



In this issue...

- [10 More: My Own Favorites](#)
- [And I Liked Straight Books, Too](#)
- [More Than 100 Favorites](#)
- [Some Kate Love](#)
- [Fun Home, A Mainstream Fave](#)
- [Others That Crossed Over](#)
- [Bestsellers From Our Bookstores](#)
- [2 Corrections. Oops.](#)
- [3 Letters](#)

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 Suzanne Corson.

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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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The Gay Men's Edition

Volume 3 Number 7

By Richard Labonte

Part Two: A Year's Favorites From 22 More Writers

Almost 60 writers, and readers, responded to my request for a few words about their favorite books of 2006 - so many that this year-end installment of the **Gay Men's Edition** of *Books To Watch Out For* comes in two parts. To round out the survey of favorites and bests (there is much overlap), I've added a roundup of queer books that made it on to mainstream lists.

10 More: My Own Favorites

In part one of this year's Favorite Books roundup, I cited seven titles that I reviewed in 2006 for my Book Marks column: Martin Hyatt's **A Scarecrow's Bible**, Jay Quinn's **The Good Neighbor**, and Joe Keenan's **My Lucky Star** in fiction; Bernard Cooper's **The Bill from My Father**, Rigoberto Gonzalez's **Butterfly Boy**, and Stuart Timmons and Lillian Faderman's **Gay L.A.** And my favorite among favorites was Tom Spanbauer's magical **Now is the Hour**.

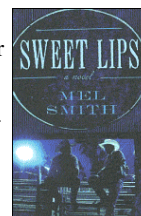
But there were plenty of good books I didn't get to, even though the column covers 100 books each year. Here are 10 of them, some odd favorites and some definite bests:

Gutted, by Justin Chin.

Justin's a friend. But I have at least a passing acquaintance with many of the authors whose books I've reviewed over the year, and with more whose books I didn't. This is searing, scabrous, and serious poetry, about the death of his father, about dealing with his own mortality, about becoming an American, about growing older, about living between two worlds. It's hard for me to separate the voice in this stunning book from the voice of friendship (and, in recent years, emails). I'd imagine a stranger diving into this work would be enthralled.

Sweet Lips, by Mel Smith.

I read a *lot* of erotica every year. Sometimes to review it, often to judge it (for the *Best Gay Erotica* series I edit for Cleis Press, and for a handful of other erotica anthologies I've edited), but not often for pleasure. Or, more precisely, for self-pleasure. I didn't take *Sweet Lips* to bed with me, but I had a great good time with this slick bit of cowboy lust and frontier romance. It's easy enough to sustain erotic tension in a short story. Not so easy in a full-length novel. This one, well plotted and well-written, held my interest. Maybe it appealed to me so much because I haven't seen *Brokeback Mountain*? Nah. It was just a good read.



Tush, by Jaffe Cohen.

Humor is hard. Even from bitchy homosexuals, who often confuse acidic *bon mots* for real wit. But I liked this campy story - about a thirty-something gay Jewish astrologer who lures young men into his apartment in order to admire, and play with, their bums - for the same reason that I singled out *Sweet Lips* from the reams of erotica I read this year: it's a fine example of genre reading. The humor,

reservations.



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campy and queeny and facile as it was, worked for me on an overcast, gloomy day. It's certainly not the most literary book published in '06 by Carroll & Graf, but it was a heck of a lot of fun.

35 Cents, by Matty Lee.

Others have praised this pitch-perfect account by a damaged straight boy of surviving days of hustling men for money and affection - and of a boy who grew into a man who understood that what society views as sordid saved his life. Almost everything published by Suspect Thoughts stands tall in the sometimes-shrubby field of queer-interest lit; this was the year's standout.

The Sound of All Flesh, by Barry Webster.

This is a 2005 book, from a Canadian publisher, but I didn't come across it until last month, when the author read at Wilde About Sappho, an annual literary do in Ottawa. His short stories, about piano music and nudity and other dissimilar stuff, are gems of dazzling wordplay and quiet humo(u)r, some gritty and realistic and some fantastical and hallucinatory.



Suspension, A Novel (P.S.), by Robert Westfield.

Best debut of the year, this one. This beauty of a book dares to use the backdrop of 9/11 without diluting the humor of its dark, comic edge. It's about one Andy Green, bored to tears by his work concocting quiz questions for students; it's about how he falls in love with a handsome man who's not what he seems to be, how he half-heartedly oversees his straight woman friend's hapless cabaret career, and how he barricades himself inside his Manhattan apartment for months on end when his life falls apart. Farce, romance, mystery, coming of age, political commentary: it straddles the genres.

Every Visible Thing, by Lisa Carey.



I assume Carey is straight. She's married to a man and has a son. It's that old heterosexual assumption. Nonetheless, this is a beautifully rendered queer novel, about a family shattered by the disappearance of its oldest son, the story shining partially through the precocious homosexual lens of the missing teenager's 10-year-old younger brother. Among gay-character novels written by women, this is the most movingly authentic I've read since Laura Argiri's *The Gods in Flight*, published a dozen years ago (and her only book) - made more marvelous because not only does Carey perfectly capture a gay voice, but because she dares to capture a

kid's gay voice.

Gay Life & Culture: A World History, edited by Robert Aldrich.

A succinct, wide-ranging overview of queer culture, from the sexual practices of New Guinea tribes to the Berdaches of Native America to ACT UP and AIDS.

Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights, by Kenji Yoshino.

From a gay Japanese-American law professor, this healing mix of legal scholarship and anecdotal autobiography argues for a recasting of how the federal courts address discrimination, anti-gay and otherwise.

The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinema, by Thomas Waugh.

At 600 pages, this is a hefty book - and it's all about queer Canadian cinema and video:

"Waugh identifies the queerness that has emerged at the centre of our national sex-obsessed cinema, filling a gap in the scholarly literature. In Part One he explores the explosive canon of artists such as Norman McLaren, Claude Jutra, Colin Campbell, Paul Wong, John Greyson, Patricia Rozema, Lea Pool, Bruce LaBruce, Esther Valiquette, Marc Paradis, and Mirha-Soleil Ross. Part Two is an encyclopedia of short essays covering 340 filmmakers, video artists, and institutions."

It's become the guide to films I'm scouring Internet video rental outlets for.



Some Non-Queer Reading Content-ment

And then there were several non-gay books that enthralled me this year. Yeah, I read outside the queer canon...often when I'm deluged by botched mysteries, repetitive self-help sermons, soggy romances, banal erotica, or heartfelt self-published under-edited fictionalized autobiographical coming out stories, and need an escape to straightville.

The Raw Shark Texts, by Steven Hall.

Hall's first novel is a fiercely original literary thriller pitting men against sharks - though these sharks, more metaphysical than corporeal, hone in on memory and essence, not flesh and blood. This is an addictive and electrifying mashup of *Jaws*, cyberpunk, and sappy romance - and it comes with a built-in flipbook featuring a shark.

Knots, by Nuruddin Farah.

Somalia-born Farah's ninth novel tells the inspirationally feminist story of a self-reliant woman's return from Toronto to her civil war-torn homeland. Farah's depiction of the riotous urban madness that is Mogadishu, where boys toting AK-47s roam the ravaged streets of a once-cosmopolitan city, is relentless and remorseful. But there is hope in how this drawn-from-reality novel depicts the everyday heroics of people attempting to lead normal lives in the midst of savagely abnormal times.

Winterwood, by Patrick McCabe.

From all evidence, Irish author McCabe is as straight as they come. But he does dwell on things queer: his Booker Prize-shortlisted novel, *Breakfast on Pluto*, told the story - against a backdrop of Irish Republican Army bombings - of Patrick "Pussy" Braden, who leaves a small Irish town for a London life as a transvestite rent boy on Piccadilly's Meat Rack. *Winterwood*, which also delves into the byways of queer ways, is creepy fiction fueled by the fact that child molestation spreads its evil through generations. Despite a fractured chronology that is sometimes hard to follow, this hallucinatory dark tale, about a man's descent into madness and murder, is artfully repellent and hypnotically compelling.



The Zero, by Jess Walter.

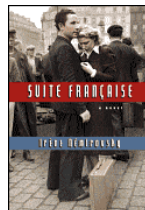
Novels written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 were generally sensitive about still-fragile sensibilities. That's not what Walter aspires to, with acidic success, in this sharp-elbowed, deliriously mordant political satire about a shadowy government agency, the Documentation Department, established by the "Liberty and Recovery Act" to scrutinize first every scrap of paper scattered across Manhattan when the Twin Towers fell, and later - shades of the NSA's warrantless wiretapping - every financial record in the nation.

Martian Dawn, by Michael Friedman.

A Richard obviously based on Gere and a Julia obviously based on Roberts are called back to reshoot - on Mars - the bollixed ending to a science fiction movie, *Martian Dawn*. Elsewhere in the comically off-kilter universe of this larky debut novel from poet Michael Friedman, a man in a bar is obsessed by Monstro, a pet baby whale who has been freed into the Atlantic. Slight but sly, this is a scrumptious literary trifle.

