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# The Gay Men's Edition

June 2004

Volume 1 Number 7

By Richard Labonte

## It's Isherwood's Gay Century, And We're Living In It

This year is the 100th anniversary of Christopher Isherwood's birth - and there's a party going on ... in a writerly way, of course.

I met Isherwood often at A Different Light in Silverlake, the first branch of the bookstore that is itself 25 years old this year. He and his partner Don Bachardy were early, generous supporters of the store from the day it opened in 1979. Though they lived over Santa Monica way (the west side of town), and the bookstore was close to downtown L.A. (the east side), they dropped in often, special-ordered books on occasion, and came frequently for book signings.

A couple of years after ADL's debut, Isherwood and Bachardy and their west-side neighbor David Hockney came for a joint appearance. Isherwood was signing a bagatelle - **People One Ought To Know**, a charming then-new book of short, playful poems about animals, written by Isherwood when he was 21, and illustrated with full color drawings by 11-year-old Sylvain Mangeot. It didn't have the literary oomph of *The Berlin Stories* or the gay cachet of *A Single Man*, but he was happy to inscribe copies for the crowd on hand, or any other book they set - almost reverentially - in front of him. Bachardy was signing *October*, his Twelvetees Press drawing-diary collaboration with Isherwood; Hockney was signing, probably, *David Hockney Photographs*, his 1982 St. Petersburg Press collection. The three sat side by side at a long glass-topped table that

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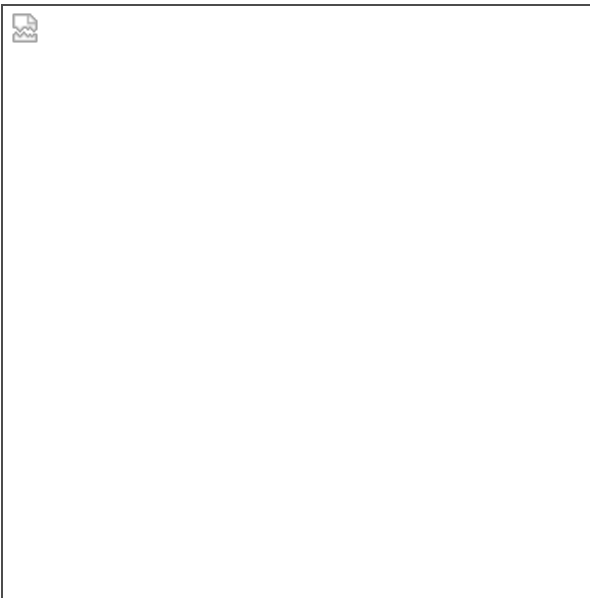
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normally was used to display new arrivals.

Hockney came equipped with a rainbow of colored pens. He signed most copies presented to him using a different pen for every couple of letters of his name, and

added a deft, quick cartoon-y sketch, individualized for each customer. Each signing took just a few seconds - he was quick. His line started out much longer than that for Isherwood; there were many arty lads in designer black, attracted to Hockney's bad-boy/gay-boy art image. Isherwood and Bachardy both drew an older audience (though a lot of people came to get books signed by all three of them). And because he was by then quite frail - he died just a few years later, in 1986 - Isherwood was much slower signing his name than either Hockney or Bachardy, to say nothing of being quite garrulous. Eventually, except for occasional stragglers, Hockney was done, while Isherwood still had a dozen or so fans in line. So, resplendent in his gold lamé slippers, he ambled over to the magazine rack, browsed the hardcore porn at the back of the bottom shelf, bought some, and picked up a beefy young thing. Later that same night, back at home, Norman Laurila and I watched *Rich and Famous* with Jacqueline Bisset and Candace Bergen, director George Cukor's last film - with Isherwood and Bachardy appearing as "Malibu Party Guest" at a scene shot, I think, on Hockney's ocean-view deck. (Gavin Lambert, even now still writing late into his life, also appeared as a "literary party guest," along with novelist Ray Bradbury, director Randal Kleiser of *Grease/The Blue Lagoon/Big Top Pee-Wee* fame, director Roger Vadim, talk show hosts of their time Dick Cavett and Merv Griffin, and Cukor himself). Those Hollywood circles...

For the store's fifth anniversary, in 1984, we threw a party, inviting every author in Los Angeles. Several dozen came, along with several hundred customers. James Leo Herlihy with a flowing silk scarf, Gavin Dillard with a dazzling smile, Malcolm Boyd and Joseph W. Bean, Terry Wolverton and Eloise Klein Healy, Betty Berzon and Michael Lassell. The party was scheduled from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., and every half hour



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or so, playwright James Carroll Pickett clambered on top of the front counter to announce notables who had arrived since the last introductions. By mid-party, the Silverlake bookstore was packed and happy, with the party spilling onto the Sunset Boulevard (the grimy strip of Sunset) sidewalk. Around 4 p.m. at the height of the festivities, James did another round of look-who's-heres, scanning the sales floor for new authorial faces, noting their arrival. He missed one - Isherwood, a bantam-height man lost in the crowd. But he did introduce Joe Tiffenbach, a porn entrepreneur who had just self-published *Foreskin*, a book in praise of... foreskins. Joe was in his hunky 50's then, about 30 years younger than Isherwood.

"Tiffenbach? Joe Tiffenbach?" Christopher's elegantly accented voice cut through the babble. "Where are you? I'm over here. Didn't I pick you up on Hollywood Boulevard in 1948." He had; they hugged; everyone laughed. Those Hollywood Boulevard circles...

