



In this issue...

- [What Self-Pubbing Has Wrought](#)
- [12 Worthy Reads](#)
- [Latino/a Writers Championed](#)
- [Two Writers on Writing](#)
- [Stein & Vidal, Linked Forever](#)
- [Editor at Large](#)
- [Our Bestsellers](#)
- [Something Straight](#)

### 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 Suzanne Corson.

- » [Click here](#) to **subscribe**.
- » [Click here](#) for **more info**.

### The Gay Men's Edition

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.

- » [Click here](#) to **subscribe**.
- » [Click here](#) for **more info**.

### More Books for Women

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.

- » [Click here](#) to **subscribe**.
- » [Click here](#) for **more info**.



### Ad Rates

Check out our ad rates at [btwof.com/misc/ARC.pdf](http://btwof.com/misc/ARC.pdf) or

# It's... Books to Watch Out For!™

## The Gay Men's Edition

Volume 4 Number 1

By Richard Labonte

Several months ago I wrote that the **Gay Men's Edition** of *Books To Watch Out For* would be back on schedule pretty soon. Make that pretty soooooon. But I'm there now, with apologies for the longish breaks between installments. Thirty newsletters in a bit more than four years of what was meant to be a monthly creature isn't quite what was pledged - though I (or others) have commented on more than 500 books since issue number 1. With this issue 31, I aim to keep it regular again.

A new address for sending books and book catalogs is listed at the bottom of this issue, but in case you don't scroll down that far, please note that I'm now at:

Richard Labonté  
Books To Watch Out For  
PO Box 133  
5596 County Rd. 12  
McDonald's Corners, Ontario  
K0G 1M0 Canada  
tattyhill@gmail.com

And in this issue: reviews of 12 mostly self-published or very small-press books that piled up in the past many months; I'll cover another dozen next time. Reviews of 12 of the many dozens books I've read in the same past many months; I'll cover another dozen next time. Two writers write about the travails of being a writer. A new publishing venture for Latino/a writers. Links to a dozen or so queer-lit items of interest. Information about my work as an editor at large for Cleis Press. And a couple of queer bestseller lists...

### They Did It Their Way: 12 Self-Published Titles

I have a weakness for self-published books. I admire the persistence of their writers. I don't always admire the quality of the prose this persistence produces. But the promise inherent in an un-cracked spine, the lure of an attractive cover, and the potential of the first unread page all appeal to the book person that I am.

I judge these books on several levels:

**By their covers.** Don't laugh at the cliché - a smart cover conveys in a glance what a book might mean to the curious, cautious reader, more so if the book is face-out on a bookstore shelf, or one of many piled on a new-arrivals table; less so, perhaps, as an online image. A good cover can tell you a lot about a story's story, even when the book can't be handled as a tangible object. So I've graded the covers.

**By their design.** Words matter most, but the "feel" of a book is important: the quality of the cover stock, the look and spacing of the type on a page, the margins - intrinsic qualities that a great story can surmount, but elements that can tip a so-what book to so-so. So I've added a word about "book feel."

**By their typos.** This is a bad thing. I miss good proofreading. Spell-check is no substitute. To two too, peak pique peek, but butt - all examples from books I've read recently. Which doesn't explain the persistence of heroine (go girl!) for heroin. I'm not going to single out any of the books reviewed below, because I didn't make notes - but none of them is without flaut...I mean, fault.

And of course, ultimately, by the quality of the writing and of the story the writing tells.

contact [Leigh](#) for additional information and reservations.



### Housekeeping

If you want to change your BTWOF email address or other contact information, [click here](#) to update:

- » your subscriber profile
- » whatever has changed.



### Finding BTWOF

BTWOF is published by Carol Seajay and Books To Watch Out For.

[www.BooksToWatchOutFor.com](http://www.BooksToWatchOutFor.com)

Email: [Editor@BTWOF.com](mailto:Editor@BTWOF.com)

PO Box 882554

San Francisco, CA 94188.

415.642.9993.

Send books for review consideration for the **Gay Men's Edition** directly to Richard Labonte at  
PO Box 133  
5596 County Rd. 12  
McDonald's Corners  
Ontario  
K0G 1M0  
Canada.

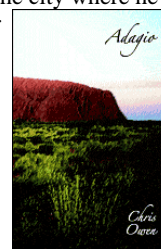
Books for the **Lesbian Edition** should be sent to the San Francisco address.



Not all the books in the roundup that follows, received over the several months of my hiatus, are self-published; a few are from smaller presses, and sometimes the presence of a professional eye is apparent. But just as often, the amateurs do a pretty good job. Books from, um, real publishers, are noted with an asterisk...

\***Adagio**, by Chris Owen (Casperian Books, \$15, 9781934081037)

Young man on the loose, younger man enters his life, romance ensues - but not without a lot of trauma. Canadian lad Jason Stuart, a semi-successful artist, has been living in Australia for half a decade, but he's never ventured far out of Sydney, the city where he landed - and where he worked as a hooker for a spell, until taken under the wing of an older mentor. But the time has come for a "walkabout" in the Australian Outback, so Jason packs up his paints and some canvasses and hits the road, soon to intersect with 19-year-old Ryan, another Canadian hitching around Australia before returning to school. Owen handles the dance of their hesitant but mutual sexual attraction with authentic flair, and the trauma surrounding a sexual attack on the younger man packs an emotional wallop. Erotica, much of it for Torquere Press, is what Owen is known for; this is a coming-of-age summer romance that blossoms, quite believably, and not without honest conflict, into real love. This is only Casperian's third title, but the (apparent) mom and pop operation has its act together.



Cover: 4 - Pretty. But not at all descriptive of the story.

Prose: 6 - Nice and intricate, good and delicate, story neatly tied up.

Feel: 8 - Good cover stock, good interior desktop design, nice font.

Author info: [www.chrisowen.net](http://www.chrisowen.net).

Chapter one: [www.casperianbooks.com/catalog/chapters/1-934081-03-5.html](http://www.casperianbooks.com/catalog/chapters/1-934081-03-5.html).

**The Chili Papers**, by Chris Girman (Velluminous Press, \$12.99, 9781905605118)

Fact-based fiction? Embellished memoir? It's hard to tell where this sometimes raunchy, sometimes reflective work falls along the literary continuum. Much of the story takes



place in Latin America, where the first-person narrator, as a college student, indulges both his love for the culture and his lust for the men. At the same time, the narrator refers often to how different family members were either scandalized by or oblivious to "his" book - Girman's own scholarly study of a few years ago, *Mucho Macho: Seduction, Desire, and the Homoerotic Lives of Latin Men*. In the end, this cheerful book's proper classification doesn't much matter. *The Chili Papers* is propelled by the cockeyed characters and absurdist world Girman either conjures up or draws from, one where his sister is in love with a gay cop, his oddball mother paints a dead lawn green so

she can sell her house, and he's fired from his job at a T.G.I.Friday's for squeezing unauthorized lime juice into a margarita. Think Sedaris-lite.

Cover: 4 - Underly (rather than overly) revealing.

Prose: 6 - Good comic writing, serious introspection.

Feel: 7 - A handsome book.

**The City**, by NA Diaman (Persona Press, \$14.95, 9780931906107)

Diaman's several novels include *Ed Dean is Queer*, *Castro Street Memories*, and *The Fourth Wall*; he's been a self-publishing pioneer with his Persona Press for many years.