Half of a Yellow Sun, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

When the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria seceded in 1967 to form the independent nation of Biafra, bloody civil war, crippling economic deprivation, and mass starvation followed. This haunting story, told primarily through the eyes and lives of a 13-year-old peasant houseboy who survives conscription into the raggedy Biafran army, and of twin sisters from a wealthy and well-connected family, is a dramatic fictional epic drawn from that period - and a searing real-life history lesson.



Suite Française, by Irène Némirovsky.

The human face of war, not the triumphant tactics of generals or the bloodshed of epic battles, is at the heart of this long-lost masterwork, written in the months before its Russian-born author was shipped to Auschwitz in the summer of 1942. It was to have been a five-novel cycle: this extraordinarily gripping "suite," collecting the first two unpolished but wondrously literary sections of a work cut short, surfaced more than six decades after her death. *Storm in June* chronicles the intersecting lives of a disparate clutch of Parisians, among them a snobbish author, a venal banker, a noble priest shepherding churlish orphans, a

foppish aesthete, and a loving lower-class couple, all fleeing city comforts for the chaotic countryside. *Dolce*, set in 1941 in a farming village under German occupation, tells how peasant farmers, their pretty daughters, and petit bourgeois collaborationists coexisted with their Nazi rulers.

The Futurist, James P. Othmer.

As Young & Rubicam ad exec Othmer's satirical first novel opens, famed futurist J.P. Yates, dead drunk after downing most of his hotel room mini-bar's contents, experiences a spiritual epiphany: he's a fake. After years of peddling pontifical insights plucked from the pop-culture ether to any group willing to pay him well - one week he assures a Bible college's graduates that God has a future, the next he assures adult video distributors that porn has a future - he stuns attendees at a "Futureworld Conference" in South Africa by declaring himself "founding father of the Coalition of the Clueless." And, ironically, his career takes off - he's more in demand than ever, recruited by quasi-governmental goons to travel the world asking why everyone hates the United States. This spirited dissection of the cultural and political zeitgeist is fluidly subversive speculative fiction.



More Than 100 Favorites From 22 More Authors

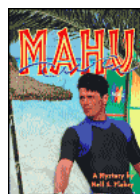
Tommi Avicolti Mecca

My fave of the year is no contest: It's Alison Bechdel's brilliant illustrated memoir, **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**. I am a huge fan of illustrated books. This one stands out from all the rest. Not only is the story engaging (and lacking the seemingly prerequisite violence of that genre), but each page is painstakingly rendered with such a fine eye to detail that one has to go back to the book several times to appreciate what Bechdel has accomplished. The author of *Dykes To Watch Out For*, the best comic strip in the world, has done it again. I can only hope that there's another illustrated book in her. Or at least a collection of short stories.



Tommi is a radical, working-class, southern Italian queer performer, writer, and activist with writings at www.avicollimecca.com and music at myspace.com/peacenikssf.

Anthony Bidulka



I see from the recent **BTWOF** I may not be too late to get this into you - sorry for the delay. As I scurried about my office checking out the books I'd managed to read this past year - mostly those of my colleagues in the gay mystery genre - and jotted down some of my favorites, I realized that most of them were books that were heavy on atmosphere and sense of place; so, quite obviously, I was looking to be transported to a different geographical location when I sat down to read this past year (or perhaps just a reflection of my love of travel).

That being said, some of my favorites this year were:

Mahu, by Neil Plakcy: Mahu is the Hawai'ian word for homosexual and the story of a terrific new face in the mystery field - a coming out gay surfer cop in Honolulu. Neil really gets the sense of the islands right, the reader can tell he loves both the place and his protagonist.

Roman Blood and **Catalina's Riddle**, by Steven Saylor: These aren't new this year, but rather the first two in his Sub Rosa series that I discovered this year - no outright gay content, but plenty of steamy subtext set in ancient Rome and those glorious public steam baths.

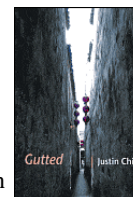
Cold Dark Matter, by Alex Brett: The second in a series that takes place, in part, in a much different Hawai'i than the above-mentioned Plakcy book - nice contrast between Neil's sun-swept Waikiki Beach and Alex's miserably cold Mauna Kea summit - and is based around the true story of something called the Fruit Machine that was built and used by the government to detect homosexuals: chilling.

Cajun Snuff, by W. Randy Haynes, **Mardi Gras Mambo**, by Greg Herren, and **Intersection of Law and Desire**, by J.M. Redmann are all pictures of a much different Louisiana and New Orleans. *Cajun Snuff* is the first of what I hope to be

another continuing series with a unique main character, whereas Greg and J. M. (Jean) have long-established series, and these two books are amongst their best. *Anthony is author of the Russell Quant mysteries Amuse Bouche, Flight of the Aquavit, Tapas on the Ramblas, and the just-published Stain of the Berries. Author info: www.anthonymbidulka.com.*

Tom Cardamone

At summer's end, on my last bike ride out to Coney Island, I recall passing a father methodically baiting his son's hook; the little boy watched, fully absorbed. Some books, most books, end when you finish the last page. But others linger in a way that is hard to pin down; they have informed perception in a way that doesn't recall the title or the author; when you see something in a new light you're not so mindful of the source. However when I see a father guiding his son onto the train, how I imagine their lives, the way in which I then contemplate my own relationship with my father, I am aware that the rhythm of these thoughts keeps time with Justin Chin's **Gutted**.



I reviewed his collection of poetry for the *Lambda Book Report* and have previously written about *Attack Of The Man-Eating Lotus Blossoms* here, in **Books To Watch Out For**, so obviously I'm interested and excited about his work. The poetry in *Gutted* takes a flashlight into the undiscovered country; work about illness, the death of a father, the meaning of family, is as personal as an artist can get, yet whatever he shines the light on, it's something we can all relate to. And thumbing through the text again, I can't find a suitable portion to quote here. The best pieces course as fast and natural as a river, and I can't just scoop out the essence.

I have discussed the book with a friend whose father recently passed away. Ironically, he's the one who first introduced me to Chin's poetry. Rightly, he doesn't want my copy. He can tell that this is one of those books you have to pick up on your own.

It's a lasting piece of music or text where the complexity of memory is revealed in such a way as to highlight a universal experience. Chin's book is still with me; it resonates like Lou Reed's *Magic and Loss*.

Tom's erotic novel, The Werewolves Of Central Park, comes out next spring. You can read some of his short fiction at www.pumpkinteeth.net.

Alexander Chee



The Children's Hospital, by Chris Adrian, is my book of the year. It's relentlessly imaginative, beautifully written and perhaps the ballsiest work of fiction I've come across in a very long time. In this novel, God changes his mind about never flooding the earth again, and saves just the residents of a single Children's Hospital. Adrian's managed to pour all of life into the place, somehow. And make it all feel very real. He's managed to reinvent the novel just to fit all of this inside it.

Alex is author of the novels Edinburgh and the forthcoming The Queen of the Night (Houghton Mifflin). His blog: <http://truenorth.typepad.com/fictioneer>.

Alonso Duralde

My two faves:

Exile in Guyville, by Dave White: Hilarious essays about being gay, grumpy, and displaced.

Fun Home, by Alison Bechdel: Her *Dykes to Watch Out For* is one of the smartest comic strips ever, but it in no way prepared readers for this haunting and powerful graphic memoir.

Alonso is former Arts and Entertainment Editor of the Advocate, a member of the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and author of 101 Must-See Movies for Gay Men. Author info: www.alonsoduralde.com.

Jack Fritscher

My favorite book is **My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin**, by Peter Gay (1999). In the summer of 2006, I chose to read the high-concept title precisely because I figured Gay's survival techniques in the Nazi 1930s might be helpful to our gay psychology surviving the age of Bush. As a writer, Peter Gay is a perfect and precise stylist who tells a dramatic coming-of-age story that is one tick this side of Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* and another tick that side



of Katherine Ann Porter's *Ship of Fools*. The Jewish Peter Gay claims to be heterosexual, but the autobiography he pens so eloquently seems to be a coded transparency which makes his closeted survivalist tale all the more interesting and supportive.

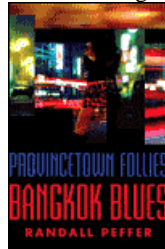
Jack is author of more than a dozen erotic and literary books, including a memoir about Robert Mapplethorpe and the epic Some Dance to Remember. He was an early editor of Drummer magazine, and is working on Eyewitness Drummer: A Memoir of the Gay History, Pop Culture, and Literary Roots of The Best of Drummer Magazine. Author info: www.jackfritscher.com.