Christopher Isherwood's life and letters are worth the honors. These are some of them:

"I've spent much of the last five years with Isherwood and I couldn't ask for better companionship; he is so humane," says Sue Hodson, curator of literary manuscripts at the Huntington Library in San Marino, a Los Angeles enclave. An exhibit of Isherwood's manuscripts, letters, diaries, audio and videotapes, and photos runs there through October. The details:

<http://www.pasadenastarnews.com/Stories/>

The deadline for submissions has passed, but the Christopher Isherwood Foundation (both Armistead Maupin and Jacqueline Bissett - those Hollywood circles - are on the board of advisors) will launch the *Christopher Isherwood Review* this fall: [http://www.isherwoodfoundation.org/isherwood\\_review.html](http://www.isherwoodfoundation.org/isherwood_review.html)

One celebratory book already available is *The Isherwood Century*: <http://www.theisherwoodcentury.org/>

Peter Parker's hefty, near 1,000-page biography of Isherwood – simply, **Isherwood** - isn't available in America until November, though impatient readers might try ordering it from Gay's the Word in London (email

[sales@gaystheword.co.uk](mailto:sales@gaystheword.co.uk) or check [www.gaystheword.co.uk](http://www.gaystheword.co.uk)).



Here is Edmund White's review, in which he declares the 1964 novel *A Single Man* "the founding text of modern gay fiction."

[http://www.the-tls.co.uk/this\\_week/story.aspx?story\\_id=2107494](http://www.the-tls.co.uk/this_week/story.aspx?story_id=2107494)

Coming in December: David Garrett Izzo's **Christopher Isherwood Encyclopedia** (McFarland & Company, \$65).

<http://www.mcfarlandpub.com/book-2.php?isbn=0-7864-1519-3>

In its "Best of L.A." annual issue last October, the *L.A. Weekly* named Isherwood's *A Single Man* the Best Los Angeles Novel. "...he laid bare L.A.'s essence as few novelists have. The perspective is that of a stranger, a foreigner, for whom L.A. is both a place to be and an escape from somewhere else - the perspective millions of L.A. residents still have every day," said Brendan Bernhard: <http://www.laweekly.com/ink/25/01/sight-bernhard.php>

And in a 2003 essay, Craig Seligman assesses Isherwood, with great fondness, as an author who "touches greatness frequently enough to leave you frustrated that he merely touches it:" [http://www.bookforum.com/archive/win\\_03/seligman.html](http://www.bookforum.com/archive/win_03/seligman.html) (Seligman's new book - **Sontag & Kael: Opposites Attract Me**, Counterpoint, \$23 - draws from and delights in both Sontag's dense critiques of mass culture, and Kael's deft defense of popular entertainments, which he filters through a celebration of gay sensibility; a lively interpretation of both their lives.)



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## New in Paper: A Summer Roundup

*Back with lower prices and softer covers, a few of my favorites from the past year:*

**The Geography Club**, by Brent Hartinger (*HarperTempest*, \$6.99)

There's a formula for coming-out stories set in small-town high schools. The usual mix includes jocks that jeer and bully; teachers loathe to provide sympathy or support; straight friends who come through in the end; and the blush of first love, or at least first crush. *The Geography Club* is all of these, but first-time author Hartinger re-jiggers the basic recipe with a delicious, unaffected edginess. Russell is convinced he is the only gay kid around, until he meets "Gayteen" online - and the closet door cracks open. Russell learns his chat buddy is baseball hunk Kevin, already an object of after-gym desire; he fearfully tells best friend Min all, only to have her come out as bisexual, with a girlfriend. Soon the new coalescence of queer kids, not quite ready to form a gay-straight alliance, conceives of the most boring of after-hours groups - a geography club - so



they can delight, covertly, in their openness. Tears, heartbreak, wisdom, hilarity, and essential truths ensue in this inventive, astute novel, an excellent fit for teens but suitable for grown-ups who have been there, done that.

(For an interview with Hartinger on this book and his latest, **The Last Chance Texaco**, HarperCollins, \$15.99):

<http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/>


**Dancer**, by Colum McCann, (Picador, \$14)

Before his death a decade ago, ballet's queer blond bad boy, Rudolf Nureyev, was more outed than out. To the end, he denied he was dying of AIDS. His gay life was the stuff of supermarket tabloids and cheeky, cheesy gossip. So it's perhaps no surprise that there's a sniggering tone whenever this novel dwells on the sexual side of the dancer's stormy life – could be the author is reflecting perceived reality, or possibly it springs from a straight writer over-imagining an underground gay life. This is most breathlessly apparent in the chapter "New York, 1975," which consists, remarkably but readably, of a single sentence running on for 36 steamy, giddy, and - lurid pleasure alert - irresistibly riveting pages. Aside from his squishy take on queer life, though, McCann has crafted a fascinating chorus of characters, real (Margot Fonteyn, Mick Jagger) and imagined, to give vivid voice to his clever fictional biography. From its haunting opening pages - a bold 7-year-old dances in 1944 for weary, wounded Russian soldiers - to its melancholy ending, *Dancer* distills the startling life of a conflicted, driven genius with atmospheric style.


(Author Info - a very long interview with the straight author:

<http://www.identitytheory.com/people/birnbaum89.html>)

**Bourbon Street Blues**, by Greg Herren (Kensington Publishing, \$14)


 *Bourbon Street Blues* is a mystery novel the way a muscle-worship video is a fitness tape. Sure, imitating a stud's biceps curls could arguably improve one's physique. And there is a mysteriously dead body in the book. But said dead body is nearly incidental to the erotically charged plot's buff queer bodies and steamy New Orleans ambience. Herren's hero is hottie Scotty, a personal trainer and go-go dancer with muscles for days, a seductive sense of social justice, and - despite occasional dizzy-queen moments - a brain to match his sexy brawn. That brain foils the implausible plan of a loony right-wing gubernatorial candidate to win election by blowing up a river levee and washing away the sins - and the votes - of the city's godless homos. The brawn, meanwhile, is busy stroking an FBI agent's steely thigh, bedding a cat burglar with a chiseled bod, and flirting with well-pec'd hordes cavorting in the French Quarter - all in a day's (and a night's) work, in this sassy, amusing mix of much sex and scant sleuthing.

