph of the release, as befits an institution of some augustness, that “the book is not about pornography”:

www.smu.ca/newsreleases/2006/05-11-06.html

Well, it may not be about pornography. But *Xtra* reviewer Chris Dupuis said in his positive review: “The novel opens with his main character, an unnamed twenty-something gender-queer punk, putting his foot through a TV screen during a televised political debate. The ensuing ten chapters follow a group of disaffected youth through a myriad of break-and-enters, kidnappings, and enough hot queer sex to give me a boner the whole time I was reading it.”

www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?SESSIONID=df9cb7f0-39a7-4e03-955f-4406189c74c4&AFF_TYPE=3&STORY_ID=1464&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=2

Publisher Loose Teeth has a website, of course:

www.looseteeth.ca

And its own MySpace page:

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=40259742>

Joey Comeau also is one-half of the duo (Emily Horne is the other) who produce a delightful weekly comic, *A Softer World*. You can subscribe through an RSS feed.

Recommended: www.asofterworld.com/

And there’s a collection of the strips, released just this month: *A Softer World: Truth and Beauty Bombs*:

www.asofterworld.com/store.htm

And Joey has a blog, of course. Utterly charming, nakedly candid, and quirky as heck. One sample excerpt: “I love Sarah Waters. Her books are like crack. I open them and they pull me right in. Dark and dirty and pitch perfect. She creates a Victorian voice so flawless and believable that it’s hard to talk about anything else when describing her. But she also fills her books with dirty lesbian sex. That ranks too. My favourite is *Fingersmith*, but I have high hopes for this new one, *Night Watch*.”

<http://untoward.livejournal.com/>

The Romanian: Story of an Obsession, by Bruce Benderson, Tarcher/Penguin, \$16.95, 1585424781

This memoir couldn’t be a more different book. Where *Locksmith* is rowdy and raw and undisciplined and angry and often laugh-out-loud hysterical, *The Romanian* is pained and sweet and controlled and melancholy and often emotionally wrenching. So what does Benderson’s book, the story of his obsessive love for Romulus, a straight Romanian rent boy, have in common - at least for me - with Comeau’s book, a high-octane fantasy about high-energy hi-jinks? They are both wholly satisfying accomplishments, books that conjure up alternate engaging universes for the reader - the former by a novelist with a bent for the underclass (*User*, *Pretending to Say No*), and with a reporter’s eye for distilling mood and moment with impeccable style; the latter by a novice author with a hard-on for the overclass, and with a natural writer’s ability to press the juice out of a story.



Comeau’s book is pure, glorious invention. Benderson’s book, he says, “is an erotic-noir ‘journal,’ the true story of a homosexual affair that takes place in a country, Romania, where homosexuality is essentially a punishable offense. It is also the story of a dangerous and unstable pairing of an American bohemian and a deprived eastern European, and it’s really a heterosexual book about a homosexual pairing, since the Romanian character has sex with a lot of women. Everything in the book is true. It’s not fiction.” Not even the part where he’s paying the rent and buying the groceries and supplying stepping-out money for his Romanian lad by translating Celine Dion’s “saccharine” autobiography...

Benderson’s sexual connection with Romulus powers *The Romanian*, to be sure, but this is a multi-layered book; the author’s sexual passion is transmuted into a passion for understanding the cultural, political, and historical personality of the part of Eastern Europe where he finds himself. The love story is the muscle, but the bones of this book are the sense of place it carries - more than a sexual memoir, this is also stupendous travel writing.

And for the longest time, it couldn’t find an American publisher. Only after its French edition, *Autobiographie érotiques* (Rivages, 2004), won the Prix de Flore - one of France’s more distinguished if lesser-known literary prizes - was it picked up in the United States, albeit only as a trade paperback. And yet self-serving tripe from Mary Cheney and a nothing-special trifle from James McGreevey are published....

An excerpt from *The Romanian*, with a picture of Romulus, the object of his obsession:

www.villagevoice.com/news/0025.benderson.15811.1.html

Another excerpt:

www.sixbillion.org/content.php?issue=1§ion=1

A Benderson interview:

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

A *Village Voice* review:

www.villagevoice.com/books/0604_press.71869.10.html

Gawker covered the launch party - John Waters hosted, Erica Jong and Naomi Wolf were there:

<http://gawker.com/news/books/team-party-crash-bruce-bendersons-book-party-152656.php>

.....