Jim Gladstone

I wanted to get back to you in the hopes of making your second installment. While I needn't add more detail to others' well-deserved affection for Julia Glass's tender, engrossing **The Whole World Over** and Cliff Chase's weirdly wonderful **Winkie**, I would like to mention a few titles that haven't come up on anyone else's radar that I think are really special.

Fiction

Randall Pepper, author of several travel guides, including Lonely Planet books on the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, turns his perceptive eye for local character on the people and places of two extraordinarily eccentric locales in his gut-punching queer noir novel, **Provincetown Follies, Bangkok Blues** (Bleak House Books, \$24.95, www.bleakhousebooks.com). A relentless page-turner, this shoo-in for a Lammy nomination in the mystery category is a deliciously twisty hybrid of *Chinatown* and *The Crying Game* with pinches of *La Cage Aux Folles* and *National Geographic* thrown in for good measure. Tuki Aparecio, Thai drag queen and the toast of P-



Town nightlife, and Michael DeCastro, rugged son of Portuguese fishermen, don't meet cute: Tuki is accused of murdering her millionaire lover, and Michael - a public defender just weeks away from his wedding - begrudgingly takes on the case. Through flashbacks to Tuki's youth in Vietnam and Thailand, replete with trauma, romance, and dazzling descriptions of Bangkok's inner city squalor and riverside splendor, Pepper deepens what could have been a simply terrific court procedural into a complexly terrific piece of literature. Touching on American history, gender identity, and a host of other pithy themes, the author keeps the plot sizzling like a house - or in this case, an arson-torched nightclub - on fire. Toward novel's end, there's one bit of character interpretation that puts a strain on credibility, but by that point, you'll be reading too fast to care.

Poetry

C.A. Conrad, a queer renegade and last-vestige-of-true-American-bohemia, has somehow been missed by much of the gay media. Big mistake. Following a peripatetic Idaho-Texas-Pennsylvania Amish Country boyhood with his wild-eyed single mother, Conrad made his way to Philadelphia in the mid-1980s and took up residence in the sort of fabled flophouse hotel that's been largely erased from the landscape over the subsequent two decades. Snatching bits of poetry from the hallway conversations of his drag queen hooker neighbors, from his work in a group home for the mentally disabled, and from his conflicted inner feelings of personal freedom and social injustice, Conrad began to forge the crooked smile of an artistic sensibility that until recently has only found its way into limited edition chapbooks. Now, his work is finally available to a wide audience in **Deviant Propulsion** (Soft Skull Press, \$13.95, www.softskull.com) which takes only a page to get to Conrad's cackling, radical faerie fantasy of reforming George W. through sexual healing, and quickly hop-scotches through intimate encounters in taxi cabs, French kisses with slices of toast, and close encounters with the Frugal Gourmet and the lead singer of Chumbawamba.

Memoir

For more than 66 far-flung and phantasmagorically improvisational years, Simon Napier-Bell has been a jazz musician in Canada, a door-to-door salesman in Mexico, a feature film editor, the writer of Dusty Springfield's 1966 hit single "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," a manager of pop stars (including the Yardbirds, and Rupert Everett in an ill-fated 90s attempt to launch a music career), and the resident of a London apartment in which he and his boyfriend could peer out the windows to watch Queen Elizabeth feeding her pet flamingos at Buckingham Palace. As befits the creator of such a rococo "career," Napier-Bell is also one deliciously chatty Cathy. The latest of his three giddy, ego-ecstatic memoirs is the concisely titled **I'm Coming to Take You To Lunch: A Fantastic Tale of Boys, Booze, and How WHAM! Were Sold to China** (Wenner Books, \$14.95, www.simonnapierbell.com). Reading it seems a likely simulacrum of what leisurely

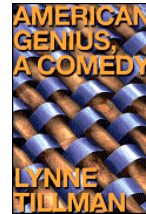
lunching with Napier-Bell would be like: a succession of *bon mots*, travel tales, tangents-upon-tangents, and - amidst a fair share of bitchery - a joyful enthusiasm for life. From the get-go, side notes pop up in profusion, Napier-Bell being the Orville Redenbacher of anecdote. In 1983, he takes on George Michael and Andrew Ridgely and plans to win massive worldwide media for the duo by having them be the first Western pop group to give a concert in Communist China. It takes two years, however, of Chinese adventures, stealthy persuasion, government bribes, and covert C.I.A. intervention (along with diverting junkets into Japan, Thailand, and Hong Kong) to finally pull off the big show. By the time 15,000 Chinese college students are swept up in the strains of "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go" in 1985, George Michael has decided he wants to become a solo act; the breakthrough and the break-up are practically simultaneous. Millions of hoped-for dollars never materialize for Napier-Bell. No matter, though. To Napier-Bell the journey is clearly more important than the destination. His book is quite a trip.

Nonfiction

Butt Book from Taschen is a compendium of the best of the first five years of the pale pink periodical out of Amsterdam that has become a queer contemporary version of Warhol-era *Interview*. The conversational mix of raunch, intellect, artsiness, and silliness is just about perfect and the pictures are all kinds of hot (which means they're not just your standard shiny hairless beauty boys). Editors Jop Van Bennekom and Gert Jonkers are friendly devils who have - despite recent attention from the Tate Modern and a fan base that includes Michael Stipe, Bruce Benderson, Edmund White, and other Big Gay Names - somehow remained un-jaded and un-sold-out; they've got a terrifically Dutch sense of self-possession, humility, and drollness. Full-disclosure: I was a regular contributor in the first few years and have a piece in the book. (www.buttmagazine.com/Issues/4_Eingang.html) *Jim, author of Gladstone's Games to Go, is a writer and creative consultant based in Philadelphia. His debut novel, The Big Book of Misunderstanding, won a Foreword Award, honoring excellence in small press publishing.*

Robert Glück

American Genius: A Comedy, by Lynne Tillman. Tillman started off great and just gets greater. You never need to disagree with what the narrator is saying in *American Genius*, because the narrator will do it for you in the next sentence, or even in the same one. And yet the world seems to pour into this stasis of assertion. I love this book for being so full of the world, for getting what can be said about the world into words. Like Lynne herself, it is the grandest of companions.



Some Phantom/No Time Flat, by Stephen Beachy. Beachy is a visionary. In these twin novellas, he explores madness and crime with the nocturnal lyricism of empty time and space. Beachy's dear criminals reach an exquisite isolation and so does his reader, a non-place where categories collapse, like freedom and confinement, chaos and lucidity, the angelic and demonic. A harsh dream, and we will never wake.

The Romanian, by Bruce Benderson. This book won the Prix de Flore, an important award in France. Benderson brings so much wisdom, observation, sweetness, and nuance to a frantic tale of obsession and adventure. There are the close-ups of total intimacy paired with the long shots of history, of a country in ruins, as our hero Bruce pursues his dreamboat Romulous through different kinds of wreckage.

A Separate Reality, by Robert Marshall. Describing the plot of this book does not do it justice, and maybe that is true of any terrific novel. It is about growing up gay and Jewish in a middle-class family in the seventies. The whole book is rather calm; it calmly renders an era with a Proustian leisure, yet it is also a page-turner. The delectation of an exquisite banality, the slow earnest longing that has not quite found its proper object, the humid passions and blind spots of the nuclear unit, the young fag as poet, as perfectionist, whose sensibility and aspirations are pitched so high - I experienced wave after wave of recognition (though my family was not so peaceful or so cultivated).

Winkie, by Clifford Chase. This is a beautiful and moving novel about a stuffed bear accused of terrorism. Winkie attains a kind of sainthood, as well as a new gender, by the end of the book. I was reminded of *The Bunny Book*, a novel by John D'Hondt, a lost classic of literature that deals with physical suffering, and loss.

Adverbs, by Daniel Handler. Handler is the renowned author Lemony Snicket, of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* fame. My kid knew all their publication dates, and we

flew down to the bookstore the instant they appeared. Once he carefully asked me, "Are these books classics?" And I assured him that they are. Another time he said, "Dad, I love women who are evil and into fashion," and I assured him that we all do. He was referring to Esme Squalor, one of the terrific villains in the world of the Baudelaire Orphans. It is a world in which any amount of paranoia is justified, where plots and conspiracies go deep, where harm is not mitigated by sunny conclusions. At the same time, the books have an eighteenth-century love of wit and mischief and invention, a glittering surface, and a deep pleasure in the outlandish. I am grateful for these books.

Handler has published other books that I am also grateful for, that also take you on some wild rides, including the twelve-step program as a literary form in *Watch Your Mouth*. The latest is **Adverbs**, called both stories and a novel, but more a kind of fugue or rondo on the theme of romantic love. Characters appear as bystanders in each other's stories, and fall in and out of the book pleasingly. The stories are very elegant, and life is inconclusive, mostly unknowable and messy - and *Adverbs* has a few homo episodes that are really stunning.