**Man About Town**, by Mark Merlis (HarperCollins, \$12.95)

There is scant passion in sad-sack Joel Lingeman's fictional  life. His sinecure as a Congressional researcher midway through Clinton's presidency bores him. His lover of 15 years has left him. He's drinking too much, he's traumatized by the prospect of dating again, and he's too depressed by it all to care that his suits no longer fit his pudgy frame. But when real life fails, fantasy fills the vacuum. Joel turns to the masturbatory memory of a beautiful man modeling a skimpy bathing suit from the truss-ad back pages of a 1964 magazine - then, an electrifying erotic image for a 14-year-old boy; now, a foolish, possibly fruitless obsession for the middle-aged jaded queen he's become. Joel's quest to capture past passion is the captivating, imaginative core of *Man About Town*. But Merlis' novel also has much that's sage to say about gay men aging gracefully, the complexity of interracial romance, and closeted hypocrisy in Washington politics. This is uncommonly grown-up work by a writer with a keen, affectionate eye for gay foibles and failings.

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

**Leave Myself Behind**, by Bart Yates (Kensington Books, \$15)

 The coming-out novel is a staple of queer fiction debuts.

Some would even say it's an overworked cliché. But *Leave Myself Behind*, some overwrought gothic moments aside, is an effervescently effective addition to the genre - Yates, in his first novel, has injected juicy originality into the coming-of-age fable. At its smart and smartass center is impudently precocious Noah, a skinny 17-year-old juggling the demons and demands of his father's sudden death, his mother's creeping madness, and his discombobulating displacement from the urban wilds of Chicago to the rural weirdness of New Hampshire. Yates crams his richly nuanced plot with a lot of issues: Noah's blossoming love for straight-identified J.D., a well-muscled sweet-16 neighbor; J.D.'s own horrific home life with a morosely alcoholic father and a hysterically bigoted mother; schoolyard bullies and their bashing; tragic secrets, rape and incest included, at the root of family dysfunctions. Busy, yes, but Yates bundles it all together with a sure touch for deciphering teen angst, exploring adolescent sex, and detailing life on the confusing cusp of growing up.

Read the first chapter: <http://www.kensingtonbooks.com/finditem.cfm?itemid=6996>

**Where the Boys Are**, by William J. Mann (Kensington Books, \$13)

A love story, a murder mystery, a soap opera, an inquisitive exposition of contemporary queer culture - *Where the Boys Are* is all that, a hugely entertaining novel and at the same time a

serious, spiritually rich read. Mann has done a fine job of crafting a stand-alone book, driven in part by the Peter Pan appeal and exhilarating dance beat of the circuit party world. But this inventive tale - thoughtful about grief and survival, bare-backing and body image, clinging to youth and finally growing up - is best read as the sequel to *The Men from the Boys*. That gay bestseller introduced the bumpy romance of Jeff and Lloyd, who were devastated at the end by the AIDS death of their older mentor. This sequel reignites their old passions - but not before author Mann pairs Jeff with a bewitching young innocent with a shrouded past somehow linked to a murder, and Lloyd with one of the most memorably dislikable and deranged characters in gay fiction.

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

**The Beginning of Calamities**, by Tom House (*Bridge Works Publishing*, \$15.95)

The real world terrifies, mortifies, and mystifies Danny Burke. The athletic boys at his Long Island Catholic school bully him. The banality of his home life embarrasses him. Fantasies inspired by images of Jesus bleeding on the cross confuse (and arouse) him. He's the epitome of a sissy - and he's only 11, a precocious preteen whose nascent homoerotic misery is depicted with melancholy hilarity in House's canny novel for grown-ups. To avoid the horror of recess dodge ball games, young Danny convinces his teacher to let him pen an Easter play based on the Gospels - "The Passion of Christ," emphasis on the passion. The unfortunate cast consists of fifth-grade misfits, including a narrator who lisps ("Now began the darketh hourth of Jethuth'th thuffering...") and Danny as Jesus, so into his role he drags his wooden cross to school on the morning of the ill-fated production. ("Take the back roads," his long-suffering mother pleads.) *The Beginning of Calamities*, an auspicious debut, is a jaunty reminder of the cruelty of childhood and a good-natured dissection of religious hysteria.

Author info: <http://www.HouseStories.net/>

**The Music of Your Life**, by John Rowell (*Simon and Schuster*, \$13)

Compassionate comedy is born of imperfection, heartbreak, and regret - the survivable failures of our lives.



That's certainly how it goes in *The Music of Your Life*, a remarkable debut collection of seven well-polished stories.

There is in every one an authentic balance between wishing for a magic future and settling for a prosaic present, a wry, poignant assertion that dreams don't always come true. There's also a charming trace of old-school gay DNA in every sweetly melancholic story - a passion for show tunes and Julie Andrews, an eye for just the right color, a career as a florist. In the title tale, a 10-year-old adores both Lawrence Welk's

"champagne music" and Batman's suggestive tights, avoids schoolyard bullies when he can, and is a disappointment to his confused, ashamed father - the classic gay tropes, always honored with gentle, unembarrassed respect. Rowell's stylish fiction is infused with the manners and memories of his North Carolina roots, a tone that probably prompted his publisher's press-release comparisons to the early writing of Truman Capote. The parallel is almost appropriate.