All We Want is a Little Lovin' in Our Literature



I've been a fan of the Scott & Scott (Scott Pomfret and Scott Whittier) romances from the beginning: they're really well-written for genre titles, and the series has matured beyond the almost formulaic plots of the first few (*Razor Burn*, *Spare Parts*, *Nick of Time*: new covers here:

http://romentics.com/non_flash/newcovers.html). *Nothing Personal* was a 2005 title, focusing quite sweetly on gay marriage in Massachusetts; it moved the stories into the sphere of politics, as a Cuban American gay man came out to challenge an anti-marriage state representative, with the attendant quirky plot twists

and progressive political thinking that the books regularly feature. The newest is **Surf 'n Turf**, even more quirky: it's a *Romeo and Juliet*/*West Side Story* fable about a mousy (it seems) bookstore owner, dumped by his lover, and a hunky (no doubt) Deep South lad, dumped by his lover, who move to the fictional seaside town of Seaside to recoup and recover. One lands in the neighborhood of the menacing Meanies - bad boys parading in leather - and the other in the neighborhood of the bitchy Queenies - men who chatter and flounce. There is absolutely nothing plausible about the plot, and any leather purist and every heartfelt drag queen will be affronted by how their proclivities are depicted - but that's the aim of good satire, right? The book is a total hoot, with some good dish on, and digs at, queer correctness; it's good to see the Scotts tinkering with the content of their fiction. BookSurge Publishing, \$13.99, 1419633031.

"One Night Stands Strong" is a 49-cent short story about the day and night that Pomfret and Whittier met:

www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000EJ9SK0/qid=1140396615/sr=1-2/ref=sr_1_2/102-5511607-2150505?s=books&v=glance&n=551440

.....

'Awed, agog, thrilled': Why Winning a Lammy Matters

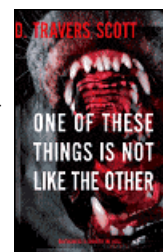
In a discussion with a prominent gay author around the time of the Lambda Literary Awards - he's written a couple of dozen of books over a 35-year-career - a writer and one-time publisher I've known and respected for many years questioned the relevance of the awards. Does anyone really care, he wondered. Of course, I said - you may be a jaded veteran, but for a younger writer, with a first book or just a couple of books under their belt - or, as it turned out, for a writer with a long but controversial literary career - the award certainly does matter. Here's proof: what three Lammy winners had to say on their blogs - verbatim - when they learned they had won back in May.

D. Travers Scott:

One of These Things is Not Like the Other (Suspect Thoughts, \$16.95, 0974638862) - Best Gay Mystery

"OK. So things're kinda stressful right now - I went straight from writing my own finals and grading students' finals to getting LA loose ends tied up, coming up to Seattle, and packing up my boyfriend, cats, and furniture - uh, basically the rest of my life - to move down to LA. So it's a little chaotic (and not in a Britney & K-Fed way), and I don't need surprises - like finding out my landlord won't let my boyfriend move in, so we have to apartment-hunt in LA immediately upon arrival; or that no rental moving trucks have back seats, so we have to find a

service that will drive our stuff while we rent another car for us and the felines. However, one surprise was welcome: a call from my editor that my rather freaky second novel, *One of These Things is Not Like the Other*, had won the Lambda Literary Foundation Award (a.k.a. the "Lammy") for Best Gay Men's Mystery! I was - and am - shocked, awed, and agog. Simply



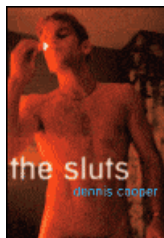
agog. Never expected for a second my weirdo incestuous fratricidal supernatural lil' book would win, especially given that it's not a traditional mystery. In fact, I was so certain it wouldn't, I didn't go to New York for the awards ceremony, and explained why to another writer-friend who was also nominated and couldn't decide whether to go. Of course, neither of us went, and we both won."