The story of *The City* - that's what San Francisco calls itself, capital T included - arcs across five decades, from the late 50s, when Theo Demetrios finds his first apartment (and his first male sexual partner) in The City, back when Beatniks walked the streets, to the current day, charting Theo's life and loves. Diaman writes with a light touch, weaving an obvious affection for the city through the story. It's a bittersweet chronicle: Theo's first lover leaves him for a European musical career, and they never see each other again - though a sweet son appears on Theo's doorstep; he shares decades of love with a second partner, but that one soon gets restless. Through it all, Theo, son of hardworking Greek immigrant parents, and with a sister with an artistic bent, manages a bookstore and builds a contented life. *The City* isn't a novel of great passions, but it is a quietly passionate story.

Cover: 7 - Two cute men, leaning affectionately together on a wall: enticing.

Prose: 6 - Not flashy, but the story moves along with dispatch.

Feel: 4 - Odd page layout.

Author info: [www.nikosdiaman.com](http://www.nikosdiaman.com).



**Column Inches: Everyday Observations of a Gay Pragmatist**, by Eric Hunter (BookSurge, \$14.99, 9781419634642)

Hunter was a regular columnist for Cincinnati's *CityBeat* for about five years; the 40-plus essays in this well-crafted collection start in 1997, with a thoughtful piece on the importance of gay history, to a 2002 piece on the closing of Cincinnati's Crazy Ladies women's bookstore. The shelf life of newspaper columns is often pretty short, but

Hunter's are well-preserved by a smart combination of interesting if familiar topics - barebacking, monogamy, organized religion, reality TV - and writing that manages to be sometimes clever, sometimes sarcastic, without sacrificing thoughtfulness. Self-publishing a book like this, were his mini-essays not so deft, would have a whiff of narcissism to it. But this book is engaging - even the columns that are Cincinnati-specific. I'm not sure it's for fans of genre fiction or queer theory, but as a slice of history, it's fresh enough.



Cover: 6 - There's not much you can do with black, white, and a splash of red, but this does tell what the book is about.

Prose: 7 - Clean and clear - good journalism style.

Feel: 7 - Very well designed.

Author blog: <http://erichunter.typepad.com/>.

**Deep South: Discovering My True Sexuality**, by Jody Dixon (Cypress House, \$15.95, 9781879384651)

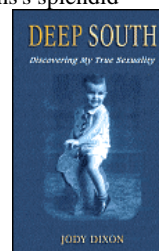
Most coming-out stories are nothing special, as important as they are to the person telling his or her story (though they can often be quite good: see Kevin Sessums's splendid

*Mississippi Sissy*, for example, for another one rooted in the Deep South). But stories written by Southern gents who came out at age 70 are something else. The prose in this straightforward memoir is clear, elegant, and often quite moving; Dixon's accounts of the segregated South of his very rural Georgia childhood in the 1930s are a vivid reminder of the persistence of America's racial divide, though Dixon's well-to-do white family got on well with black neighbors and employees; his life in the closet for more than 50 years is recounted without self-pity; and the joy of his decision to be the man-loving-man he'd longed to be is resoundingly palpable.

Cover: 8 - Effective use of a photo of the author as a cute kid.

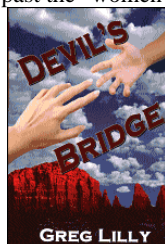
Prose: 7 - Nothing flashy, but a good mix of emotion and restraint.

Feel: 6 - A tidy package.



**\*Devil's Bridge**, by Greg Lilly (Regal Crest, \$14.95, 9781932300789)

Regal Crest is better known for its lesbian fiction; I hope prospective male readers look past the "women's/gay" designation on the back cover. This is definitely a book for both women *and* gay men - though gay women and straight men will find a lot of value, entertainment and otherwise, to it. Lilly's nuanced tale of the friendship between a gay man and his best gal friend is taut and polished; gay men will identify with Topher's need for a change in life after too many boyfriend disappointments, and Myra's desperate need to get away from an abusive husband is heart-pounding realistic. This is a solid novel about how integral emotional freedom is in life.



Cover: 6 - Hands reaching out for each other is a good pitch for the soul of the story, but the background doesn't make much sense until after you've read the book.

Prose: 8 - A definite page-turner, with well-drawn incidental characters fleshing out the two principals.

Feel: 5 - Margins too tight, type too squeezed.

Author info: [www.greglilly.com](http://www.greglilly.com).

**\*Devils in the Sugar Shop**, by Timothy Schaffert (Unbridled Books, \$14.95, 9781932961331)

Nebraska author Schaffert's third novel is the gayest story without much gay content that I've read in eons. It's set in Omaha, and the back-cover description is awfully apt: "A comical whirlwind of deception, adultery, desperation, drag queens, stiff cocktails, nervous breakdowns, and suburban swingers." The characters, who manage to be both daffy and complex, include twin sisters Peaches and Plum, who run a bookstore that's the center of the arty crowd; Ashley, who teaches erotic writing to the women in her crowd even though her marriage is pretty much sexless; June, who sells naughty marital aids at Tupperware parties; Sybil the Guru, a blunt-spoken motivational speaker; and, mostly in the background, Lee, Ashley's gay son, who has fallen in with a caring crowd of those drag queens - he's crafting a comic based on their lives, called *Those Fabulous Bastards of Omaha* and their live-sex stage act, *Bedraggled*. Schaffert's novel about Omaha's unexpectedly bohemian underside is a non-stop comic delight.



Cover: 9 - Perfect for the book, and the author thinks so; he's included a "Note on the Cover Design" that's more expansive than most author bios:

*The cover of Devils in the Sugar Shop is based on a design by Maciej Zbikowski for the Polish release of the 1968 Italian film Le Dolci Signore, a bedroom farce starring Ursula Andress and Virna Lisi. Poster design reigned as Poland's most respected and refined art form from 1945 to 1989, ending with the rise of capitalism in the country and a more commercial, less artful, approach to the*

advertising of cinema, opera, and the circus. The design work of the 1950s and 60s was known as the Polish School of Poster, and demonstrated diverse influences: folk art, surrealism, art deco, and pop art among them. The Polish designers of movie posters favored abstraction over celebrity, metaphor over plot.

Prose: 10 - More fun than a French Tickler - though the author describes it as "one long raucous cocktail party scene."

Feel: 9 - Airy yet solid.

Author info: [www.timothyschaffert.com](http://www.timothyschaffert.com).

Excerpt (scroll down): <http://unbridledbooks.com/sugarshop.html>.

**The Hell You Say**, by Josh Lanyon (iUniverse Editor's Choice, \$15.95, 9780595385126)

Judging from this lovely lark of a whodunit, the "editor's choice" slogan on a self-pubbed iUniverse book might actually carry some cachet. This is the third of Lanyon's mysteries



about Adrien English, owner of the Cloak and Dagger bookstore, and sometime boyfriend of a hard-bitten L.A. cop (the first two, *Fatal Shadows* and *A Dangerous Thing*, were published by the defunct Gay Men's Press). Adrien's relationship with the detective is fraught with the cop's inner demons: he's not happy being queer. And demons are bedevilling our bookseller, too - his one full-time clerk is implicated in a satanic cult, and his cop boyfriend is investigating a series of ritualistic murders - including a body found in the clerk's bed. The plot is serviceable; what makes this mystery sparkle are Lanyon's sturdy characterizations, from the turmoil of the sexually conflicted cop to the

bubble-headed bounciness of three girls who are about to become Adrien's half-sisters, when his imperiously dotty mother remarries.

Cover: 7 - iUniverse basic, but its cartoonish colors suit the book well.

Prose: 6 - Brisk enough, though Lanyon doesn't make much use of Los Angeles and its many atmospheres for his story.

Feel: 7 - Nice interior look.

Author info: [www.joshlanyon.com](http://www.joshlanyon.com).