**Do Everything in the Dark**, by Gary Indiana (St. Martin's Press, \$12.95)

For Manhattan's cultural insiders, pretenders, and hangers-on, this episodic novel's depiction of excess and ennui should vibrate with cheeky resonance. It's a pity, then, that most of those people probably won't read *Do Everything in the Dark* - except perhaps to see if Indiana's wicked way with character assassination includes them. Or to cluck over his incisive dissection of self-centered personalities, among them a Susan Sontag-like intellectual. As for the rest of us - well, there's a perverse and powerful charm to this aggressively melancholic account of a social set's inexorable slide into decay. The author's jump-cut take on the short-circuited potential and damaged psyches of the actors, writers, and other artists drawn from his world is both catty and compassionate, a tricky balancing act. But he pulls it off with sharp-witted style, excavating his past as art critic for *The Village Voice* to skewer that world's artifice with gusto. Indiana's previous work, most recently the novels *Depraved Indifference* and *Three Month Fever*, has all been edgy chronicles of folly. This one extends an idiosyncratic winning streak. (July)

**War Against the Animals**, by Paul Russell (St. Martin's, \$13.95)

The savage sorrow of cultures in collision is the provocative core of this compassionate novel. On one side of a fearful divide: a nepotistic Catskills community, clinging to its conservative heritage and resentful of interlopers. On the other: a flowering community of liberal escape-from-Manhattan queers, gleefully gentrifying a decaying town. Jesse is a teenage redneck, adrift after his father's death, living in the shadow of his crude older brother, and both baffled by and attracted to the flamboyant men new to his world. Cameron is a wealthy transplant, adrift when his lover leaves him, in better health thanks to new meds after nearly dying of AIDS, and both wary of and drawn to the muscled, moody boy who comes to work for him. Russell's characters, gay and straight alike, are generously nuanced. His themes - coming out, coping with death, needing love, sex intersecting tragically with violence - are common enough in gay fiction. Propelled by masterful plotting, elegant writing, and a riveting climax, though, the



predictable is made perfectly fresh in *War Against the Animals*.  
(September)

**In Clara's Hands**, by Joseph Olshan (Bloomsbury UK, \$13)

*In Clara's Hands* braids together not one but two storylines from author Olshan's underappreciated fictional oeuvre. One character, the mystically no-nonsense Jamaican-born Clara Mayfield, was central to *Clara's Heart*, his 1985 debut, made into a middling movie starring Whoopi Goldberg; the other is Will Kaplan, from 1994's *Nightswimmer*, about the conflicted surviving son of a family fractured by the shocking death of his elder brother. Will and Clara have stayed in contact through the 20 years since Clara's stint as a live-in housekeeper for the Kaplan clan. Here, they're reconnected by the mysterious disappearance of Will's friend Marie Claire - the mother of Will's ex-lover, Peter. There's a dense intensity to Olshan's mournful, mesmerizing reflection on the paralysis of memory, the acceptance of death, and the possibility of love. But there's also a soothing simplicity, expressed most particularly through the healing spirit of waggish, world-weary Clara, the sort of uncommon, unconditional, comforting companion every unsettled gay man can cherish - if not in real life, then at least in the pages of this agile work of fiction.

Reviews of *Clara's Heart* (<http://bookcrossing.com/journal/1215721>) and of *Nightswimmer* (<http://www.raetzer-botha.de/gay/books-e.html>, third review), the two books brought together in *In Clara's Hands*; and, here, a bad-book slam: <http://www.gaycitynews.com/gcn210/twistedsisiter.html>

**Going the Other Way: Lessons from a Life In and Out of Major-League Baseball**, by Billy Bean with Chris Bull (Marlowe & Company, \$14.95)



A heart-tugging romance, a courageous coming-out account, a memoir dizzy with a man's passion for baseball - *Going the Other Way* is a solid triple. Readers hoping Bean will spill the beans about queer shenanigans in the clubhouses will be disappointed - though former Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda's son and former major leaguer Glenn Burke, both gay, both dead of AIDS, are mentioned briefly. Instead, the retired player and his gifted co-author, gay journalist Bull, focus with engaging candor on the story of a scrawny, solitary kid who transformed himself into a solid-bodied team player; of a sexually confused, deeply closeted gay man who married his college sweetheart; and of a utility player who bounced around the big leagues for a decade, living out a dream and living through a nightmare. Bean's book joins the autobiographies of football player David Kopay and diver Greg Louganis as inspiration for today's gay teen jocks. That's reason enough to applaud it. But any fan of baseball will savor the depth of feeling Bean brings to the story of his journeyman days in a

sport he so clearly loved.

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

An interview about being gay in baseball:

<http://www.outsports.com/baseball/20020812beancnn.htm>

### **Why the Long Face? The Adventures of a Truly Independent Actor**, by Craig Chester (St. Martin's, \$13.95)

A few flicks hailed at Sundance and then exiled to scattered art houses. A silly TV movie about schizophrenia starring a loopy Diana Ross. Short stints on stage, including a star turn in a cramped storage-room incarnation of *AIDS: The Musical* at a Dallas AIDS resource center. On the surface, there's not a lot of career for actor Chester to write a memoir about. The author's thespian tendencies manifested themselves early, when in boyhood he faked speaking in tongues, in a vain attempt to gain favor among his rural Texas Bible Belt peers. But he persevered, carving out a celebrated niche as a proudly, openly queer independent film presence, with credits including the affable slapstick romance *Kiss Me, Guido* and the unjustly reviled dead-boy film *Frisk*. He also outgrew the homophobia of Christian schooling, fumbled for sexual identity at summer camp, and survived a harrowing teenage year of jaw-breaking reconstructive facial surgery to correct "long-face syndrome," a genetic defect - rites of passage recounted with hilarious honesty in *Why the Long Face?*, where he mines a delightfully dizzy life for page after page of rewarding comic prose.

Author interview: <http://uk.gay.com/article/1711>



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### **In This Corner, Dale Peck**

Just because a fellow has opinions, other people with opinions knock him around. Of course, Dale Peck's opinions - collected this month in **Hatchet Jobs: Cutting Through Contemporary Literature** (New Press, \$23.95) - can be harsh. He called Rick Moody "the worst writer of his generation"; Ian McEwan's novels stink, he said, worse than dead fish - or at least the paper they're printed on does; and Terry McMillan's *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* is a "panting, gasping, protracted death rattle." From a marginal writer of shallow talent, bitch slaps of this sort could be shrugged off as jealous rants. But Peck takes writing seriously, and writes books with heft - *Martin and John* (published in the U.K. as *Fucking Martin*), *The Law of Enclosures*, and *Now It's Time to Say Goodbye* were among the best bits of gay fiction published in each of their respective years. Some of us read for entertainment; he reads for more than that - for originality, for



depth, for majesty, for art. And when he finds those qualities in a novel, he doesn't stint on thoughtful, generous praise: Rebecca Brown's *Excerpts from a Family Medical Dictionary* is one he likes. One I like, too, which may be why I find his own books so smart, and his criticism entirely apt. *Hatchet Jobs* demands standards most writers won't ever match; but anyone serious about fiction will learn a lot.