His blog:

<http://oneofthesethings.blogspot.com>

Dennis Cooper:

The Sluts (Carroll & Graf, \$14.95, 0786716746) - Best Gay Fiction



"Yeah, *The Sluts* won the Lambda Literary Award. I'm shocked. I really am. Like I said a while back, the last time I was nominated for a 'Lammy' was in 1991, and it's just seemed since then that their definition of gay/lesbian literature excluded my work or something, so it's disorienting to go from being an outsider to being chosen as the best gay fiction book. It's great, and I'm truly thrilled and grateful. I'm blown away, in fact. It's just so weird. And, yeah, it's not just me. Two people who've posted on this blog won awards too. The amazing poet Richard Siken won for Best Gay Men's

Poetry for *Crush*, and D. Travers Scott won for Best Gay Men's Mystery with the terrific *One of These Things is Not Like the Other*. And my comrades at Suspect Thoughts Press won too."

His blog:

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

Charlie Anders:

Choir Boy (Soft Skull, \$13, 1933368470) - Transgender/GenderQueer

"Blame jet lag - all night I kept dreaming that a book called *The Bronze Scar Versus The Space Cannibals* had won the Lambda Literary Award for every category, including nonfiction. When I went to bed last night, they hadn't announced the winners yet. In fact, though, it turns out the much less excitingly named *Choir Boy* has won the Lammy for transgender/genderqueer books. Big props to Tennessee Jones, Judith Halberstam, Matt Kailey, and Deborah Rudacille, the other nominees. I really wish I coulda been there for the ceremony, but I was just too slammed after running around the East Coast for a week, and I wanted to be moderately fresh for Saturday's *Writers With Drinks*. Oh, and congrats to Suspect Thoughts, which scored two wins with D. Travers Scott's *One Of These Things Is Not Like The Other* and Ali Liebegott's *The Beautifully Worthless*."



Her blog:

<http://charlieanders.com/blog.html>

So, to sum up: D. Travers Scott: "Awed and agog." Dennis Cooper: "Thrilled and grateful." Charlie Anders: she had a dream... Of course the Lambda Literary Awards matter!



Three Books, Blurbed, To Watch Out For

I'm asked to blurb books most every month, and if I like a title, I do: here are some Comments To Watch Out For that will be showing up on new titles between now and the end of this year:

The Dark Paintings, by Hugh Fleetwood, BIGfib Books, \$16.95, 2952489955, Sept.

"Hugh Fleetwood's eruditely horrific novel has a malevolent mystery at its heart: one after another, a wealthy older man's beautiful young lovers are dying. There's a tinge of the supernatural to this riveting tale, a titillating whiff of the perverse, and - topping it off - a compelling miasma of creepiness permeating every twist of the

smart plot." That's what I wrote about Fleetwood's newest novel, which is about the wealthy, depraved, and hugely gifted Luigi Teramo, who has deliberately rejected his youthful talent for art in favor of making money, and of spending his fortune on young men and drugs - but he can't bring himself to destroy the fruits of that rejected talent, his early paintings, and as the years pass, it starts to seem that those paintings possess a terrible power. Fleetwood is the author of some twenty books, mostly



psychological thrillers and contemporary horror, the most recent being *Brothers* (Serpent's Tail, 1990). I've only read a couple, many years ago (he started publishing in the 70s) and *The Dark Paintings* seems to be his gayest work. Quirky fact: his novel *The Order of Death* became a film starring Harvey Keitel and Johnny Lydon, aka Johnny Rotten...

Fleetwood titles:

www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/f/hugh-fleetwood

Fleetwood's paintings:

www.lonbersyl.com/flwd1.html

A Map of the Harbor Islands, by JG Hayes, Southern Tier Editions, \$19.95, 1560235969, Dec.

"Stories of boyhood buddies growing up to be adult lovers are a gay-fiction staple - alas, almost a cliché. But few are as infused with as much poignancy and poetry, or brim with as much audacious originality, as this first novel from Hayes. His two earlier short story collections, *This Thing Called Courage* and *Now Batting for Boston*, explored the shame and desire and often bewildered urgency of sexual blue-collar South Boston queer boys and men with an uncommon, subtle artistry, crafting with muscular delicacy exquisite glimpses of lives that were sometimes sad and sometimes ecstatic. Much was promised of Hayes as a writer in those short stories. This novel delivers exquisitely on that promise. The story of Petey and Danny is luminous and luscious - a romance recounted with prose that glows with heartrending honesty, theirs a love for the gay ages that evokes tears again and again."