**The Literary Six**, by Vince Liaguno (Outskirts Press, \$24.95, 9781598006957)

*The Big Chill* meets Freddy Kreuger. Wait - is that first film reference, about college chums reuniting years after their friendship first formed, familiar to anyone these days? Hmm. Doesn't matter. They can Google it. Liaguno's fast-paced horror story has all the tropes chillingly in place: a touch of romance, flashes of humor, moments of pathos, bloody (very bloody) revenge, and a moral to wrap it all up. The "six" of the title bonded over their literary affinities in college, and - as snobby types are wont to do - played a cruel prank on a college prof, one that comes back to haunt them twenty years later at a reunion on a - what else - isolated island. Liaguno's plot holds together well, and he has a nice way with words.

Cover: 8 - Fog-shrouded stairs and roiling sea convey spooky; the title and author are easy to read.

Prose: 6 - A little bit overwritten, but then purple prose does suit the horror genre.

Feel: 7 - Very tidy.

Author info: [www.vinceliaguno.com](http://www.vinceliaguno.com).



**\*Stolen**, by Annette Lapointe (Anvil Press, \$16, 9781895636734)

There is real literary art to this poetic novel about drug-dealing drifter Rowan Friesen - not a typical loser's name! - and his debauched and sometimes desperate life. The story is set in rural Saskatchewan, not the usual environs for a gay-interest story; Rowan, after



blowing up his high school with a sleepover buddy with whom he shares lusty same-sex escapades (even after his unstable school chum is institutionalized), has made a living for several years breaking into houses and selling what he burgles on the Internet. He's the product of a bruised upbringing, with a schizophrenic father and a mother whose self-centered path in life left her science-geek, rock-music-obsessed son pretty much abandoned. So it's no surprise the man's a rebel, a drifter, and a grifter, with his own emotional scars. As protagonists go, Rowan's not particularly likeable at first - but he grows on the reader, as romance blossoms (albeit with bumps) with a teacher he meets

hanging out with a community of university students, and as he finally comes to care for the mother who neglected him in younger days. His life is pretty grim - but Lapointe writes about Rowan, and about the prairie landscape where he roams, with startling beauty; phrases like, "The air's so warm he can feel it rubbing into his skin" pop up on almost every lustrous page. This is an exceptional debut novel.

Cover: 3 - It sure is arty, but it says nothing at all about the book; thank goodness for a more artful back cover (and a strong back-cover blurb).

Prose: 9 - Luscious. This is a grown-up book about, well, not quite growing up.

Feel: 8 - Nice design inside and out.

Author interview: <http://thelink.concordia.ca/view.php?aid=38906>.

Another review: [www.prairiefire.ca/reviews/lapointe\\_stolen.html](http://www.prairiefire.ca/reviews/lapointe_stolen.html).

**Strings Attached**, by Nick Nolan (BookSurge, \$18.99 paperback, 9781419628894)

Adolescence is a hazardous way of life for 17-year-old Jeremy Tyler; his father died in a mysterious accident when he was a child, and his mother has since descended into alcoholic hell and forced rehab; that's when he's sent from the Fresno slums of his childhood to the posh estate of his overbearing great aunt Katherine and her censorious husband - liberated from an economic prison, only to land in an emotional one - and is overwhelmed by the change. It's not easy for him to fit into the upper crust, particularly because he's trying to hide how much he's attracted to other boys. Jeremy's story of breaking free from the strands of dishonesty, deceit, and self-doubt has its parallels to the tale of Pinocchio, but Nolan's queer take is totally contemporary: think the TV series *The OC* - girls with mean cheekbones, well-built guys with snotty attitudes, and Jeremy in the role of a queer Ryan Atwood. He's a good-looking kid, with a sleek swimmer's physique - and the swim team's champ is out to get him. He dates one of the smart-set girls in an attempt to keep his gay hormones at bay - but that doesn't do him much good. Nolan's debut novel is a kitchen sink of genres - coming of age, coming out, mystery, romance, erotica, even a dash of the supernatural - that add up to an impressive story about the passage from boyhood to manhood.

Cover: 10 - Perfect for the book, clean and crisp and easy on the eyes.

Prose: 8 - Excellent for a self-published book, leanly written and well plotted.

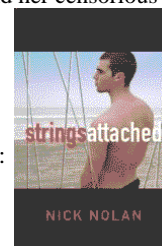
Feel: 8 - Good design overall.

Author info: <http://nick-nolan.com>.

Author interview: [www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp?](http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp?AuthorID=31977&id=25010)

[AuthorID=31977&id=25010](http://www.authorsden.com/visit/viewarticle.asp?AuthorID=31977&id=25010).

Excerpt: [www.littleedenpress.com/book/index.php?page\\_id=4](http://www.littleedenpress.com/book/index.php?page_id=4).



**\*Tattoo This Madness In**, by Daniel Allen Cox (Dusty Owl, \$10, 9780973926644)

The "dazzling, snarling" smile of a Smurf - that's what rebellious Florida teen Damian Spitz tattoos onto the young bodies of the boys and girls he woos away from the fellowship of the Jehovah's Witness church, in this zippy novel of punk mayhem, sexual transgression, bloody epiphanies, and artfully outrageous subversion.

It's the story of an angry young kid, written with subversive glee by a talented young writer who may be angry himself - but who knows how to brighten the dark edge of his first novel with sharp wit. Those Smurfs? It seems that they were singled out as spawns of Satan in a sermon that sets Damian on the path of transformation, from a kid afraid to masturbate because God won't like it to a sexual rebel fucking a fellow former Witness. Which perhaps proves that churches that hate are good for something after all.

Cover: 8 - Rebel with a cause personified: cigarette butted out in the palm.

Prose: 8 - Raw but impressively irresistible.

Feel: 7 - Pulpy, more like a 'zine than a book, but the style suits the substance.

Author info: [www.myspace.com/danielallencox](http://www.myspace.com/danielallencox).

Author interview: <http://thelink.concordia.ca/view.php?aid=39124>.



## A Dozen Recent Stellar Reads

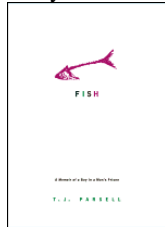
**Stray**, by Sheri Joseph (MacAdam Cage, \$25, 9781596922013)

Paul, a university student in his early 20s, is the uneasily kept boy of an elderly acting teacher. Kent, 30, a lackadaisical musician, has been married for a year to Maggie, a Mennonite public defender with a passion for doing good. The men were lovers (and minor characters in Joseph's debut novel, *Bear Me Safely Over*) before going their separate ways; a chance encounter resurrects the passion - and ignites a tangled triangle. Kent adores his wife, but sex with Paul excites him; Paul cares about his once charismatic mentor, but is ashamed of depending on him for financial support; Maggie is ready to build a family with Kent. Their delicate interpersonal dance explodes when Paul's sugar daddy is brutally murdered, Paul becomes the prime suspect, and Maggie takes on his legal defense. Married man with a secret, wife who doesn't suspect, needy gay man in the middle: the plot is familiar, almost trite. But Joseph's potent tale of sexual deception and emotional redemption is a seductive stew of love story and murder mystery about three fundamentally fine, and gratifyingly complex, people.



**Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison**, by T.J. Parsell (Carroll & Graf, \$24.95, 9780786717934)

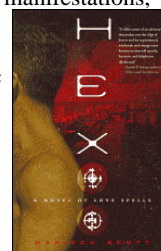
Fantasies about prison rape are a staple of gay porn. This is the real thing: the memoir of a 17-year-old white boy's journey through America's sexually predatory prison system.