Meanwhile, let's walk back the controversy over the opinionated Mr. Peck, starting with a panel on critics earlier this month at BookExpo America, the annual convention for booksellers. From *PW Newsline's* show coverage, by Steven Zeitchek, this day-after commentary:

"What promised to be an entertaining panel took an even further O'Reilly-esque turn... as *Philadelphia Inquirer* reviewer Carlin Romano lobbed criticism at self-styled hatchet reviewer Dale Peck while audience members yelled things like "You're obsolete" at panelists. Ostensibly a look into the savagery of reviews, the discussion quickly began to prove its own point when Romano charged that Peck's brand of reviews puts adjectives ahead of analysis. "There's savagery and there's savagery," he said, referring to Peck's trademark zingers, adding that Peck reflexively dislikes everything because it is not as he would have written it... Peck responded that he indeed uses textual analysis and that the books, not the reviews, are the issue. "There's a problem here. It's not a lack of talent. The problem is a lack of [authors] going against received wisdom." Peck sought to disarm criticism by saying that he doesn't intend his reviews to be a standard: "I don't want everyone to write about books the way I do. I wouldn't want to read reviews that are writing about books the way I do."

According to newspaper accounts no longer available on-line, Romano wasn't much mollified.

Next: this is the article, from last October's *New York Times Magazine*, that set literary tongues to wagging, clucking, and tut-tutting: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/26/magazine/26PECK.html>

In an essay about why he reviews the way he does, from *The New Republic*, Peck wrote, really smartly, about what he calls "Stepford fiction": <http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?pt=mBFc/9JGFQ4h0PgGzX4qAx>

In a British interview, Peck discussed his evisceration of Rick Moody:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,1134188,00.html>

And in a separate article, the interviewer decrees that there's a new verb in American literary circles - to "Peck":

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,1091150,00.html>

In a chatty insider interview last fall with Choire Sicha of [www.gawker.com](http://www.gawker.com), Peck mused on the kerfuffle:

<http://www.gawker.com/topic/the-dale-peck-im-interview-013750.php>

A more focused, no less informative, interview:

[www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/](http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personalities/)


And a kind review of *Hatchet Jobs*: <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2004/07/noteworthy.htm>

Even better, a kind bookseller critique of *Hatchet Jobs*, by John Mitzel of Calamus Books in Boston, from his weekly new-books newsletter: "What Peck is doing is using these occasions to meditate on the state of fiction in recent years and make his very pointed criticisms of what he sees as the deficiencies in the prominent work of certain popular writers. He's a man who takes writing seriously - his own work is serious literary fiction - and he knows the terrain. And, good news, there are writers he actually likes. Peck has done his homework and *Hatchet Jobs* is both fun and a challenge to the fragmented world that popular writing has become, like so much else in popular culture, a situation probably unable to be remedied but worth complaining about in a smart way, to which effort Peck has made his thoughtful contribution." (<http://calamusbooks.com/newsletters/4/14>)

It's okay to laugh here: "Drove by PS 42 and thought about childhood. There's a certain sophistry to hopscotch, at least the way today's generation plays it, the bleak *recherché* of patterns distorted for their own sake, as if this irreverence was soothing somehow, and not simply a flailing of sneakers and hooded jackets wasting away in the failing light. I wept for twenty minutes." From "Dale Peck Reviews His Day," by Jeremy Richards, at <http://www.haypenny.com/archive/featurearchive/ingrid/>

And here's my review of Peck's fourth book:

**What We Lost: Based on a True Story**, by Dale Peck  
(Houghton Mifflin, \$23)

Peck often borrows moments and memories from his own life  for his unconventional fiction, most particularly in the 1996 novel, *The Law of Enclosures*. To astonishing effect, he inverts that process in this stark memoir of his own father's life. *What We Lost* invokes the facts of Dale Peck Sr.'s grim early years with the fierce, clear-eyed detachment of a gifted fabricator of fiction. The Dale who tells the story is a Manhattan homosexual slightly famed in the 1990s for his novels. The Dale whose story he tells lived, mid-1950s, in a squalid hovel with seven siblings, a stepmother who beat him,

and a wreck of a father who one drunken night spirited his son away from the misery. Dale Sr., then 14, stayed a year with his uncle, milking cows, excelling at school sports, and growing strong. But, bowing inexplicably to the power of blood ties, he returned home. Peck honors that power with this aggressively unsentimental portrait of an often-distant father who mastered life and its harsh misery with stubborn resilience.

The author speaks for himself here: <http://www.dalepeck.com/> (eventually)



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## Two Books I Haven't Read That You All Ought To

From Salon, a roundup of reviews of Colm Tóibín's masterful **The Master** (Simon & Schuster, \$25): "Writing a novel that captures Henry James is like deriving an equation that calculates Albert Einstein," says the *Christian Science Monitor*. Yet everyone agrees that Colm Tóibín has "stared the nearly impossible in the face and achieved a quiet tour de force," as the *New York Observer* puts it, with this biographical novel chronicling five transitional years in James' life. (Repressed sexuality is a major theme; Tóibín even imagines a night of passion with Oliver Wendell Holmes.) The key is not stylistic imitation - Tóibín's prose is "lighter and less ornate" than James', says the *London Review of Books* - but Tóibín's ability to match his subject "in his awareness of the uses and the costs of evasion," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Ultimately, says the *Chicago Tribune*, "James emerges as a truly Jamesian character - and this is a triumph of imaginative sympathy."