Jamie O'Neil reviews *This Thing Called Courage*:

www.iol.ie/~atswim/journal/courage.html

Author info:

www.thisthingcalledcourage.com

Postcards From Heartthrob Town, by Gerard Wozek, Southern Tier Editions, \$17.95, 1560236238, Jan.

"Wozek's snippets from a restless writer's memory, and the effortless short stories he spins with such grace from those memories, span the generous possibilities of a fine gay imagination. Some of these tales tingle with erotic potential and sexual satisfaction. Some are essential queer travelogues, fusing personality and place with an assured imagination. Some shout out the glory and the wonder of an innate gay spirituality. Each of them offers the reader the seductive opportunity of joining with the author on the journey, as universal as it is personal, into a questing queer man's uncharted emotions and emerging character."

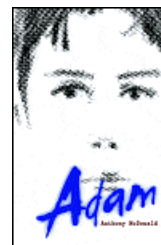
Wozek's blog goes back to 2001:

www.gerardwozek.com/blog.htm



Hey, Undiscovered Writer: Welcome to BIGfib

With the demise of Gay Men's Press (see the Internet Connections below), and for a number of other reasons, British novelist Nick Alexander (though he lives in France) has moved from self-publishing his own books through Lulu.com to launching his own imprint and branching out as a publisher for other titles. In addition to producing new editions of his first two novels, *50 Reasons to Say Goodbye* and *Sottopassaggio*, BIGfib Books has released a reprint of *Adam* by Anthony McDonald - one of GMP's best-selling titles from 2003: "Adam is the 16-year-old most parents would love to have: he doesn't do drugs, comes top at school, and regularly practices his cello. But there is another side to him, which comes to the fore when he falls for laborer Sylvain and gets sexually involved with two friends. The results are explosive in this passionate story of illicit romance and teenage angst-a combination that is eternally popular with gay readers." Coming next: *Good Thing Bad Thing*, the third in Alexander's trilogy, and, next February, tentatively titled *Diary of a Dork*, by Drew Ferguson, "an unpublished but brilliant American writer... his first novel is quite simply stunningly funny," says Alexander, "and I hope he will make quite a wave in gay publishing circles."



Two Ferguson stories from *Blithe House Quarterly*:

“Erase”: www.bliethe.com/bhq4.3/4.3.10.html

“Burial”: www.bliethe.com/bhq1.2/burial.html

BTWOF: Why start a new press?

Alexander: I decided to set up BIGfib Books because I hoped simply that I could make a better living from my own novels that way, and control the marketing of them better by doing it myself. More than anything though, I felt that the loss of Gay Men's Press in the UK left a big void that someone needed to fill. We're aiming to target the literary/humorous end of the market rather than the erotica end, which already seems better served.

BTWOF: How have you set up the press?

Alexander: BIGfib Books is a small company using the latest POD (print-on-demand) technology to print and distribute books with minimal outlay. Our books can't compete with the contracts, promotional budgets, or royalty advances that a mainstream publishing house can offer. So let us be quite clear here: If you can get Random House to publish your book, then please do so. It is, however, our experience that many "gems" slip through the nets of the publishing corporations, and that their selection policies are narrow-minded and ignorant of market specifics, particularly in niche markets such as GLBT publishing.

BTWOF: What's your focus? How will BIGfib distinguish itself?

Alexander: BIGfib Books wants to build a reputation for extraordinary gay/lesbian fiction and cutting edge humor. We want people to know that by choosing a BIGfib book they will be getting much more than the run of the mill pulp that passes for fiction these days. They will be getting *art*, *sweetie*. If writers feel that their work fits this category, then BIGfib would be thrilled to consider their title. It's unlikely to lead to riches, but it will provide a route into print. The rest depends how good at promotion a writer turns out to be.

For submission info:

www.bigfib.com/submissions.html

.....