Turns out those fictional scenarios aren't all that implausible - though they lack the layer of emotional terror this story delivers. When Parsell was sentenced for armed robbery - he held up a drive-through photo stand with a toy gun for a few dollars - he entered a culture of omnipresent sexual violence and a hierarchy where muscle and meanness ruled. Four inmates raped him on his first day in the general population. After a coin toss, he became one seasoned convict's bitch. Parsell is raw and unsparing in recounting his harrowing prison stint as a closeted gay kid thrown into a world where man-on-man sex was a commodity. But he also recalls, with surprising affection, sex with one straight prisoner with whom he reconnects by mail 25 years later. Parsell was paroled in 1984, and became a force behind the Stop Prison Rape movement, described in an epilogue that tells how he came to thrive despite the scars of his incarceration.

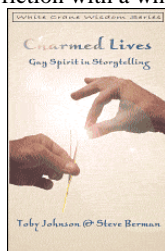
**Hex: A Novel of Love Spells**, by Darieck Scott (Carroll & Graf, \$16.95, 9780786717644)

Fidel Castro has died, and Miami's Cuban exiles are partying in the streets. Except that the dead president is spotted around town, adding to the hysteria - just one of many weirdnesses in this steamy cauldron of supernatural mysteries, psychic manifestations, parallel universes, time travel twists, magic spells (one gone tragically awry), and a good amount of gay lust, both painfully repressed and sensuously realized. Despite its heft, *Hex* reads like a text-heavy comic book, albeit one written by a race-conscious black intellectual with a yen for commentary about American politics and culture. It's crammed with a slew of colorful characters, but five young men - two hunky African-American friends, one macho Latino circuit boy, one fierce white drag queen, and one mixed-race fellow who's sure he's straight, though he sleeps in the same bed as the gay guys - make up the queer core of this ambitious potpourri of mystical adventure and sexual shenanigans.



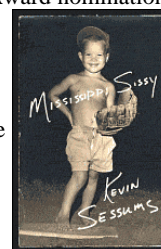
**Charmed Lives: Gay Spirit in Storytelling**, edited by Toby Johnson and Steve Berman (White Crane Books, \$16, 9781590210161)

Some of the 30-plus spirited contributions to this collection are queer fairy tales, fey fiction with a whiff of magical realism. Some are essays focusing on gay spirituality. The mix sets *Charmed Lives* charmingly apart from the norm of contemporary gay anthologies, most of which these days draw deeply from the erotic well to sate gay readers. A book where spirit takes prominence over sex is a treat. Among the essays, Bill Blackburn writes movingly about visiting the irrepressible Harry Hay on his deathbed; faerie Mark Thompson and Episcopal priest Malcolm Boyd tell how they fell in love; and Bert Herrman dwells wisely on the authenticity of a life - not necessarily religious - of faith. On the fiction side, there's magic in Victor J. Bani's story about an elderly man and a disfigured man finding beauty in each other; in Michael Gouda's story about a surviving lover finding solace in his late partner's possessions; and in Martin K. Smith's story about a tea that compels anyone who drinks it to speak suppressed truths.



**Mississippi Sissy**, by Kevin Sessums (St. Martin's Press, \$24.95, 9780312341015)

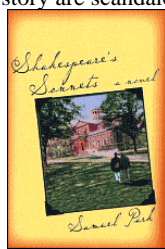
The shelf of queer coming-out confessionals is certainly crowded - almost as many gay memoirs (25) as gay novels (30) were eligible for a Lambda Literary Award nomination this year. But this account of growing up a Southern sissy is a decided standout. Sessums was butch enough to play football with some talent in 1960s Mississippi, but he preferred dressing up as actress Arlene Francis, whose long run as a panelist on TV's *What's My Line* captured his little fag heart. His parents died within a year of each other when he was ten. A Bible-thumping Baptist minister molested him in his early teens. Racists who cheered Martin Luther King's assassination surrounded him. But young Kevin's instinctive gay radar led him to a "found" family of actors, artists, and writers - including Eudora Welty - who nurtured his more fey interests. Sessums's poignant but celebratory memoir ends at age 20, when the older gay man who mentored him was murdered by a trick; the author left the South soon after, to become an editor at *Interview* and a writer for *Vanity Fair*. As an account of coming out and coming of age, this book is far different from Jody Dixon's *Deep South*, reviewed above; but both memoirs share a strong Southern identity.



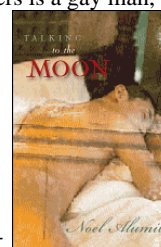
Author interview: [www.towleroad.com/2007/03/many\\_of\\_you\\_hav.html](http://www.towleroad.com/2007/03/many_of_you_hav.html).

**Shakespeare's Sonnets**, by Samuel Park (Alyson Books, \$24.95, 9781555839550)

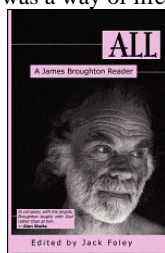
The time is 1948, the place is buttoned-down Harvard, and the boys in this literary love story are scandalous dandy Jean and closeted rich kid Adam. Jean's scholarship is slipping away as he parties with the campus lavender set; Adam is on course for an academic career, a fine marriage, and a life of privilege. Their prickly first meeting becomes a tentative friendship and then a passionate, private romance - the story arc of any number of novels about young men and forbidden attraction. But Park adds lyrical texture to his take on the genre with the suggestion - not all that shocking now but scholarly heresy six decades ago - that Shakespeare's sonnets were written for a beautiful young man. That historically daring research topic is what binds the young men together in this sweet, smart novel. (A short film based on the book has made the festival rounds and is available on the DVD *Boys Briefs 3*).

**Talking to the Moon**, by Noel Alunit. (Carroll & Graf, \$14.95, 9780786716296)

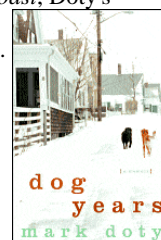
Alunit's impressive fiction debut, *Letters to Montgomery Clift*, was a distinctly queer coming-out novel filtered through a young American-Filipino's perspective. *Talking to the Moon* artfully flips the emphasis: though one of the central characters is a gay man, this book is more about Filipino experience in the United States - particularly that of mailman Jory, shot by a crazed bigot, and his wife Belen, a weary nurse. Atmospheric flashbacks describe their earlier years in the Philippines, where she was an upper-class debutante and he was a poor-born seminarian, class differences that appalled Belen's parents. Thirty years later, the couple has built a life in Los Angeles, though they mourn the accidental death of their first son and are bewildered by the gay life of their second son, Emerson, who too easily bottles up his emotions. A tidy subplot focuses on Emerson's on-again, off-again romance with a Taiwanese flight attendant, but the heart of this sophomore success lies in its examination of how a quiet family copes with the sensational aftermath of a racially motivated shooting.

**All: A James Broughton Reader**, edited by Jack Foley (White Crane Books, \$28, 9781590210208)

James Broughton was a poet, filmmaker, and all-around faerie for whom effervescent joy was a way of life. More than a gay artist, he "made art gaily," as this marvelous potpourri of excerpts from his journals and reprints of his poetry attests. One chapter assesses several of his many short avant-garde films, the first of which he made in the 1940s, the last of which he made in the 70s and 80s together with Joel Singer - the man he married in 1976, way before gay marriage was in the news. Editor Foley contributes a lengthy interview with Broughton, conducted in 1997, two years before the poet's death at age 86. But the real spirit of this collection springs from the poems, which infuse whimsy with a spirited wisdom that's always playful, often intense. Broughton published more than twenty collections of verse in his lifetime; this rich sampler, smartly compiled with a caring touch, is a delicious introduction to the words of a shaman whose life, as much as his art, celebrated the necessity - and the fun - of love.