Indeed, yes. And: "Could (Henry James') fear of an actual relationship with a man also have been a fear of intimacy, not just of flouting convention? "Yes – that's the term we'd use for it now, isn't it? However he was placed within his family, and however his relationship with his sister Alice developed, he certainly was careful to maintain a solitary life, partly because of his homosexuality, but also because of something deeper and stronger than that, from whatever happened to him growing up in a big family." So says Tóibín himself:

<http://www.sundayherald.com/40397>

How the book blossomed from a series of nonfiction essays:

[www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/04/03/1080941716564.html?oneclick=true](http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/04/03/1080941716564.html?oneclick=true)

And a giddy review: <http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/arts/books/documents/03858828.asp>

 Kudos abound, too, for David Sedaris' new collection, **Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim** (Little, Brown, \$24.95). I read many of the essays in *Esquire*, and heard a few read on the radio, and every time, I laughed out loud. He got his start on NPR's *Morning Edition*, reading his memorable Christmas elf story more than a decade ago, and after that was a constant for a while on Ira Glass' *This American Life* - so it's easy to hear his "voice" when reading his words, an effect that I think enhances his mordant, relaxingly-formulaic, wit.

Here's an article on his climb to fame (are those homosexuals front and center in the photo, excitingly getting their books signed?):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/06/fashion/>

Sedaris is interviewed on his writing technique, and discusses child molesters he has (unfortunately) known:

<http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/gay/lesbian/news/>


Time Magazine asks him 10 Questions: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/>



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## It's a NY Times Bestseller - But Wait For A Better One

**On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Black Men Who Sleep With Men**, by J.L. King (*Broadway Books*, \$21.95)

By the author's own admission, the topic of black men living straight but scoring gay has been much discussed in print in recent years - even, not so long ago, in the *New York Times Magazine*.  It's certainly a fascinating subset of the gay world, meriting anecdotal exploration, autobiographical confession, and cultural, spiritual, and medical analysis. This earnest effort at "breaking the silence about a hidden sexual lifestyle" skims the surface of all three areas. As the first book of its kind, it succeeds in raising warning flags and making publicity waves; an appearance by the author on Oprah speaks to the importance of the topic in the African-American community. But King's flat writing sucks the energy out of the anecdotes; his self-confessions are fascinating the first time they crop up, but dulled by overenthusiastic repetition; and his analysis, while apt as far as it goes, is more suited to an informational pamphlet. Better books are sure to follow - probably Keith Boykin's 2005 title from Carrol & Graf, *Beyond the Down Low*, whose nonfiction study will include a look at

media hype around "the DL." Boykin was asked to work with King on *On the Down Low*, but declined; so did Kai Wright (contributor, *The Man I Might Become*); and a foreword to be written by E. Lynn Harris didn't appear in the final book.

In an Advocate interview, King says he's happy to sleep with men, but won't identify as gay because he doesn't believe he can have an enduring relationship with a black gay man:

[http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/915/915\\_downlow.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/915/915_downlow.asp)



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### Fun Author Site of the Month:

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

Speaking of Keith Boykin: he's one of two queers (the other is Chrissy Gephardt, daughter of Rep. Richard Gephardt), who are taking part in *American Candidate*, a new reality TV show on Showtime in which 12 contestants compete in a series of tests during a simulated presidential campaign. Boykin, his "campaign" managed by his partner Nathan - "I believe we will be the first black gay couple ever to appear on reality TV - faced the first elimination hurdle on June 8, when he and another candidate gave campaign speeches, and were judged on the number of supporters who showed up. Check out the site for campaign updates - it seems there's a new elimination every couple of weeks. Hey - it's a reality show!

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

Campaign aside, however, keithboykin.com is a jumping joint - he maintains a near-daily slice-of-life column, recommends books he likes, posts his writing, links to loads of worthwhile places, and engages site readers with enormous energy, good humor, smart writing, and - best of all - colorful, easily-navigated, eye-friendly design.

(And, in the spirit of equal time, here is Chrissy Gephardt's site:

[http://www.americancandidate.com/candidate\\_homepage.php?id=957](http://www.americancandidate.com/candidate_homepage.php?id=957))



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### New York Review (Queer) Books

A gay hooray to whoever is choosing titles for The New York Review of Books' reprint series. There are some wonderful queer-important classics made available every season, most

recently:



**Apartment in Athens**, by Glenway Wescott,  
intro. by David Leavitt (NYRB, \$12.95)

Out of print for more than 30 years, this is a novel  
"about a Greek couple in Nazi-occupied Athens  
who must share their living quarters with a

German officer... an intense and unsettling drama of  
accommodation and rejection, resistance and compulsion, and  
an account of political oppression and spiritual struggle that is  
also a parable about the costs of closeted identity."

<http://www.nybooks.com/nyrb/authors/6891>

**The Ivory Tower**, by Henry James, intro. by Alan Hollinghurst  
(NYRB, \$12.95)

"Beginning among the great houses and sweeping sea views of  
Newport, Rhode Island, with the underhanded deals and  
enduring animosities of New York's financial world lurking in  
the background, *The Ivory Tower* explores the predicaments of  
Rosanna Gaw and Graham Fielder, heirs of two rival tycoons."

<http://www.nybooks.com/nyrb/authors/7452>

**The Gallery**, by John Horne Burns, intro by Paul Fussell  
(NYRB, \$12.95)

"A daring and enduring novel, one of the first to look directly at  
gay life in the military, *The Gallery* poignantly conveys the  
mixed feelings of the men and women who fought the war that  
made America a superpower."