Marcel, Alison, Leslie, Julia, E. Lynn, Thomas, and Others



Paul Reidinger reviews William Carter's *Proust in Love* for the *SF Bay Guardian*: "Although literary critics of the conventional school will tell you that Marcel Proust's greatest achievement was his mammoth novel *Remembrance of Things Past*, a credible case can be made for his dodging the dum dum bullet etched with 'gay writer.'"

www.sfbg.com/entry.php?entry_id=1065&catid=160

In the same issue, Lynn Rapoport blesses Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*: "The first few panels of Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, have the weight of a soft kick to the gut behind them. 'Like many fathers,' the story opens, 'mine could occasionally be prevailed on for a spot of 'airplane'.' The chord struck is sweet and nostalgic and familiar, and the juxtaposition of high-flown language and low-flying child is quietly comical, but the humor is dulled by the sight, two panels farther on, of an unsmiling father staring upward from a Persian carpet at his daughter, or perhaps just a crack in the ceiling."

www.sfbg.com/entry.php?entry_id=1067&catid=160

And Mattilda, a.k.a Matt Bernstein Sycamore, interviews Leslie Feinberg about *Drag King Blues*: "*SFBG: Drag King Dreams* begins dramatically, with a bashing and a betrayal. Then, within a few pages, you're able to de-center gender, the daytime world, and Manhattan. I was wondering if you could talk about these choices. **LESLIE FEINBERG:** It wasn't so much about making a decision to start that way as it is that I had lived with these characters in my head a long, long time, and I had a sense of who they were and who they were in the world, and then I found them at the train station together in the predawn hours on this cold winter morning, and I just started from there."

www.sfbg.com/entry.php?entry_id=1066&catid=160

AfterElton recommends gay books for summer reading, particularly the new novel by Julia Glass: "Glass, who dazzled gay readers with her gay-themed *Three Junos*, is back with a gorgeous second novel, *The Whole World Over*. Glass' new book contains a secondary but fully engaging and fully fleshed out gay character,

restaurant owner Walter, who isn't just comic relief or a tragic plot twist. Indeed, Walter finds himself in love with a man who may or may not be ready to move on from his previous lover." Other recommendations:

www.afterelton.com/print/2006/7/summer.html

In the tradition of *Betty & Pansy's Severe Queer Review of San Francisco*, two Chicagoans - both booksellers - have published *A Field Guide to Lesbian and Gay Chicago*, which was out just in time for the recent Gay Games:

www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/ARTICLE.php?AID=11975

Charles Michael Smith, writing in *Gay City News*, somewhat disses but doesn't dismiss Thomas Glave's essay collection, *Words to the Wise*: "Because of Glave's academic background, the prose is often overly ornate and convoluted. It's too bad that the notes in the back of the book are more straightforward and reader-friendly than the texts they are linked to. His two essays about gay murder victims, one of them written for a newspaper audience, are more readable, if a bit too graphic for the squeamish."

www.gaycitynews.com/gcn_525/towardpositiveidentity.html

Matthew Cole Weiss interviews E. Lynn Harris for *AfterElton* about his love life, the tensions between black and white gay men, and his upcoming stint at "cheer" camp:

www.afterelton.com/people/2006/7/harris.html

A reclusive E. Lynn Harris? A *Houston Chronicle* story: "Very low-profile - that's how E. Lynn Harris describes his life in Houston. Which helps explain how one of the country's hottest commercial novelists could live here several months of the year unnoticed. 'I think I broke the record for staying in the house on consecutive days,' the one-time IBM salesman said during a recent pass through the city. 'Eleven days. I have an assistant to go get my food. I have a gym right in my house. I write.'"

www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/life/3974111.html

Lewis DeSimone chats with the *Bay Area Reporter* about his debut novel, *Chemistry*: "Surprisingly, getting the story down may have been the easy part. 'It took me more years to sell it than it did to write it,' DeSimone explained. His big break came when he saw an ad in the back of a gay magazine asking for short stories. He sent off one, and it was published by *Gay Men's Fiction Quarterly*. DeSimone asked the periodical editor to put him in touch with the editor of the book division. The book editor said, 'Send me the first 50 pages and a synopsis.' DeSimone sent it off, went to Paris on vacation, and two weeks later, came back to a contract in his mailbox saying they wanted the book in a month. 'Luckily, I had already written it,' he said with a chuckle. After the contract was signed, nothing happened for a year.