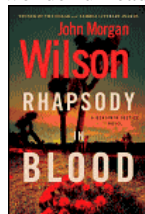
Robert is author of Elements of a Coffee Service, Jack the Modernist, Margery Kempe, and, most recently, Denny Smith. He and Brian Bouldrey gab together here: www.lodestarquarterly.com/work/138.

Ken Harrison

Since I started being a publisher, it seems as if I read fewer books put out by other publishing houses. Although I did read some gay books, the majority of books I did get to read were Harlequin, Silhouette, and Red Dress romances, which are short and easy to plow through.

As it turns out, two of the three gay titles I read have already been discussed: **I Am Not Myself These Days** by Josh Kilmer-Purcell and **Queen of the Oddballs** by Hillary Carlip. Both are fantastic must-reads for any and all.

Then there is the one book I was eager to read, which turned out to be a bit of a disappointment. That book was the latest in the Benjamin Justice series, **Rhapsody in Blood**, by John Morgan Wilson. I discovered the Benjamin Justice series a few years ago and turned a few of my close friends on to this series. The first four are wonderful reads, then Benjamin Justice starts drinking less and becomes less of a dark, tortured character, and the books begin to lose some of their attraction. And in the latest Justice novel this is all too true. Although Justice is still himself and his sidekick Alexandra Templeton is with him, he's less morose and has his drinking problem under control. One of the things I loved about Justice was that he had real problems that he was able to work past while solving a mystery. Take that away and a lot of the magic is gone. The story is still good and the mystery well done, but I'm not going to feel so eager to read the next installment. Please, if you like a good mystery, read the first four in this series (*Simple Justice*, *Revision of Justice*, *Justice at Risk*, and *The Limits of Justice*).



The next two books are from 2005, but I read them in 2006. **Hot Target** by Suzanne Brockmann was a fun read. This is a romantic suspense with both dished out in spades. Hot Navy SEAL Cosmo Richter is hired to guard high profile movie producer Jane Mercedes Chadwick. It's the typical romance where he hates her until he learns what she's really all about, but the clinch is that one of the central story lines involves gay FBI agent Jules Cassidy, who is still smarting from the end of a relationship and fighting his attraction to Chadwick's closet case brother. This book was a major drool fest full of intrigue, glamour, and everything that makes romance fun.

My final pick for a fun read is **Do They Wear High Heels in Heaven?** by Erica Orloff. The story revolves around Lily, a divorced woman with two children who is diagnosed with breast cancer. Although this is a heavy topic, it's kept light without avoiding the awful truths about cancer. Although there is some romance for Lily in this book, most of the romance centers on her gay friend Michael. I am not one to cry - and I did not shed a tear while reading this book - but those prone to fits of emotion should keep a box of tissues close by. This book was just wonderful.

Ken is the publisher of Seventh Window Publications, with a focus on romance fiction (including Lawrence Schimel's Two Boys in Love and the just-published Discreet Young Gentleman, by MJ Person), and author of Ten Thick Inches and Bad Behavior. Info: www.seventhwindow.com.

Kevin Killian

Stephen Beachy, **Some Phantom/No Time Flat** (Suspect Thoughts). My amigos Greg Wharton and Ian Phillips put out some fine books this year, but this is the *crème de la crème*, the gold standard of West Coast writing.



Bruce Benderson, **The Romanian: Story of an Obsession** (Tarcher). I have yet to write anything about the magnificence of this book. It just floors me. He is the platinum standard, and so beautifully kempt and torn.

Robin Blaser, **The Fire: Collected Essays** and **The Holy Forest** (both from University of California Press). Blaser, born in Idaho, educated at Berkeley, and now a citizen of Canada (and the world) celebrates his 80th birthday with sumptuous editions of his collected critical work and a new volume of collected poems. Hooray, hooray!

Hart Crane, **Complete Poems and Selected Letters** (Library of America). Perhaps silly of me to recommend this new edition of a classic poet, while there are so many new books to talk about, but try it - you might love it.

Landis Everson, **Everything Preserved: Poems 1955-2005** (Graywolf Press). In other poetry news, the beautiful young poet of the Berkeley Renaissance, the man whom Duncan, Spicer, and Blaser all wanted, stopped writing in 1962 and began again only recently, under the spell of a young muse and a newly appreciative audience. The backstage story of the year.

Michael Friedman, **Martian Dawn** (Turtle Point Press). The Colorado-based poet has written his first novel, a sophisticated mashup of Hollywood satire, Eastern wisdom, Russian émigrés, and long slow comfortable screwing aboard international space shuttles on their way to luxury Mars hotels.

Martin Hyatt's **A Scarecrow's Bible** (Suspect Thoughts). Just the kind of book I usually can't stand, but young Martin Hyatt pulls off a *coup d'écriture* with this sad tale of love, loss, and last minutes in a not-so-long-ago Louisiana wasteland.

Chris Kraus, **Torpor** (MIT/Semiotext[e]). Kraus's writing keeps getting better and better and her new novel *Torpor* seems to me the postmodern equivalent of books like Isherwood's *The World in the Evening* or Rebecca West's *The Birds Fall Down* - books which wanted to reveal the entire politics of an era - grand ambitious books with breathtaking narratological schemes.

Matty Lee, **35 Cents** (Suspect Thoughts). It's a hard knock life, it is, but Matty Lee tells it with the clearest eyes in the world; you can see what made him a hit on the streets.

Janis and Richard Londrville, **The Most Beautiful Man in the World, Paul Swan from Wilde to Warhol** (University of Nebraska Press). The ace biographical team turns their attention to Paul Swan, the modernist painter who was also the American Nijinski and lived into old age, queening it up out of a studio at Carnegie Hall.

Derek McCormack, **Christmas Days**, illustrated by "Seth" (House of Anansi Press). Richard, you are Canadian and can you forgive my lateness in recommending the books of your brethren? I am still reading *Christmas Days* (2005) aloud to my students and in fact, to strangers on the subway. I should also like to say a big word about Montreal-based Peter Dube's novel **Hovering World** (DC Books) from 2002. I may be slowing down, but I can still smell genius a mile away.

Patrick Moore, **Tweaked** (Kensington). Along with Matty Lee's book (above) and Ed White's **My Lives** (see below) this is the memoir I enjoyed most in 2006 - what seems in retrospect to have been the year of the memoir. Finally a book that shows off why people become addicts in the first place, because it's such a rush - at least initially.

Scott O'Brien, **Kay Francis: "I Can't Wait to be Forgotten"** (BearManor Media). I couldn't get this far into the alphabet without singing the praises of this fine book, which unleashes the "Kay Fwancis" in all of us. Kay, you will never be forgotten,

you had both brains and beauty.

Chris Packard, **Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature** (Palgrave Macmillan). Packard has trod the range and has the saddle sores to prove it. His research into hidden pockets of U.S. Western literature will show you why they didn't fret if their chaps had no ass.

R.T. Raichev, **The Hunt for Sonya Dufrette** (Carroll & Graf), the triumphant return of the traditional Golden Age detective story.

Lawrence Rinder, **Art Life, Selected Writings 1991-2005** (Gregory R. Miller and Company). Veteran curator and educator Rinder produced probably the best-edited book of the year, where every account means something and ties together, accruing meaning and power as it goes along.

K.E. Silva, **A Simple Distance** (Akashic Books). First novel of a young woman's journey from a Caribbean island, haunted by family ties and taboos, into the perilous world of present-day San Francisco. A lover and a mother fight an epic battle of fealty over Jean Sousa's soul.

Michelle Tea, **Rose of No Man's Land** (MacAdam Cage). The poet of Mogsfield, Massachusetts, trains her amazing eye and her big heart on a romance between two young girls who between them seem to embody all the words of love that have ever been spoken.

Lynne Tillman, **American Genius** (Soft Skull). Here's another book that has kept me reading and reading, utterly fascinated by Tillman's writing. I'm reading it with a raw compulsive energy and envy. How I wish I could write as beautifully as Lynne Tillman!

Edmund White, **My Lives** (Ecco Press). As we all know now, *My Lives* impresses as much for what it doesn't do as what it does. It would have been supremely easy for White to give us one of those "and then as I told Vera Nabokov" memoirs, for he has known everyone and really listened closely; instead he writes as though inventing the entire genre for the very first time - the way Augustine or Rousseau must have felt, on fire with new freedom.

Kevin writes poetry, prose, and plays, is author most recently of Little Men and I Cry Like a Baby, editor of The Wild Creatures, a collection of short stories by the late Sam D'Alessandro, and is working on a book about Kylie Minogue. Author info: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/killian>.

Aaron Krach

It's a trend (I think) to write mature gay fiction, meaning novels about grown men dealing with relationship issues as opposed to sweet, fresh romance or dramatic break-ups. But Christopher Bram's **Exiles in America** did it best for me this year. Bram tackled this unruly subject with humor and touching generosity toward his characters. At one point in the book Bram compares writing about relationships to writing in white ink on white paper. Well, if that's true, Bram's white ink is rather diverse in density, opacity, and texture. His ink has plenty of shadows and glittery highlights, too. *Exiles* ends with a thorny, awkward little knot, which I am still struggling with. But the few weeks of 2006 I spent reading *Exiles in America* were very well spent.