<http://www.nybooks.com/nyrb/authors/10192>

Off on a tangent: Jerry Rosco's fluid and informative biography,  
**Glenway Wescott, Personally**, is a one-stop read for anyone  
new to Wescott and his work. Here's an excerpt from the bio:

<http://www.out.com/bookexcerpts.asp?id=976>

And a fine review of Rosco's book:

<http://www.oysterboyreview.com/issue/16/WojtasikT-Rosco.html>

Back to NYRB: And then there's **W.H. Auden's Book of Light Verse**. But there's no need to restrict your reading to the queer stuff. This publisher's list oozes with overlooked, underappreciated, and long-out-of-print masterpieces, to say nothing of several upcoming books that address directly contemporary American politics and culture:

<http://www.nybooks.com/nyrb/forthcoming>

And here are some of the other authors-of-interest on the 100-book NYRB backlist: J.R. Ackerly, Truman Capote, J.L. Carr, Colette, Ivy-Compton Burnett, Jean Genet, L.P. Hartley, James McCourt, Henri Michaux, James Schuyler, A.J.A. Symons (those British writers sure have an affinity for initials), and





Patrick White. Plus other books by Wescott and James.




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## Let's Get Academic About It

Reading to learn is as much fun as reading for fun. Here are a few recent big-word, big-thought books:


**The Queer God**, by *Marcella Althaus-Reid* (Routledge, \$30.95)

The title alone would cause Pat Robertson to damn us all to hell. As for his actually reading *The Queer God*? That would  bring down fire and brimstone. This is a bristling religious explosion - dense and difficult, but a brilliant re-imagining of God that opens wide the stuffy heterosexual closet of traditional Christian thought. Althaus-Reid fuses the politics of queer theory and the passion of liberation theology with bracing originality - if there is a good God, the author pronounces, She is as present in the S/M erotics of the Marquis de Sade, or in the exotic sexual practices of South American tribal cultures, as in the most reverent of prayers offered in the grandest of churches. If there is a just God, She embraces Brazilian prostitute transvestites and well-dressed Sunday churchgoers with equal grace and holiness. This book's creative queer theology holds out the promise of a Christianity capable of blessing and embracing people who love those whom, ecclesiastically, they are not meant to love - a radical call for a faith that includes rather than excludes.

Althaus-Reid essay on the theology of memory:

<http://www.epica.org/Library/church/lifeout.htm>

**Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People**, by *Joan Roughgarden* (University of California Press, \$27.50)

Birds do it, baboons do it, even fish swimming in the sea and lizards lazing in the sun do it - express gender fluidity and same-sex orientation. So why not women and men? That's the persuasively argued crux of *Evolution's Rainbow*, a controversial consideration of evolution, genetic determinism, and the spectrum of sexual activity in the natural world. 

Roughgarden is an acclaimed professor of biology at Stanford University, and an MTF transsexual. All the aspects of her self - scientific curiosity and intelligence, personal emotion and experience - are fused in this revolutionary affirmation of life's rainbow of diversity. The result is a challenging yet seductive book that explores everything from the asexual procreation of aphids to the sexual complexity of humans. Along the way the


author refutes the absolutism of Darwin's theory of evolution, challenges social-science orthodoxies, and even bitch-slaps fundamentalists who misread the Bible. This book's blend of hard science, progressive politics, and sharp thinking declares that sexual ambiguity ought to be embraced as a norm, not feared as a threat - a splendid thought.

Roughgarden ably confronts Simon LeVay, a critic of her thinking (and being): <http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Bailey/Joan-re-LeVay.html>

LeVay's self-serving response: <http://members.aol.com/slevay/page21.html>

And an *L.A. Weekly* interview with Roughgarden: <http://www.laweekly.com/ink/04/21/books-kotler.php>

**Becoming a Visible Man**, by Jamison Green (Vanderbilt University Press, \$24.95)

The personal, the factual, and the political mesh perfectly in *Becoming a Visible Man*. This measured memoir by a leading  advocate for transmen and transwomen is primarily a candid account of Green's bumpy but self-assured passage from woman to man, including a poignant description of his own mother's resolute disapproval. With writing that is always lucid and accessible, the book then shifts into textbook territory for an intelligent but not overly scholarly exposition of the medical, physical, and emotional hurdles confronting FTMs. And, finally, it argues with implacable common sense that the transsexual movement - like the struggle for queer equality that preceded and now parallels it - is essentially about fundamental, overdue human rights. Green, married to a woman and the father of children, is particularly connected to the chapter "Transparent Feelings," about transpeople as parents and about parents and their transchildren. As a longtime activist, he also brings firsthand knowledge to the chapter on history and community. There's been no shortage of transsexual-topic books recently - Green cites more than a dozen published since 2000 - and his is an invaluable addition. Author info: <http://www.jamisongreen.com/>

**The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's "The Tempest"**, by W.H. Auden (Princeton University Press, \$24.95)

"...the most brilliant and unsettling of the four long poems Auden composed during his furiously industrious first decade in America," says Mark Ford in *The New York Review of Books* - which includes "an extraordinary speech by Caliban, written in a convoluted pastiche of Henry James." It's a thin book, just 100 pages, insightfully annotated by editor Arthur Kirsch. But this reprint is a cogent reminder that Auden is a writer for the ages.

The book from a bookstore's perspective:

<http://www.semcoop.com/detail/0691057303>

**Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London**, by Mark W. Turner (*Reaktion Books*, \$27)

What *Backward Glances* is not: a juicy first-person narrative of men the author has coupled with in alleys, adult bookstores, and opera hall lobbies. Nor is it a glib compendium of how-to tips for meeting the one-night stand of one's dreams. As fuel for fantasies imagined or realized, such books have their value. This ruminative take on cruising is far more fascinating. From the Turkish baths of Victorian London and the steamy streets of Walt Whitman's New York, to the age of cruisingforsex.com, Turner draws on novels, diaries, poetry, pornography, and art to opine that cruising is an act of connection rather than alienation. This premise is at odds with the straight perception that queer cruising is the province of the lonely, the desperate, or the sexually addicted. Turner makes his case for cruising as an act of urban community with a combination of solid historical sources and provocative queer theory. His prose is snoozy and ponderous in places - he's a British academic with a fondness for tangents - but nimble, original thinking propels the book.