www.ebar.com/arts/art_article.php?sec=books&article=130

"Michael Cunningham resists being labeled a pre-eminent gay novelist. But he cannot disavow the accuracy of the description," says the *Dallas Voice*:

www.dallasvoice.com/artman/exec/view.cgi/21/2147

"Augusten Burroughs is more than a mere survivor. He's an ingenious, hyper-creative force on the verge of something huge - a mega-mogul in the making," says David Kennerley in this interview. And he loves his fans:

www.afterelton.com/print/2006/5/augusten.html

"There is no longer a dedicated gay publisher in the UK. Gay Men's Press has finally ceased trading after years of dwindling sales. The big book retailers are closing down their gay sections, and small specialist shops are struggling or going under. The era of niche publishing is over," writes Rupert Smith (new novel *Service Wash* coming from *Serpent's Tail* in October) of the demise of the venerable British gay publisher":

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1763857,00.html>

Some good news about lesbian publishing, despite the demise of gay-specific stores:

www.afterellen.com/Print/2006/7/publishing.html

Speaking of the passing of so many gay and women's bookstores - Lee Lynch remembers when they mattered, laments their passing, and says nice things about

Books To Watch Out For:

www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/ARTICLE.php?AID=11910



Coming From Arsenal Pulp: a Book of My Co-Own

The Future is Queer: A Science Fiction Anthology, edited by Richard Labonte and Lawrence Schimel, Arsenal Pulp Press, \$17.95, 1551522098



I can't review this book: I co-edited it, with my good friend Lawrence Schimel. But this excerpt from his introduction provides some flavor of the book:

“The future has long been the purview of science fiction - and that future has increasing implications for queer women and men. The gay marriage controversy, scientific ‘breakthroughs,’ and well-organized anti-gay campaigns by the Religious Right seem to ensure that we are still decades away from achieving any kind of pansexual utopia some forty years after the advent of gay liberation.

“Nonetheless, despite recent setbacks in many countries - most prominently, the US - legal recognition of gay and lesbian marriages is taking place and, slowly but inexorably, moving forward. The further one looks to the future, the further technological advances - cloning, gene manipulation, etc. - will erode the biological imperative for heterosexuality as a means of procreation, making the social stigma against same-sex relations even less relevant...

“*The Future is Queer* set out to address these issues, to create a visionary handbook or manual, with stories firmly rooted in the queer present (and past) and extrapolating possible futures.

“Science fiction as a literary genre has long provided a welcoming haven for writing and speculation about alternative sexuality. Feminist literature, as well, has a long tradition of utopian fiction. Since we believe the future is not binary, *The Future is Queer* draws from both these literary traditions.

“Herein you'll find stories about the legal and social ramifications of cloning, the future of transgender spirituality, gays in the military, the splitting of identities taken to literal extremes, and even nostalgia for the repressive past - but always focused on the human angle of these socio-political or technological changes or innovations.”

And here's a short excerpt from my own introduction, which I'll preface by noting that, earlier in the intro, I recalled being a seven-year-old thrilled by the Edgar Rice Burroughs Mars novels I found on an older man's (he was 19 or so) bookshelf:

“...the library was where I fell in love. With Robert Heinlein, Andre Norton, Jack Williamson, A. E. van Vogt, Murray Leinster, E.E. “Doc” Smith, Manly Wade Wellman, and Jack Vance, among many - a universe of imaginations conjuring a wealth of universes. Endless great escape. This was in 1960, and it was the first time, but not the last, that I lost myself in a room full of books. It wasn't a large room: there were perhaps 5,000 volumes, every one donated by families and bachelor officers and young, not-yet-married enlisted men. I remember an awful lot of *Reader's Digest* condensed editions. A lot of mysteries, but they weren't of interest then. And a lot of science fiction, enough to keep me reading for a year, until one day a card fell out of a newer book, an invitation to join the Science Fiction Book Club. Which I did, in 1961. I was twelve by then. And for the next seventeen or so years, until I moved to Los Angeles in 1979 to help open the first branch of A Different Light Bookstore, I ordered every book, every month - except for the Edgar Rice Burroughs titles: his stories were for little kids.... So there I was, a fag by the time I was twelve, and reading four or five science fiction books a week. My future was certainly going to be queer.”