Aaron is author of the novel Half-Life, an editor at Cargo magazine, and an artist and photographer. Author info:

www.absolutewrite.com/freelance_writing/aaron_krach.htm.

Timothy J. Lambert

In the past I've read lists like this and thought, "They're just promoting their friends' books." So I'll be completely honest and say, yes, I've mainly read my friends' books this year, which include **When the Stars Come Out** by Rob Byrnes, **A Coventry Christmas** by Becky Cochrane, **Mardi Gras Mambo** by Greg Herren, **Through It Came Bright Colors** by Trebor Healey - published in 2003, yes, but I think it got a new cover this year - and **What I Did Wrong** by John Weir. John Weir is more of a pen pal



than a friend, I suppose, because he insists on living so far away. I also read **A Scarecrow's Bible** by Martin Hyatt, who isn't a friend, per se, but we did sit on the same sofa once.

Next, I'm going to finally read **Alternatives to Sex** by Stephen McCauley, whom I've never met, which is probably for the best, because I admire him greatly and I'd probably turn into a blathering idiot. Because of my involvement in **Best Gay Erotica 2007**, I've been hounding Alana Noel Voth for more stories to read, and luckily for me she's complied with my requests. I think her writing is a prime example of the difference between erotica and porn - that is, why erotica is considered literature.

Anyway, that's my list. Yes, they're books by my friends and acquaintances, but they're all good writers. "Good" is a superlative that often gets shoved aside in favor of flashier words like "fantastic" or "stupendous." But I think "good" best describes these writers, as well as their work.

Timothy selected the "bests" for Best Gay Erotica 2007, is one-quarter of "Timothy James Beck" (Someone Like You, It Had to Be You, I'm Your Man, He's The One), one half of Cochrane Lambert (Three Fortunes in One Cookie), the co-author with Becky Cochrane of The Deal, and co-editor, also with Becky Cochrane, of the forthcoming romance anthology, Moonlight & Roses: Men Romancing Men. He blogs at <http://timothyjlambert.livejournal.com>. For reading suggestions from Alana Noel Voth, check her blog, <http://alananoel.typepad.com>.

Douglas A. Martin

My favorite books of the year:

The Last Time I Saw You, Rebecca Brown (City Lights)

Up is Up But So Is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene, 1974-1992,

edited by Brandon Stosuy (New York University Press)

Pornocracy, Catherine Breillat (Jovian)

American Genius, A Comedy, Lynne Tillman (Soft Skull)

Works 1963-2006, Tracey Emin (Rizzoli)

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, edited by Julie Ault (Steidl/dangin).

Douglas is author of Outline of My Lover, They Change the Subject, and Branwell:

A Novel of the Bronte Brother. Coming in 2008: Last Early Poems and a lyric prose work, Your Body Figured.

Jesse Montegudo

Since I stopped writing "The Book Nook" earlier this year, I haven't been keeping up with the latest and greatest in LGBTQ literature. The end of so many LGBTQ bookstores and publications depresses me, which is why I rejoice that you and **BTWOF** are still around to promote good LGBTQ literature.

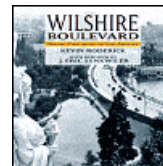
On a positive note, 2006 has brought us some great works of LGBTQ history, dealing with people, places, and groups that have been neglected in the past. Books like **Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement**, by Marcia M. Gallo (Carroll & Graf) and **Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation**, by James T. Sears (Harrington Park) are long-overdue histories of the early "homophile" and "gay liberation" movements; as is Steve Endean's posthumous memoir, **Bringing Lesbian and Gay Rights Into the Mainstream: Twenty Years of Progress** (Harrington Park). But if I had to pick a "book of the year," I'd pick **Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians**, by Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons (Basic Books). From the very beginning, LGBTQ histories have centered on New York City - this year's *Gay Power*, by David Eisenbach, is just the latest New York-centric history - thus ignoring the many contributions that Los Angeles (and San Francisco) have made to our communities. In *Gay L.A.*, Faderman and Timmons make up for years of historical neglect by writing a book that is revealing, thought-provoking, educational, entertaining and inspiring.

Jesse is the semi-retired author of "The Book Nook."

Max T. Pierce

Growing up in Texas, I knew at an early age that my future lay in Los Angeles. For those who *California Dreamin'* is not becoming a reality, armchair travelers, and students of queer culture, I offer up three recommendations:

From 2005, **Wilshire Boulevard, Grand Concourse of Los Angeles**, by Kevin Roderick and J. Eric Lynxwiler (Angel City



Press) is the romantic Los Angeles small town boys like me were weaned on. Chock-full of vintage photos and reproductions of postcards and matchbook covers, this is a road trip from downtown to the Pacific along the famous street. The bad news is the book isn't gay inclusive; the first location of the Gay Community Services Center (a faded Victorian, long demolished) at Wilshire and Union is ignored.

The good news is that recently published was **Gay L.A.**, by Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons (Basic Books). This meaty, academically inclined work studies the City of Angels' political, economic, and cultural heritage from the pueblo days through the end of the twentieth century. I was fascinated to learn how early acceptance devolved into one of brutality and discrimination, yet like any good Hollywood story, there's the cycle of rise, fall, rise and fall. Lesbians and gay men are given equal coverage, and although there's the requisite Hollywood 'who is' section, it's mercifully limited to names familiar only to die-hard vintage movie fans. I got a kick out of the locations of long gone bars and trysting spots: for example, who knew the old hotel on Hollywood Boulevard (and now the Church of Scientology's offices) once housed a gay bar in its basement? With addresses and place names, I've got the makings of a Sunday afternoon scavenger hunt.

After writing a popular series of books specifically for those die-hard movie fans, author Richard Lamparski could have been the subject of his own *Whatever Became Of?...* chapter. Back in Texas, I devoured his books one by one until they abruptly ended in 1989. Word on the street was he'd died, retired, or had become eccentrically reclusive. With the release of **Hollywood Diary** (BearManor Media), the first two claims can be laid to rest. While I'd assumed Lamparski was, at the minimum, gay friendly, and maybe more, this slim volume begins with the author driving none other than Quentin Crisp around the city in 1980. Lamparski relates tales of encounters with Our Gang's Darla Hood, Patsy Kelly, and Zeppo Marx and more (he specializes in the obscure) with a decidedly gay sensibility floating throughout.

Gay L.A. informs us that by 1969 Los Angeles was home to over 160 bars catering to gays and lesbians. Today, there are less than a handful, and even fewer are businesses that specifically identify as queer. Real estate prices continue driving everyone but the wealthiest out of the traditional gay enclaves. While we make needed inroads of equality, I question the price paid via the growing loss of community. I'll answer my question with a quote from the opening credits of a film crafted by the forebears of my adopted hometown. "Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A civilization gone with the wind." These books capture the dream.

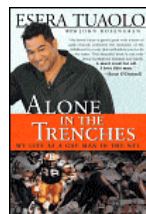
Max is the author of the forthcoming gothic mystery-romance The Master of Seacliff (Haworth Press); author info: www.maxpierce.com.

Jim Provenzano

Wrapping up ten years of sports writing this year, several books about LGBT athletes were sent to me, which proved informative and fascinating.

D.M. Bordner's **Roller Babes** (iUniverse), an affectionate fictional account through the early days of women's roller derby, included a lesbian romance between two skaters, and was written by a gay man who's followed the "sport" with fascination since childhood. This independent self-published book just got a film option, too.

Another of my favorite independent authors is Randy Boyd, and his massive (720 pages!), ebullient romantic epic **Walt Loves the Bearcat** (West Beach Books), which takes off from football stadium to outer space in recounting an unstoppable romance between a football jock and a cheerleader.



With two autobiographies penned by gay former NFL players, Esera Tuaolo's **Alone in the Trenches: My Life as a Gay Man in the NFL** (Sourcebooks) and Roy Simmons's **Out of Bounds: My Life In and Out of the NFL Closet** (Carroll & Graf), never has the struggle of closeted men in sports dealing with addiction and the pressures of pro sports been so thoroughly brought out into the open. After interviewing and meeting both men, it was also a thrill in 2006 to give Tuaolo a private tour of the exhibit I curated at the GLBT Historical Society (I'll treasure the football Tuaolo signed), and to hear Tuaolo sing at Gay Games VII's opening ceremonies.

It's great when friends write books, but even better when they're good. Among those is Trebor Healey's **Sweet Son of Pan** (Suspect Thoughts), a sweet, sexy, reverent

poetry collection penned by my favorite pagan stud muffin. And yes, as promised, I first read parts of it aloud, while naked and outdoors with another man. The poems proved a perfect nature loving aphrodisiac!