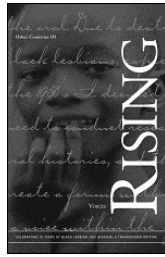
**Dog Years**, by Mark Doty (HarperCollins, \$23.95, 9780061171000)

Got a dog in your life? Get ready, as you read, to grin with recognition and to weep in sympathy. Dogs Arden and Beau were minor characters in *Heaven's Coast*, Doty's elegant memoir about the AIDS death of his lover Wally more than a decade ago. This equally elegiac remembrance is all about the pooches. Memories of romps in the woods and runs on the beach, celebrating the joyous physicality of a beloved pet, are rendered with tender amusement; those moments when a dog's eyes reflect a man's soul, expressing the intricate mystery of how dog and man meet in the world, are analyzed with poetic emotion. There's no end of books about the role dogs play in our lives, about their ever-present unconditional love and their ineffable connection to our moods; Doty breaks no new ground in this joyous, heartbreaking celebration of the bond between man and mutt. The triumph of *Dog Years* is how Doty illuminates the lives - and the deaths - of his dogs with a lyrical and philosophical intensity that is warmly compassionate.

**Voices Rising: Celebrating 20 Years of Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Writing**, edited by G. Winston James and Other Countries (RedBone Press, \$25, 9780978625139)

Other Countries was founded twenty years ago as a collective committed to black gay male writers and writing, back when a mere handful of emerging African-American voices could be found on gay bookstore shelves. This hefty collection of more than 100 contributions from more than sixty writers expands on Other Countries' original focus on men to include essays, short stories, poems, interviews, and play excerpts from lesbians

as well as bisexual and transgender writers. The result is a rich and hefty reader, and a generous testament to black literary accomplishment. Established authors like Jewelle Gomez, Marvin K. White, Cheryl Clarke, Reginald Shepherd, Letta Neely, and Samuel R. Delany stand out - but dozens of younger, newer voices also "rise" in this historic anthology, so many so good that singling out even a few would do a disservice to the rest. *Voices Rising* is a hymn to the power of words to build community, express emotion, realize dreams, and explore the complexities of identity.



**Androphilia: A Manifesto Rejecting the Gay Identity, Reclaiming Masculinity**, by Jack Malebranche (Scapegoat Publishing, \$12.95, 9780976403586)

It's almost guaranteed that anyone reading this review of *Androphilia* in **BTWOF** will despise the book - after all, you've paid money to read news and reviews about queer literature, and the author's thesis, after all, is that there really ought not be anything like a "gay community." And if there is, he wants no part of it. Nope. He's a masculine fellow, a man's man who just happens to sleep with other men. So it's tempting to write this screed off with a gay-icon quote (he's not fond of gay adoration of divas, by the way) from, say, Bette Davis, something like, "But ya *are*, Blanche." But that's too simplistic a response to what is in fact a heartfelt argument that "the gay identity" is too sissy, too socialist, and way too libertine for this man-loving man. There's a history of queer intellectuals insisting that they're too masculine to represent perceived gay stereotypes: Andrew Sullivan, Bruce Bawer, and Daniel Harris come to mind. Malebranche's manifesto is an extreme manifestation of their kind of stereo-phobia. Let's just hate the book, acknowledge the author's personal honesty and articulate passion, and leave it at that. So why are my comments included in a roundup of recent stellar reads? Because, disagreeable as I found the thesis, it's well-reasoned.



**SoMa**, by Kemble Scott (Kensington Books, \$14, 9780758215499)

Sexy but sexually ambivalent young Raphe, precipitously downsized by San Francisco's dot-com implosion, is a frustrated writer with a condo he can't afford, a menial job in a South of Market mail drop, and an apparent eye for the girls. Then he meets Baptiste, a suave Latino lawyer who courts naïve Raphe with unctuous charm, sucking him into the gay world's whirl. Scott's ebulliently filthy debut novel prowls the sex clubs - gay and straight - of S.F.'s South of Market (aka SoMa) underworld, introducing a cast of hipsters and hipster-wannabes (two straight girls from the 'burbs are a hoot), all deep into mind games and sex play. The many sex-club scenes manage, somehow, to be both sordid and slapstick, which is a charm of this multi-textured book. Sex-extreme novices may squirm at some of the action, but anyone with sexual savvy will appreciate the author's sly, cock-eyed observations. *SoMa* takes a slick, sick twist at the end, when a raped Raphe, finally empowered, exacts extreme sexual vengeance against his tormentor. But revenge is sweet - and so, perversely, is this kinky story.



### Kinky Heresy in a Catholic Context

It's 1983, and young Catholic priests are dying mysteriously. A concerned Vatican calls in hotshot Father Javier Barraza, an Argentinian-born Jesuit with a built-in disdain for his Church's more repressive dogmas - and more longing in his soul for a childhood sweetheart, now a very special FBI agent, than a priest of his stature ought to have - to investigate the viral epidemic decimating America's priesthood. Part medical thriller and part Vatican expose (quite reminiscent of church-insider Andrew Greeley's many novels set in the shadowy world of Vatican politics, ambition, and ego), Mock's timely novel **Mosaic Virus** stitches together Catholic homophobia, AIDS conspiracy musings, and one particular Cardinal's thuggish self-interest, as the duo digs into decades of criminal cover-ups and deadly deceit - an investigation into the unleashing of a horrific "mosaic virus" that causes Barraza to question his Catholic faith. AIDS and the Vatican intersect most imaginatively when, as characters, real-life flight attendant Gaetan Dugas, said to be Patient Zero of the AIDS epidemic, is seduced as a seminarian by Francis Cardinal Spellman, whose queer ways are the stuff of legendary lore. That's the kind of kinky heresy that gives this book its zip. Mock, at one time a practicing doctor, gets pretty detailed with medical facts and theoretical extrapolations; his story, brisk enough to carry readers over the expository bits, ends with the priest and the FBI agent flying to an unnamed destination with an antidote that could end an



epidemic - until, in something of a cliff-hanger, a plane - their plane? - is shot down. Seems a sequel is in the works... Floricanto Press, \$24.95 paper, 9780915745791. Author info: [www.carlostmock.com](http://www.carlostmock.com).

Mock, an activist who produces a steady stream of link-rich newsletters on numerous topics, is also spearheading a move, in conjunction with his publisher, to increase the visibility of Latino/a writers. Here's what's happening:

"Floricanto Press, recognizing the void in today's GLBT Latino Literature, is launching a new line. I've been hired as coordinating editor for the series. We will have two titles ready for publication this summer. Felice Picano is finishing editing my work, *Papi Chulo: A Legend, A Novel, and the Puerto Rican Identity*, and Leo Cabranes-Grant's *The Chat Room and Other Plays: A Puerto Rican Anthology*."

In addition, Mock and Floricanto are working with poet Emanuel Xavier, who is soliciting submissions for a *First Modern Anthology of Latino GLBT Poetry—Mariposas* for a summer 2008 release.

Here's what Felice Picano says about the series:

"If self-identity is a crucial issue in this literature, then national identity is another one that both authors address; and *Papi Chulo*, actually is the story of a country as seen through the eyes and lives of three strong women of several generations. In that novel, as in Cabranes's play, *In Mortality*, the changing and changeable nature of Latino American GLBT identity becomes a toy played with by the characters and the author to express and illuminate the underlying anxiety that this topic always incites. For Carlos Mock, the theme is felt so strongly that it must be openly expressed. 'To Puerto Ricans, I've become an American. But to Americans of Puerto Rican descent, I'm insufficiently Puerto Rican because I've not undergone the years of prejudice they have.' So the question becomes, who are any of these characters, these authors, these people? And we've not yet begun to explore other themes of this writing: machismo versus homosexuality, male versus female, and how or even why that should alter to catch up to the rest of the world. Or the role of the various religions - Catholicism versus Santeria for example - that are touched upon in these works."