The table of contents:

My Life-Long Love for Queer Boys, Gay Lit, and Science Fiction: Introduction - Richard Labonté

Looking in All Directions: Introduction - Lawrence Schimel

Obscure Relations - L. Timmel Duchamp

Instinct - Joy Parks

The Chosen Few - Caro Soles

...the darkest evening of the year... - Candace Jane Dorsey

From Homogeneous to Honey - Neil Gaiman & Bryan Talbot

My Long Ago Sophia - Diana Churchill

The Sleep Clinic for Troubled Souls - Hiromi Goto
The Beatrix Gates - Rachel Pollack

More about the book:

www.arsenalpulp.com/select_book.php?book=218

Look for it in November.



Bestsellers From Our Bookstores

Every few months, the Windows Media group surveys several bookstores to compile a bestseller list, which appears at least in the *Southern Voice* and the *Washington Blade*. The top July titles were reported by Lambda Rising, D.C.; Outwrite Books, Charis Books & More, and Brushstrokes, Atlanta; Unabridged Bookstore, Chicago; and Amazon.com - not a remarkably broad pool of booksellers, though one of them is the world's biggest, I suppose - but it's a start. Some years back, *The Advocate* surveyed some twenty bookstores to gather a monthly Top 10, a truly national spread.

The Top 10 Titles For Men:

1. **Grief**, by Andrew Holleran
2. **Full Circle**, by Michael Thomas Ford
3. **From Top to Bottom**, by Michael-Christopher Lurry
4. **Dorm Porn: Raunchy Tales of Boys on Campus**, edited by Sean Fisher
5. **The Pale Blue Eye**, by Louis Bayard
6. **I Say A Little Prayer**, by E. Lynn Harris
7. **Summer Cruising**, by Dave Benbow
8. **My Lives: An Autobiography**, by Edmund White
9. **A House Is Not a Home**, by James Earl Hardy
10. **The Zookeeper**, by Alex MacLennan

The Top Five General Titles:

1. **Spirited: Affirming the Soul and Black Gay/Lesbian Identity**, edited by Lisa C. Moore & James G. Winston
2. **Possible Side Effects**, by Augusten Burroughs
3. **Dispatches from the Edge**, by Anderson Cooper
4. **What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality**, by Daniel Helminiak
5. **Sellelevision**, by Augusten Burroughs

The Top Three Women's Titles:

1. **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**, by Alison Bechdel
2. **Turn Back Time**, by Radclyffe
3. **Women of Mystery: An Anthology**, edited by Katherine V. Forrest

So, kudos to Windows Media (*Southern Voice*, *Houston Voice*, *New York Blade*, *Washington Blade*, *Express Gay News*, and *David Atlanta*) for recognizing books as a part of the popular culture mix. For the full three lists, which also include Gaydarradio.com's Top 10 and G-Sides AOL Essential Tunes:

<http://sovo.com/2006/7-7/arts/books/top10books.cfm>

For a look back in time - to May - here are the Top 10 titles from the Baltimore branch of *Lambda Rising*, as printed in *Southern Voice*:

<http://sovo.com/2006/5-26/arts/books/top10books.jpg>

From Giovanni's Room: July's Top, er, 7

Gay Men's Bestsellers

1. **Grief: A Novel**, by Andrew Holleran, Houghton Mifflin, \$19.95
2. **The Tricky Part: One Boy's Fall from Trespass into Grace**, by Martin Moran, Anchor, \$14
3. **I Say a Little Prayer**, by E. Lynn Harris, Doubleday, \$21.95
4. **My Undoing: Love in the Thick of Sex, Drugs, Pornography, and Prostitution**, by Aiden Shaw Carroll & Graf, \$15.95
5. **Cowboys: Gay Erotic Tales**, edited by Tom Graham, Cleis, \$14.95
6. **My Lives: An Autobiography**, by Edmund White, Ecco Press, \$25.95
7. **Full Circle**, by Michael Thomas Ford, Kensington, \$23

Giovanni's Room on the web:

www.gioannisroom.com



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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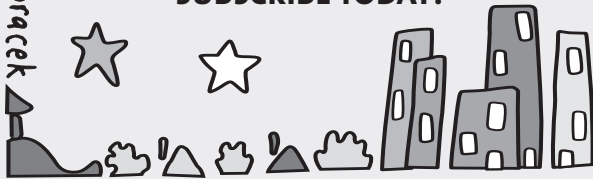
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