K.M. Soehnlein's **You Can Say You Knew Me When** (Kensington) explored both San Francisco's beat era and a contemporary gay resident's foibles in maintaining a relationship while searching for his father's lost years here in the Bay Area. Appropriately, I started reading Karl's second novel just days after seeing the famous Jack Kerouac *On the Road* first draft scrolls when they were exhibited at the San Francisco Public Library.

Felice Picano's **Fred in Love** (University of Wisconsin Press) told the tale of a cat he owned while living in New York City. While I read it with pleasure, it made a perfect gift for my mom, a former New Yorker whose current cat closely resembles the book's cover "model."

Speaking of New York, Christopher Bram's **The Lives of the Circus Animals** (Harper Perennial) thoroughly captured my attention and affection. I alternately sympathized with the struggling Manhattan actors and the beleaguered theatre critic, having been both at times. Bram's witty prose never fails to please. Another darker yet at times funny novel, Robert Westfield's **Suspension** (Harper Perennial) captures a specific post-9/11 ennui with a few intriguing plots of conspiracy, violence, and the ambiance of dread through a series of odd plot twists.

On my flight to and from Chicago's Gay Games VII, I read Erik Larson's compelling **The Devil in the White City** (Vintage) about the phenomenon of developing the World's Fair, and a bizarre serial killer. That part interested me less than the historical accounts of the city of Chicago becoming transformed in preparation for the fair. Passing some of the sights mentioned in the book while in Chicago made it all the more vivid.

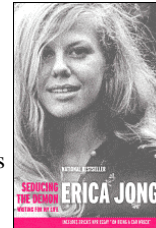
For pleasure, and a bit of nostalgic bittersweet gay history, Joshua Gamson's **The Fabulous Sylvester** (Picador) tells the life story of the disco era's legendary singer who made us feel mighty real. For a time during his all-too-short life, he lived only blocks from my current home in San Francisco. After finishing the book, I bought a copy of the live concert he gave at Herbst Theatre.

A special find was **Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend** (Harper Collins). At nearly 1200 pages, this massive tome lists expansive descriptions and is the perfect reference guide for writers like me who like to weave old stories into new ones. Gods and goddesses, symbols, rituals, and spirit animals are all explained in fascinating detail.

Jim is the author of PINS and Monkey Suits; author info: www.myrmidude.com.

Lev Raphael

Seducing the Demon, by Erica Jong: Jong's honesty, power, and wit make this a unique memoir and an inspiring book about the writing life.



The Kill, by Emile Zola: *Bonfire of the Vanities avant la lettre*, filled with sex and money-madness. The stunning new translation is a killer.

The Man Who Saved Britain, by Simon Winder: A hilarious combination of memoir, history of England's decline, and a study of Bondmania, with great stories about Fleming.

Grief, by Andrew Holleran: A dazzling meditation on the losses we all will face, a deft comedy, and a vision of Washington, D.C. unlike any other. As powerful as anything he's written.

Shalimar the Clown, by Salman Rushdie: Thriller, romance, spy novel, and a lament over Kashmir's tragedy, this is big, bold, and stunning at every turn. *Lev's next book, Hot Rocks, a Nick Hoffman Mystery, is due in April; Writing a Jewish Life and Secret Anniversaries of the Heart were new in 2006. Author info: www.levraphael.com.*

Rob Stephenson

Here are the six I thought of first. Does that make them the best?

Fiction reads:

Absolute Friends, by John Le Carre: Political commentary in the guise of a spy novel about two double agents from different countries. I read this after several recommendations and friends gave me their copy. I expected some updated James Bond thingy, but no, instead of good guys versus bad guys, we have an altogether different, carefully drawn view of the world we think we know.



Dark Dominion: A rare old novel by the incomparable Marianne Hauser, published in 1947, about an amateur painter from the Swiss Alps who visits and observes the strange marriage of his sister and her therapist husband. The three of them live together for several months in the couple's high-rise apartment in NYC. My mind could not put this book down until long after I had finished reading it. Her **The Collected Short Fiction of Marianne Hauser** came out a couple of years ago - subtle and varied in scope and style. I highly recommend them. Her introductory essay is priceless. Not many 90-year-old women talk so candidly and cleverly about what their sex lives are like!

The Glass Bees, by Ernst Jünger: Published in 1957. Supremely, quirkily futuristic novel about a war veteran, desperate for money, who goes for a job interview at the headquarters of a powerful inventor of new technologies and is forced to re-examine his entire outlook on life after seeing things he had never imagined possible. Jünger predicted a future that is eerily similar to our present.

Nonfiction reads:

The Romanian, by Bruce Benderson: Fascinating memoir about the author's difficult relationship with a remarkable hustler, gloriously intertwined with the trouble-ridden story of King Carol of Romania and his Jewish mistress.

Hatred of Capitalism: A Semiotext(e) Reader: Essays and fiction by a lovely gang of radicals about the state of the world inside and out. Bits and pieces from the many fine publications by this press.

About Writing, by Samuel R. Delany: A collection of brilliant essays and interviews on writing. Challenges abound! The book includes four inspired letters that he wrote to aspiring authors.

Rob is a writer, composer, and visual artist living in NYC; his work has been published in a wide variety of anthologies and magazines, including [Blithe House Quarterly](#), Velvet Mafia, Dangerous Families, and Best Gay Erotica 2003. He co-edited the erotic anthology Tough Guys with Bill Brent, and his music compositions can be sampled here: <http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=94530915>.

Mattilda, aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore



I finally got around to reading Kevin Bentley's **Wild Animals I Have Known**, his diaries about living, socializing, cruising, and fucking near Polk Street from the late 70s to the late 90s. His stories are filled with the sexual hopes of a different time, joyful and even innocent - they reminded me of the possibilities for playful connection through slutty sex that often seem so lacking in the contemporary gay cruising world of assimilation, shame, the internet, and addiction - bring those hopes back! Then I read Bentley's collection of essays, **Let's Shut Out the World** - I especially liked the title piece, so many layers of beauty and connection and betrayal. Did I mention that the writing about AIDS in *Wild Animals I Have Known* is especially careful, spare, and of course heartbreaking? We need more of this.

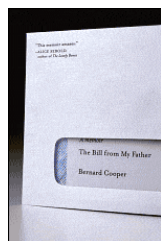
Michelle Tea's new novel, **Rose of No Man's Land**, is a mesmerizing take on the horrors and highs at that point between childhood and the end of the world. Just when you think you've settled in for a comfortable tale of being uncomfortable, Trisha, the narrator, does crystal for the first time, with her new friend Rose, and they're out in this dinosaur-themed miniature golf course in the suburbs of Boston, and they start to make out, and it's like everything from there to the end is one

extended revelation filtered through breakdown. It's tremendous.

Jennifer Natalya Fink's **V** doesn't come out until January, but oh, the complexity of themes packed into such compact, precise, and playful language! Who else could write a novel where much of the tension comes from the disagreements between a hat and a gun, and where one of the culminating scenes occurs when an anorexic teenaged girl ends up cruising the men's room? All of this within a stunning take on capitalism, development, religion, desire, and coming-of-age crises.

Did I mention T Cooper's **Lipshitz Six, or Two Angry Blondes**, a complicated take on Jewish family history, intergenerational trauma, and the perils of assimilation? Or Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's incredible anecdote about accidentally running into Oliver North in Honduras, contained in **Blood on the Border: a Memoir of the Contra War**? And for an incredibly dense, awe-inspiring, and illuminating look into the process by which immigrants to the U.S. became "white," check out David Roediger's **Working Toward Whiteness**, which weaves together a tremendous variety of sources - historical, sociological, literary, journalistic - oral histories, autobiographies, teaching manuals, movies, to tell so many complicated, critical, challenging, and controversial stories. The result is simply breathtaking. I especially like the way the book focuses on assimilation as both whitening as well as Americanizing and its insistence on the messiness of racial categories - Roediger's analysis of the New Deal as both white and whitening, as well as his tracking of the exclusionary politics within unions, is particularly startling and compelling. *Mattilda is author of the novel Pulling Taffy and editor of the anthologies Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender & Conformity, That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation, Dangerous Families: Queer Writing on Surviving, and Tricks and Treats: Sex Workers Write About Their Clients. He selected and introduced the stories in Best Gay Erotica 2006. Author info: www.mattbernsteinsycamore.com.*

Jim Van Buskirk



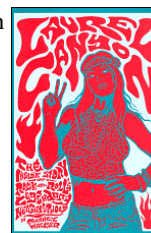
Perhaps it's because I have just seen my mother for the first time in over 20 years, but I am currently fascinated with memoirs that deal with gay men's coming to terms with their parents' legacy. Three stellar examples, all published this year, are Bernard Cooper's **The Bill from My Father**, Kevin Jennings's **Mama's Boy, Preacher's Son**, and Jonathan Silin's **My Father's Keeper**. All three of these well-written accounts, while stylistically unique, present a thoughtful and thought-provoking entrée into these men's perspectives on their aging or deceased parents, and by extension into how those relationships change as we mature and face our own mortality.