### A Writer's Life: Two Views

A few months ago, within a few days of each other, two writers whose work I admire mightily wrote on their respective blogs about being writers. Between then and now, much has happened in the realm of publishing. News hit of the implosion of Publishers Group West, distributor of well more than a hundred presses (including a number of queer ones), a bankruptcy that sucked many thousands of dollars out of the cash flow of the independent publishers affected; in the wake of that disaster, Perseus Books - which took over distribution of many of the PGW clients - announced it was folding two impressively gay-positive publishers that it had acquired in corporate back-and-forth fiddling too complicated to go into here. Gone: Carroll & Graf, where Senior Editor Don Weise (also axed) had in just three years put together the most extensive mainstream-publisher list of queer titles since the heyday of St. Martin's Stonewall Inn Editions two decades ago. The elimination of his line of books came as a surprise to Weise, who in the past three years has published work written or edited by Noel Alunit, Cheryl Clarke, Leslie Feinberg, Kate Clinton, Michael Musto, John Rechy, Michelle Tea, Dennis Cooper, E. Lynn Harris, Aiden Shaw, Michelangelo Signorile, Jaffe Cohen, and many more. Books released this spring include Samuel R. Delany's novel, *Dark Reflections*; Felice Picano's memoir, *Art & Sex in Greenwich Village*; Edmund White's novella and short story collection, *Chaos*; and Sarah Schulman's novel, *The Child*. A tragedy - intensified because Perseus and its own several imprints has never had a strong fiction line - let alone many queer books. Also gone: Thunder's Mouth, which had a smaller but steady line of gay titles.

So, though neither blog entry was written specifically as a reaction to the PGW bankruptcy and the demise of Carroll & Graf and Thunder's Mouth, they have much to say to aspiring writers - or discouraged ones.

For another take on what the loss of Carroll & Graf and Thunder's Mouth portends: [www.calendarlive.com/books/cl-ca-indybooks27may27,0,3696417.story?coll=cl-books-top-right](http://www.calendarlive.com/books/cl-ca-indybooks27may27,0,3696417.story?coll=cl-books-top-right).

And an interview with Carroll & Graf senior editor Don Weise:

[www.mediabistro.com/galleycat/editors/our\\_exit\\_interview\\_with\\_don\\_weise\\_59528.asp](http://www.mediabistro.com/galleycat/editors/our_exit_interview_with_don_weise_59528.asp).

And a report on why some of the independent presses formerly distributed by PGW are still hurting: [www.salon.com/books/feature/2007/06/21/independent\\_press/index.html](http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2007/06/21/independent_press/index.html).

### **Why I'm Persevering**, by Marshall Moore

I read somewhere that writers are more prone to depression than normal people. Or perhaps we started out prone to depression, and among those of us who didn't take up drugs or cutting or suicide, many channel our dark tides and black currents (black currants?) into something creative.

Another one of my writer friends has announced he's throwing in the towel. This is a disturbing trend, and I want to share my two cents worth. No, I'm not going to name names.

I've been publishing about 10 years now, a fact I might have commented on already. While I don't look down at the literary world from the heights of *Granta* and *The New Yorker*, I also didn't short-circuit after my first book. My third is in the pipeline. My fourth and fifth have better-than-decent chances of being published, although I haven't yet summoned either the time or the will to begin overhauling *Bitter Orange*. I'm not cranking out short stories as fast as I used to, but hell, I changed careers and moved abroad. When I was an interpreter, I had a job I could do in my sleep. Inasmuch as you can phone it in, I was doing so. The only time my work-related reality was real and raw was in the middle of my nervous breakdown. Everything's different now, and my brain is more engaged than it used to be. But I'm still working on new projects: I've finished an essay for the debut volume of *Invert(e)* and a couple of pseudonymous smut pieces. I'm tinkering with a couple of other things I'm not ready to mention. Point being: I'm not dead yet.

Other writers I know have dealt with struggles and disappointments and setbacks. Two got hosed by Penguin in two different countries. One of them was so disgusted by the whole thing - his fourth book was accepted, then dropped because of its provocative content - he swore off writing for a while and went back to his day job. He has written a fifth novel but is being maddeningly secretive about any impending possibilities of publication. The other was also dropped, just after delivering his third book. Both ultimately went with much smaller houses; both books that were dropped are now in print; both are outstanding. And the second of these two guys is blissing out on not having to write fiction and deal with publishers for the foreseeable future.

Yet another one is threatening to call it quits. His first novel got published by a small house that immediately collapsed, but the book is being reprinted by an American publisher. There has been a significant delay in the publication: it's about a year behind schedule. I'm close to the situation, so I can't comment further, except to say the logistics are now sorted out and the book will be coming to stores within the next few months. This writer has been working on a sequel - and he's already contracted for it - but he's been rather hard-pressed by life for the last year or so, and he has developed an intense hatred for writing. The sequel may never see the light of day. Which sucks, because I've read his first book and I want to know what happens next.

I could name a few other writers whose careers started around the same time as mine, but who seem to have hit the wall. First novels published, followed by nothing. Endless delays, discouragement, rejection, sophomore slump. I'm more of a short story writer than anyone else I currently know (not a boast, I just keep writing the damn things, and sooner or later most of them find homes) so I've kept up a modicum of visibility between books. Others haven't done so. Which is dreary to contemplate. I look at these people not writing - talented, competent, imaginative, but consumed by either despair or just the daily grind, or both - and feel awful for them.

This isn't an issue of competition. Other writers come along. The well of human creativity never runs dry. For the individual it may, but not for people as a whole. Someone will always have both the talent and the hunger.

Stephen King announced his own retirement, then broke his silence with *Cell* and now *Lisey's Story*. The former is a good fun read and the latter, which I finished on the subway, is simply devastating. Best thing he's done in years. But I digress. I wanted to give *Lisey's Story* an enthusiastic plug. King's reason was, if I recall, just that authors sometimes have their reasons. When the publication of *Cell* was announced, he said he might not keep cranking out the books and the stories as fast as he used to, but the drive is still there.

I hope this is also the case with some of my friends and acquaintances who have said that they're giving up. Our circumstances are different. I am persevering. I hate to see others fall by the wayside. I don't know how I'd have made it through the events of 2003/2004 if I hadn't been working on *An Ideal for Living*, if I hadn't had a couple of good short stories in the works, if I hadn't had ideas for a couple of other worthwhile novels in my head, if I hadn't been thinking perhaps I ought to write a memoir someday to show Augusten Burroughs how it ought to be done. Other people may not take writing quite as seriously. Or they're more consumed by their day jobs than I allow myself to be. Or they're simply letting their depression go unchecked, and it's getting the better of them. (I believe this to be true of at least three of them. Myself, I take happy pills. Fuck that suffering shit; pain is for other people.) In terms of writing careers, which tend to span decades for the ones who don't flame out along the way, maybe this is all very typical. And maybe some or many or most do need to call it quits, because in the grand scheme of things there's not enough room for everyone. I don't know. When it's personal,

though, and I see this talent going to waste, it's disappointing. Not in a gleefully malicious schadenfreude kind of way, either.

*Marshall Moore is author of the novel The Concrete Sky and the short story collection Black Shapes in a Darkened Room; and he has more books coming: "Looking ahead, I'm getting impatient for An Ideal for Living to be published. The two books beyond that are basically done, as well: Bitter Orange and the second story collection, which I now think will be titled 'The Infernal Republic' when and if it's published."*

His literary-chatter blog: <http://msminpdx.livejournal.com>.

His other blog: <http://articulate-ink.livejournal.com>.

### **The Party Survival Guide for Writers**, by Alexander Chee

I was notorious as a young man, so I'm not impressed automatically if people have heard of me. I'm used to being worried about it. When I met the playwright and activist Larry Kramer, for example, I was 24, in his apartment for Gay Pride, and he said, Oh, you're thaaat Alex Chee, and it wasn't because he'd read me. The difference between infamy and fame is a little blurred for me.

I used to like going to parties but once I started telling people I was a writer, it got a little ugly. I used to think it would get better but it only gets different, not better at all. This is how it went about 10 years ago:

*Me:* I'm a writer.

*Guest:* Published?

*Me:* I've had a lot of things in magazines and anthologies...I'm working on a novel.

*Guest:* [odd, blank stare] Excuse me.

Now, 10 years later:

*Me:* I'm a writer. A fiction writer.

*Guest:* What kind of fiction writing?

*Me:* Literary fiction

*Guest:* So...what is that?

*Me:* A mystery novel where the mystery is basically humanity.

*Guest:* [Strange, eerie half-smile]

*Me:* Okay. Forget mystery novel. It's nothing like a mystery novel.

[Writer reaches for a small cake on the food table. I think it was a lemon bar.]

*Guest:* I just read nonfiction, mostly. I don't read much fiction.

And that, of course, is the show stopper. I don't know what the relevant impersonal put-down would be to an economist, who in this case was the live source of the above quotes - I only read Adam Smith? I'm a free-market nut, a protectionist? If you know, let me know.

Some alternate endings:

*Guest:* Would I have heard of you? What's your name?

*Me:* Oh, I don't know. Alexander Chee is the name. The first novel's called *Edinburgh*.

*Guest:* I think I remember reading about it. How did it sell?

*Me:* Well enough.

*Guest:* Can I get it at a Barnes and Noble?

*Me:* Yes, just about every one of them.

The Barnes and Noble question is an interesting one. In the first year my book was out in hardcover, it was a hard-to-find independent press release. And then Picador took over, and suddenly the book was everywhere. To the minds of the people at these parties, though, there was always a new level of legitimacy, as if they all congregated somewhere and decided on how to afflict writers at the different stages of their careers. At first I wasn't a writer because I hadn't published a book, and then when I had, I wasn't a writer if they couldn't get it at a Barnes and Noble, and then when they could, I wasn't a writer unless it sold well and was famous, so famous they would have heard of me. If I should eventually win a Nobel, there'd be someone, somewhere at a party, who'd try to make it an insignificant accomplishment and set some further standard for being 'a writer.' They apparently can't help themselves. Mild-mannered creatures who would ordinarily shrink out of your way if you even looked like you wanted to walk by them to get to the cheese plate get a sadistic gleam in their eye at the mention you're a writer. And the more confident ones get quizzical or condescending, even if the greatest thing they ever did with their life was pay a parking ticket. They roll their eyes. They leap at the chance to show you they haven't heard of you.

Over time, I've realized that the problem is the profession itself. The problem is that I'm a writer, just as it is a problem for all writers at parties like these. People who aren't writers really have no idea what it's like in here. Partying with them is like a cross-

cultural experience, as a result. So I've learned to brace myself. Telling them I'm a writer apparently is like telling them I'm made of some nonhuman substance. I'm not expected to have the ordinary feelings. So while the testing me on how famous I am or how connected is a bit like being thrown to the floor to see if I bounce, they don't know that. And I've learned that if they haven't heard of me, and they say, I'm sorry, I've never heard of you, they aren't sorry. They apologize because they imagine I have this giant ego that's easily wounded by not being a celebrity to them. As if they didn't know, every writer starts out getting used to being ignored for their work.

The irony is that most people get into writing out of a social awkwardness of some kind or another that translates into good writing. People who rehearse conversations in their head, for example, are often quite good at dialogue. The paranoid, suspicious, and jealous have a knack for plot, misused. Unable to say what you meant at the time? You're likely a stylist. Shy and stands at the back of the room? Detail, detail, telling detail. You may not be socially awkward and in need of medication. You may just need to go write. All of this is to say that the average person isn't wrong to think writers are full of personality problems. We are. And we're trying to make a living off it, too. We're human anthologies of anxiety called writers.

The best thing anyone ever said to me about all of this came from the late Frank Conroy, a long-time director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. 'Success is as distracting as failure,' Frank said. 'You're on top, you stop writing, you're on the bottom, you stop writing - so, don't stop writing. Don't even think about it.'

I am used to telling my students not to talk so much about a book you're working on. I think now, what's really required is not mentioning you're a writer at all. Subterfuge, camouflage, whatever you have to do. You're a fiction writer. Lie. Make stuff up. Think of it as rehearsal. Some alternate scenarios:

*Guest:* So, what do you do?

*Me:* I...work on my personality. Actually, wow. Sorry. I'm such a liar.

*Guest:* What kind of work do you do?

*Me:* [strange eerie half-smile] Excuse me.

*Guest:* What field are you in?

*Me:* I'm a contract assassin. Whoops, sorry. Have to take this call.

*Alexander is author of the aforementioned Edinburgh and of The Queen of the Night, forthcoming from Houghton Mifflin.*

His current blog: <http://koreanish.wordpress.com>.

.....

## Stein, Maupin, Vidal & More

It's the summer of Toklas and Stein in San Francisco:

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/06/17/PKG7AQCASJ1.DTL&type=gaylesbian](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/06/17/PKG7AQCASJ1.DTL&type=gaylesbian).

Celebrating the news that Michael Tolliver is still alive:

[www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-ca-maupin15jun15.1.2524019.story?coll=la-headlines-frontpage&track=crosspromo](http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-ca-maupin15jun15.1.2524019.story?coll=la-headlines-frontpage&track=crosspromo).

Gore Vidal's complicated relationship with gay culture:

[www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF\\_TYPE=3&STORY\\_ID=3075&PUB\\_TEMPLATE\\_ID=2](http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF_TYPE=3&STORY_ID=3075&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=2).

The gay book club InSight Out, swallowed up:

[www.afterelton.com/bgwe/05-25-07](http://www.afterelton.com/bgwe/05-25-07).

Rice, Christopher, son, and Rice, Anne, mom, throw a party for the Lambda Literary Foundation:

[www.thedesertsun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070513/COLUMNS02/705130332/1215/COLUMNS15](http://www.thedesertsun.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070513/COLUMNS02/705130332/1215/COLUMNS15).

Hooray for queer children's books, or is that queer books for children?:

[www.edgeboston.com/index.php?ci=108&ch=news&sc=glbt&sc2=features&sc3=&id=4257](http://www.edgeboston.com/index.php?ci=108&ch=news&sc=glbt&sc2=features&sc3=&id=4257).

"You have to be a bit deranged if you're going to pick poetry and hope to reach a lot of people. It's like picking Latin as a language to communicate," says poet Shane Rhodes, who's included in *Seminal*, a solid collection of Canadian queer poets:

[www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF\\_TYPE=2&STORY\\_ID=2852&PUB\\_TEMPLATE\\_ID=6](http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF_TYPE=2&STORY_ID=2852&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=6).

Scottish lesbian Louise Welsh on writing in a gay male voice:

[www.smh.com.au/news/books/number-three-with-a-bullet/2007/03/14/1173722565142.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/number-three-with-a-bullet/2007/03/14/1173722565142.html).

British author Neil Bartlett in a passionate interview with Paul Burston about the fur trade, fairy tales, and gay writers (and rights):

<http://news.independent.co.uk/people/profiles/article2347957.ece>.