Another entry in this genre is British playwright Alan Bennett's **Untold Stories**, a collection of assorted autobiographical sketches, essays, and criticism, in which he somewhat elliptically paints a portrait of his relationships with his family of origin. While these titles may at first seem less than uplifting reading material, they are in fact humorous, poignant, enlightening, stimulating, and important works, ultimately eliciting as much about the readers' relationships as about the writers.

Jim is co-author of Gay By the Bay (with Susan Stryker) and Celluloid San Francisco (with Will Shank), and co-editor with Jim Tushinski of Identity Envy: Wanting To Be Who We Are Not, Creative Nonfiction by Queers. Author info: www.jimvanbuskirk.com.

Dave White

I love **Laurel Canyon** by Michael Walker (Faber and Faber). It's an exhaustive account of the music scene that took place in a very specific part of the Hollywood Hills in the 1960s and 70s, starting with the Byrds and Mama Cass and Joni Mitchell and ending with everyone on cocaine and acting like assholes and deserving to be mowed down by punk rock. It's even better for me because I live five minutes away from history I had paid only a little attention to until recently. It makes driving through the canyon less irritating now because instead of worrying that Jason Priestly will be driving the next out-of-control car coming around the bend, I fix on the houses and wonder which ones famous people shot up in.



The other book I loved this year was the next installment in the pocket-sized 33 1/3 book series. This one is called **69 Love Songs** (Continuum); it's a mini-encyclopedia

of all things related to the 1999 three-CD album of the same name by the Magnetic Fields. Written by sometime-Field LD Beghtol, it's like taking a microscope to a really delicious cookie and realizing that all the individual crumbs have weird fact-filled stories and tangential observations about cookiedom to tell you about.

And, finally, I think Ian Svenonius's **The Psychic Soviet** (Drag City) is the sassiest book in America. Argue with me about these things at www.imdavewhite.com. You'll be bested.

Dave is author of Exiles in Guyville, a film reviewer for www.movies.com, a contributor to the Advocate and Instinct, a columnist for www.MSNBC.com, a sometime DJ, and blogs at: <http://djmrswwhite.livejournal.com>.

Gerard Wozek



My favorite queer book this year is a book of - gasp - poetry! Trebor Healey's collection of visionary verse, **Sweet Son of Pan** (Suspect Thoughts Press) delivers on its promise of pagan promptings, erotic love spells, and sweaty incantations to the cloven-hoofed god of fertility. Healey's project here is to restore the broken bond between men and celebrate the carnal impulse shared between them as something sacred and life affirming. Reading Healey aloud is to smudge the air with an earful of ecstasy! The book also gets my vote for most erotic cover of 2006, with its gorgeous tattooed satyr planted amid swirling dragonflies and shooting flames.

My runner up for the year has to be Kevin Jennings's touching memoir, **Mama's Boy, Preacher's Son: A Memoir of Becoming a Man** (Beacon Press), which very courageously tells the story of what it's like to be the gay son of a Southern Baptist preacher. The book is a testament to moving beyond guilt and shame and reclaiming an authentic life on your own terms. The work Jennings does with helping students reconcile with their sexual identities is laudable! I can't wait to read more of him.

Gerard is a poet (Dervish), fiction, and prose writer whose most recent book is Postcards from Heartthrob Town: A Gay Man's Travel Tales. Author info:

www.gerardwozek.com.



Kind Words for Kate

William Mann's **Kate: The Woman Who Was Hepburn** (Holt), made it to at least three best-of-the-year lists. *The New York Times*, somewhat opaquely, wrote: "Mann's biography takes some complicated sexual algebra into account." The *Washington Post* avoids the L-word, but less enigmatically:

"Though Hepburn emerges as a willful fame-seeker in *Kate*, Mann is never less than respectful and even-handed when discussing aspects of her life she may have preferred stay in the shadows. [Her] cosmopolitan circle could certainly be fodder for a more salacious account, but Mann handles the material with clear-eyed equanimity... Mann offers a corrective to the hagiography that has often passed as her personal history (up to and including her own memoirs), but nonetheless manages to keep intact her image as rebellious icon, screen goddess and American original."



And *Publishers Weekly* said, "This outstanding, splendidly written biography will surely be the definitive version of Hepburn's life for decades to come" - but doesn't say why.



More Love for Fun Home

In addition to Mann's *Kate*, a few queer-connected titles broke into the mainstream roundups for the year; the title with the most glowing accolades (and also a nominee for the second annual Quill Awards) is Alison Bechdel's **Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic**.

The most high-profile praise is in the year-end issue of *Time* magazine, which put the book number 1 on its Top 10 List:

"The unlikeliest literary success of 2006 is a stunning memoir about a girl growing up in a small town with her cryptic, perfectionist dad and slowly realizing that a) she is gay and b) he is too. Oh, and it's a comic book: Bechdel's breathtakingly smart commentary duets with eloquent line drawings. Forget genre and sexual orientation: this is a masterpiece about two people who live in the same house but different worlds, and their mysterious debts to each other."

From the *Los Angeles Times*:

"In this graphic novel, Bechdel re-creates her difficult childhood, using her relationship with her father - a closeted English teacher and funeral director who committed suicide after she came out to him - as a lens through which to explore her own sexuality and identity. Densely drawn and subtly written, this is an example of graphic storytelling at its most profound."

Except it's not a novel!

New York magazine put Alison's book on its Top 10 list, along with the likes of Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*), Alice Munro (*The View from Castle Rock*), and Claire Messud (*The Emperor's Children*):

"Each year, one graphic novelist gets crowned 'the next Art Spiegelman.' And you don't read his book, because it actually seems kind of boring. Don't make that mistake with Bechdel. One of the best memoirs of the decade, *Fun Home* tells the story of her closeted father, pairing visuals and storytelling in a way that is at once hyper-controlled and utterly intimate... Alice Munro came up with a new kind of memoir, and so did Alison Bechdel."

Publisher's Weekly liked it too: "In this haunting memoir, Bechdel examines her closeted father's homosexuality and destructive lies while learning to accept her own lesbianism."

Salon, in one of its several assorted Best of 2006 lists, dubbed *Fun Home* **Best Nonfiction Debut**:

"Alison Bechdel calls her graphic memoir a 'family tragicomic,' though the story in a lesser artist's hands would probably have come out simply sad. The book is an investigation of her own childhood, spent in the ornate Victorian house her father obsessively restored and maintained, and the way her understanding of that childhood was overturned after she came out to her parents at 19. The return whammy, delivered by her mom, was that her father had a lifelong history of affairs with men, including some of the teenage boys in the small Pennsylvania town where their family had lived for generations. A few weeks later, her father was killed in a highway accident that Bechdel believes was a form of suicide. Bechdel's years of drawing a serial comic strip (the divine *Dykes to Watch Out For*) have honed her ability to convey oceans of feeling in a single image, and the feelings are never simple; *Fun Home* shimmers with regret, compassion, annoyance, frustration, pity, and love - usually all at the same time and never without a pervasive, deeply literary irony about the near-impossible task of staying true to yourself, and to the people who made you who you are."

And, in other national honors, Bechdel's book was anointed Best Graphic Book by *USA Today*, the number one nonfiction pick on *Entertainment Weekly's* Best of 2006 list, and made the Best of 2006 list for *People* magazine.

Whew....

(Ed. note: *BTWOF* publisher Carol Seajay, now living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has alerted us that the *London Times* has named *Fun Home* #10 on their Top 10 Best Books of 2006 list. Their review: www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,923-2504697,00.html.)

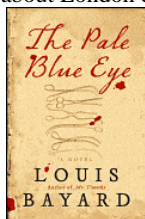
Praise From Other Mainstream Presses

Besides *Fun Home*, the *L.A. Times* also liked **Gay L.A.** (which was on that newspaper's bestseller list for a spell):

"In this 'meticulously researched history' of Los Angeles from its earliest days to the present, the authors maintain that this city has had a greater influence than other major American metropolises - San Francisco and New York, for instance - on the gay movement's development over the years."

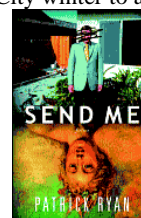
And the *L.A. Times* also liked **The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million**, by Daniel Mendelsohn: "The author's epic journey to understand what happened to members of his mother's family in the Holocaust, taking him from family stories and old letters to explorations on the Internet and eventually to the streets of Poland, in search of anyone who might remember his lost relatives," said the paper's anonymous reviewer.