Andrew Holleran on *Dancer from the Dance*, *Grief*, and the books in between: "To my mind *Dancer* is a critical/satiric book. It's not a glamorization of gay life. It was a younger person's book so it came out with a certain element of romanticism that has something to do with temperament and false ideals. I do feel I've been in the grip of bleak realism for a long time now. I've really got to let it loosen because that's not the only viewpoint in life and I feel like I'm stuck in it. *Grief*, I think, was the end of that. *Grief*, I think, was about as far as I could take it." More:

[www.bookslut.com/features/2007\\_03\\_010776.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2007_03_010776.php).



### I'm Looking for a Few Good Books

Cleis, publishers of the *Best Gay Erotica* series that I've edited since 1997 (and of a few other books I've put together for them: *Hot Gay Erotica*, *Country Boys*, *Best Gay Romance 2008*, and *Where the Boys Are*) has asked me to work with the press as an editor at large, scouting for books for the Spring, Fall, and Winter lists. Cleis is interested in good memoirs, thoughtful and provocative nonfiction, smart-themed anthologies, imaginative erotica anthologies, and the occasional reprint. Children's books, drama, and poetry aren't on the radar. My task is to scout for titles, and work with potential authors to draft a proposal. Felice Newman and Frederique Delacoste, the Cleis publishers, consider the proposal; I then work with the author (or anthology editor), if they do accept the book, to make sure a clean, polished manuscript is delivered to the press on deadline. **In my role as editor-at-large, I don't make the final decision. My function is to look out for promising writers and writing - lesbian, gay, transgender - and to initiate contact between Cleis and possible authors.**

So: I'm open to queries. An initial email to [CleisEditor@gmail.com](mailto:CleisEditor@gmail.com) will start the process. If the idea sounds promising, I'll request sample chapters or the full book for a single-author work, or a smart proposal for an anthology. I'd strongly suggest that anyone considering submissions look at the Cleis website ([www.cleispress.com](http://www.cleispress.com)) for a more complete concept of the type of books that have made it one of the premier queer publishers of the past three decades. The bar is set high...



### Bestsellers From Our Bookstores

Bestseller lists are always snapshots of time and place, and Outwrite's is more up-to-date than that from Giovanni's Room, so it's not overly odd that books by Armistead Maupin and Mike Jones are number 1 and 2 in Atlanta but hadn't yet registered in Philadelphia - and of course Outwrite featured both writers at book signings. But it is notable that only one book appears on both lists: Kevin Sessums's *Mississippi Sissy*.

*Giovanni's Room* / Philadelphia Top ~~10~~ . . . 9\*

1. *Boston Boys Club*, by Johnny Diaz (Kensington, 294 pp., \$15 pb). Diaz depicts the lives of the men who gather in Boston's hottest gay bar to drink, mingle, and share stories.
2. *Mississippi Sissy*, by Kevin Sessums (St. Martin's, 320 pp., \$24.95 hb). Sessums brings to life the pungent American South of the 1960s and the world of the strange little boy who grew up there.
3. *Dark Reflections*, by Samuel R. Delany (Carroll & Graf, 295 pp., \$15.95 pb). This novel concerns the life of a gay African-American poet who has lived most of his life in NYC.
4. *Manhood: The Longest Moan*, by L.M. Ross (Q-Boro, 416 pp., \$14.95 pb). Three

African-American men are seeking fame, fortune, and love in New York City.

5. **Between Men: Best New Gay Fiction**, edited by Richard Canning (Carroll & Graf, 334 pp., \$15.95 pb). Eighteen of today's best writers are gathered in this stunning collection of new, unpublished stories.

6. **Call Me by Your Name**, by Andre Aciman (Farrar Straus Giroux, 248 pp., \$23 hb). The story of a sudden and powerful romance that blossoms between an adolescent boy and a summer guest at his parents' house.

7. **Vintage: A Ghost Story**, by Steve Berman (Harrington Park, 149 pp., \$12.95 pb). This young-adult novel concerns runaway teenagers.

8. **Giovanni's Room**, by James Baldwin (Doubleday, 176 pp., \$14 pb reprint). Set in the 1950s Paris of American expatriates, liaisons, and violence, a young man finds himself caught between desire and conventional morality.

9. **Mothers and Sons: Stories**, by Colm Tóibín (Scribner, 271 pp., \$24 hb). The mothers and sons in Tóibín's superlative first collection resist the changes wrought by transformative events.

(Book blurbs by Giovanni's Room: [www.gioannisroom.com](http://www.gioannisroom.com))

*Outwrite / Atlanta Top 40 . . . 9\**

1. **Michael Tolliver Lives**, by Armistead Maupin, \$25.95

2. **I Had to Say Something: The Art of Ted Haggard's Fall**, by Mike Jones, \$23.95

3. **Forgiveness**, by Jim Grimsley, \$21

4. **Looker**, by Stanley Bennett Clay, \$12.95

5. **Queer Astrology for Women**, by Jill Dearman, \$14.95

6. **The Transcended Christian: Spiritual Lessons for the Twenty-First Century**, by Daniel A. Helminiak, \$16.95

7. **Grief**, by Andrew Holleran, \$12.95

8. **What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality**, by Daniel A. Helminiak, \$13.95

9. **Mississippi Sissy**, by Kevin Sessums, \$24.95

Store info: [www.outwritebooks.com](http://www.outwritebooks.com)

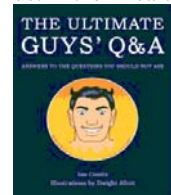
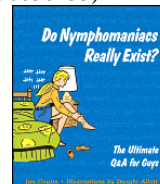
\*Beats me why both lists stop at 9 books rather than going on to the traditional 10!

.....

## Masturbation: How Long Is Too Long?

**Do Nymphomaniacs Really Exist? The Ultimate Q&A for Guys**, Ian Couatts (Chicago Review Press, \$14.95, US ISBN: 9781556526749, CDN ISBN: 9780470838433)

Upfront: there's nothing really gay about this book. The answer to a question about breaking into adult films focuses on the excessively heterosexual (but as far as I know, gay-friendly) porn star Ron Jeremy. The answer to a question about prolonged erections might titillate at first, but the ones Couatts is writing about go past the sexually fulfilling into the area of medical emergency. How to self-tattoo might pique some fetishists; "What is life like in the Foreign Legion" might fuel some fantasies; so might the answer to a question about building up your body in prison (not by weightlifting, since many U.S. prisons have eliminated barbells; think "burpee" - which is not the result of too much cola swallowed too quickly. (Buy the book and look it up.) "In a fight between Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears?" is superficially queer - but neither of them, really, has any diva cred. There's good news for young queers with lust in their heart but no boyfriend on the horizon, though: unless you Do It to the point



of developing carpal tunnel syndrome - or bleeding - there's nothing wrong with a lot of masturbation. So, then: why review this book in *BTWOF's Gay Men's Edition*? Because the author is a friend of mine, and I told him I would, and the book is a whole lot of fun, and we all in the end do need to know how to escape quicksand, what it's like when your parachute fails to open, and whether exotic female dancers (think go-go boys instead) catch colds. And there's another question this book answers: what can a gay guy get his straight friend/brother/nephew for a birthday gift? Now you know. Um, and the author is a friend of mine, the husband of a woman I met in college almost forty years ago. Author Ian is Canadian, by the way, and his book was first published here, with the much less titillating (and much more reserved) title *The Ultimate Guys' Q&A: The Answers to Questions You Should Not Ask*.

.....

Richard can be reached at [tattyhill@gmail.com](mailto:tattyhill@gmail.com) or at PO Box 133, 5596 County Rd. 12, McDonald's Corners, Ontario, K0G 1M0, Canada. Books for review, author news, interesting links - all appreciated.