The *Washington Post* favorites, three fiction and one memoir, were **The Night Watch**, by Sarah Waters: "Told backward, allowing us to know the outcome of unrequited love before it falls apart, this is a sophisticated, beautifully written novel about London during World War II," wrote Tracy Chevalier; **The Pale Blue Eye**, by Louis Bayard: "Bayard carries off the miserable locale of the Hudson Valley with an atmospheric darkness worthy of his illustrious subject: Edgar Allan Poe," said Jasper Fforde - a book also selected in [BTWOF/GME #29](#) by Dan Cullinane; **Grief**, by Andrew Holleran (a book that Lev Raphael liked in this issue, and that Kevin Bentley, John Weir, and Don Weise liked in the first installment of BTWOF's 2006 Favorites): "Set in Washington, D.C., this haunting novel takes Holleran's themes - loss, desire, the joy and solace humans derive from their homes and surroundings - and distills them into a heady, bittersweet aperitif," wrote Elizabeth Hand; and **Untold Stories**, by Alan Bennett: "There is probably no other distinguished English man of letters more instantly likable than Bennett," said Michael Dirda of a memoir that James Van Buskirk also liked in this issue.



The online magazine *Salon* also asked its readers for their favorite books of 2006. K.M. Soehnlein expanded on his praise for Michelle Tea's **Rose of No Man's Land**: "Tea moves from being the sharpest eye on the queer underground (*Valencia*, *Rent Girl*) to the torch-carrier of the comic coming-of-age novel. No other book this year had me laughing and wincing in perfect balance at the memory of what it was to be a high school freshman making every exciting wrong choice." And one Alan Roberts really liked Patrick Ryan's debut novel, **Send Me**:

"Reading it transported me from the middle of a New York City winter to a very hot and sticky situation, both weather- and sibling/parental-related, in Central Florida. His simple prose and colorful characters, plucked straight out of Richard Russo land, made *Send Me* a very enjoyable read. Also, the original use of non-linear storytelling put forth by Mr. Ryan was highly effective - I had no idea how it was going to end. But it all made perfect sense once I finished."



And *Publishers Weekly* singled out Spanbauer's **Now is the Hour**: "Spanbauer's superb channeling of 17-year-old Rigby John Klusener's summer of love makes for an unforgettable *bildungsroman*."



Bestsellers From Our Bookstores

I like bestseller lists - they're a great gauge of what people are really buying, as opposed to what the critics (like us, in this and the last *Books To Watch Out For*) are writing about. Here are two that couldn't be more different... December lists, presumably reflecting book sales in November, as well as local authors, book signing appearances, and geographical quirks. I've been cycling through a handful of gay bookstores that post their lists on their websites: Giovanni's Room, Outwrite, Lambda Rising, Little Sisters, mostly. But if there are any bookstore managers receiving *BTWOF* who want to send me their lists, I'll add them to the roster: tattyhill@gmail.com.

Giovanni's Room / Philadelphia

1. *Harvard's Secret Court: The Savage 1920 Purge of Campus Homosexuals*, by William Wright (St. Martin's). Based on the secret records found by the *Harvard Crimson*.
 2. *Discreet Young Gentlemen*, by M. Pearson (Seventh Wind). Period romance.
 3. *Stripped: The Illustrated Male*, a compilation of cartoon art from Bruno Gmunder Verlag.
 4. *Breathe*, by Blair R. Poole (Burrow). A young black man struggles with his demons. Set in Philadelphia.
 5. *Gangsta Daddy*, by Julius (Juliusart). Oversized book of very explicit cartoon art.
 6. *Point to Point Navigation: A Memoir, 1964 to 2006*, by Gore Vidal (Doubleday). Sequel to his *Palimpsest*.
 7. *Mama's Boy, Preacher's Son: A Memoir* by Kevin Jennings (Beacon). Jennings's poignant, razor-sharp memoir describes growing up in poverty in the South, the death of his fundamentalist preacher father when he was eight, and his discovery of a world beyond poverty.
 8. *Deep Sex*, photos by Tom Bianchi (Gmunder). Tom's erotic diary of life with his partner and friends.
- Bookstore info: www.gioannisroom.com. Book descriptions from the bookstores.

Outwrite / Atlanta

1. *I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence*, by Amy Sedaris (Warner Books). America's most delightfully unconventional hostess provides jackpot recipes and solid advice laced with her blisteringly funny take on entertaining - plus four-color photos and enlightening sidebars on everything it takes to pull off a party with extraordinary flair.
2. *Seventy Times Seven*, by Salvatore Sapienza (Southern Tier Editions).
3. *Ask the Fruitcake Lady: Everything You Would Already Know If You Had Any Sense*, by Marie Rudisill (Hyperion). Truman Capote's aunt - also known as the Fruitcake Lady after an appearance on the Jay Leno show where she taught him and Mel Gibson how to make fruitcake - dishes out sassy advice to fans.
4. *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, by Daniel Helminiak (Alamo Square). New edition! Top scholars show that those who perceive Bible passages as condemning homosexuality are being misled by faulty translation and poor interpretation. Helminiak, a respected theologian and a Roman Catholic priest, explains in a clear fashion the fascinating new insights of these scholars.
5. *The Book of Bad Habits*, by Patrick Regan (Andrews McNeel). *The Book of Bad Habits* takes us behind convent walls for a hilarious look at nuns like you've never seen them before. Absolutely authentic, un-retouched vintage photos offer glimpses of nuns at ease and in action. Wry, clever captions complete this unholy alliance of words and pictures. Not to worry, Mother Superior - it's all harmless fun. After all, all pray and no play makes for a very dull day. Nuns with guns! Nuns with pool cues! Nuns with cigarettes, footballs, fire hoses, and flying fists! Holy Mother! Have these sisters lost their religion? Hell, no . . . they're just nuns having fun, and this book catches them in the act. At risk of attracting a lightning bolt from the blue, author Patrick Regan has rifled through the Vatican's photo files and unearthed an eye-opening array of candid snaps of holy sisters doing some rather un-nun-like things. Paired with irreverent (to say the least) text, this book is guaranteed to induce "church giggles" of the highest order.
6. *Lesbian Sex 101: 101 Lesbian Lovemaking Positions*, by Jude Schell (Hylas Publishing). The essential book on lovemaking, woman to woman.
7. *Running With Scissors*, by Augusten Burroughs (Picador).
8. *Walk Like a Man*, by Laurinda Brown (Q-Boro Books). Lesbian erotica.
9. *Inside Out: Straight Talk from a Gay Jock*, by Mark Tewskbury (John Wiley).
10. *Penis Pokey: The Adult Board Book*, by Christopher Behrens (Quirk Books). This book contains no nudity. No profanity. No sexual material of any kind. And yet it just might be the most obscene thing we've ever published! *Penis Pokey* is an illustrated board book with a large die-cut hole in its center. Every spread features a dazzling full-color illustration with one thing missing - a banana, perhaps, or a fire hose, or a sea serpent. Male readers can complete the illustrations using the talents God has given them.

Are we serious? Yes! Is this funny? Absolutely! Will this be a terrific hit with college students, bachelorette parties, and exhibitionists of all ages? Of course! *Penis Pokey* is far and away the strangest and funniest novelty book we've seen in a long, long time.

Bookstore info: www.outwritebooks.com. Book description from the bookstores.

A Couple of (oops) Corrections

First: Dennis Altman teaches at La Trobe in Melbourne, not Sydney.

And: Trebor Healey's praise for **Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians**, in the last [BTWOF/GM #29](#), quite delightful, was based on early drafts of the book with now-vanished references, writes Stuart Timmons, co-author with Lillian Faderman of the book. "He kindly and carefully read earlier drafts of *Gay L.A.*, and a few details change in some of the stories he cites. To read about the one-legged hustler, Ah Fook and the Swedish sailor, and other compelling queers of L.A.'s past, you may have to wait for the next book."

Here's a revision, by Stuart, of Trebor's original comment, with changes in bold:

L.A. has such a fascinating history, and this book covers so much of it, reminding us that queers have always been present in large numbers and thus a huge part of that history. I love all the little personal anecdotal stories in this book - the early native tales of two-spirited children, the **tragic** hustler boy of Main St., the tale of **the five female impersonators in 1890s** Chinatown, the mystique of Captain Jinx, the **masculine frontierswoman** who passed for a dude, and the numerous twisted Hollywood tales. You realize in reading this book that though L.A. is often popularly eclipsed by SF and NYC when it comes to queer history, it seems likely that a lot more actually happened in L.A. than either of those cities and challenges you to consider that L.A. may in fact be the queerest town on the planet in the final analysis.



They Read, They Write: 3 Letters

Dear BTWOF:

Thanks for the end of the year roundup. Very interesting. It gave me some sense of that community of writers that is slipping away by the nanosecond.

–Perry Brass

Dear BTWOF:

You're an angel for taking the time to pull this together. As always, I loved it. Where else am I going to find out what John Weir or Fenton Johnson are reading?

However, seeing so many titles I've not read - or heard of before, in a lot of instances - I feel as if I've awakened from a really long nap. Where did they all come from?

–Don Weise

Dear BTWOF:

I'm never going to live that circumcision article down. You gave me a good laugh when I saw that link. I wondered why my [website](#) was getting so many hits!

–Matt Rauscher



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