**The Violet Hour: The Violet Quill and the Making of Gay Culture**, by David Bergman (*Columbia University Press*, \$24)



"An interesting social history that reveals the Violet Quill as emblematic of the trajectory of the gay male elite from dominance - by caste - of gay representation, to devastation by AIDS, to obscurity at the hands of contemporary corporate control of gay imagery. Bergman is particularly provocative in illuminating the various degrees of success to which survivors Picano, Holleran, and White have been able to negotiate both the plague and commodification," says Sarah Schulman of Bergman's astute, reflective follow-up to 1994's *The Violet Quill Reader* - a blurb that makes the book sound more daunting than it is. Seven writers got together about eight times to discuss their writing, eat and argue, and fascinating canonization ensued; Bergman threads through the ups and downs of gay culture and the writing and the lives of Michael Grumley, Robert Ferro, Christopher Cox, and George Whitmore (dead of AIDS), and of Andrew Holleran, Edmund White, and Felice Picano (still writing, some faster than others).

Bergman on teaching a gay canon: [http://www.georgetown.edu/tamlit/essays/gay\\_les.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/tamlit/essays/gay_les.html)

The impact, on one fellow, of *The Violet Quill Reader*:

<http://www.hour.ca/columns/3dollarbill.aspx?iIDArticle=682>



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## Out For An Internet Cruise

Playwright Michael Kearns (*T-Cells and Sympathy: Monologues in the Age of AIDS*) uses a children's book, *My Dad Has HIV*, to tell his daughter what HIV is - and that he's lived with it for 15 years: <http://www.laweekly.com/ink/04/30/features-kearns.php>

Allison Burnett comes clean. Or comes out. In a not-out way. Here's the first-person account of a straight man whose first novel, *Christopher: A Tale of Seduction*, wowed gay readers and reviewers who bonded with its bitchy central character. [http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/917/917\\_burnett.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/917/917_burnett.asp)  
<http://www.allisonburnett.com/>

"... [T]o understand David's suicide, you first need to know his anguished history, which I chronicled in my book *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised As a Girl*," writes John Colapinto in his Slate remembrance of David Reimer: <http://slate.msn.com/id/2101678/>

More on Scott & Scott of the Romantics - every new publisher should be so skilled at their own PR!: <http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/artsCulture/view.bg?articleid=70626>  
And from a South African website: <http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books04/040618-romentic.html>

In manga, the girls like the boys who like the girly boys: <http://www.villagevoice.com/vls/181/ito.shtml>

For cute-boy comics that are a lot more buff, consider the several books of Joe Phillips, whose youthful imagery is as popular as can be; for artist info, <http://www.joephillips.com>, for an interview, <http://www.befrank.co.uk/news/cartoon001.htm>, and for an appreciation: <http://www.365gay.com/entertainment/feature/051904feature.htm>

Three books beating the drum for - or beating on - the Beats: <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0422/holcomb2.php>

Hmm. A British novel by highly-regarded thriller writer Carol Ann Davis with male rape as the crime that triggers murder and mayhem. An interview with the author / a positive review: [http://www.thealienonline.net/ao\\_030.asp?tid=1&scid=3&iid=2087](http://www.thealienonline.net/ao_030.asp?tid=1&scid=3&iid=2087)

<http://www.sfsite.com/05a/ki175.htm>

Perry Brass on the lack of good gay thrillers:

<http://www.emediawire.com/releases/2004/5/emw128793.htm>

Look what the Internet coughed up; an October, 2003 Christian Science Monitor article placing Dennis Cooper at the center of a new indie-writer L.A. revival. Excellent:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1031/p16s02-alar.html>



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## 20 For 2004: The Cleis Press Catalogue

Erotic fiction, the book that inspired a Tony- and Pulitzer-winning play, an S/M classic, a lesbian bestseller from half a century ago, Virginia Woolf in paperback, and two queer encyclopedias: Cleis is as eclectic as ever, with its 2004 **Books To Watch Out For**.

A couple are already in hand: Violet Blue's **Taboo: Forbidden Fantasies for Couples**, was a March title; **Best Asian Gay Erotica**, edited by Joel B. Tan, and **Heat Wave: Sizzling Sex Stories**, edited by Alison Tyler, were released in May.

For June: **Queer Beats: How the Beats Turned America Onto Sex**, edited by Regina Marler, includes fiction, prose, letters, and essays by Ginsberg, Burroughs, Kerouac, di Prima, Norse, Huncke, and a whole lot more. **The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts**, edited by Claude J. Summers, draws from his superb on-line encyclopedia ([www.glbtq.com](http://www.glbtq.com)) to trace the distinctly queer presence permeating the visual arts. **Spring Fire**, by Vin Packer (Marijane Meaker), reprinting what's said to be the first lesbian pulp novel ever published – and quite a commercial success: it sold 1,463,917 copies in its first printing, more than *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, by James Cain, and more than *My Cousin Rachel*, by Daphne du Maurier, sold in that same year.

For July: **I Am My Own Wife**, by Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, is propitiously available in the wake of a Tony Award win for playwright Doug Wright, whose one-man play is based on the book - originally published in 1995 by Cleis as *I Am My Own Woman*. (The Faber & Faber play script edition reverts to the original title: *I Am My Own Woman: Studies For a Play About Charlotte von Mahlsdorf*, by Doug Wright, \$13).

For August: Mitzi Szerto collects more torrid travel tales in

**Foreign Affairs**, and Alison Tyler triples the fun with **Three-Way: Erotic Stories**. Violet Blue is back with **The Ultimate Guide to Sexual Fantasy: How To Turn Your Fantasies Into Reality**.

For September: **Mr. Benson**, John Preston's classic S/M novel, has more publishing lives than a cat.. 'o nine tails. It was published in story form in *Drummer* more than a quarter century ago, then was a *Drummer* book, a *Masquerade Book* in 1992, and a *Badboy Book* in 1998; there may have been a couple of pre-ISBN editions as well. How astute of Cleis to bring it back, one more time.

A 1990 interview with Preston: <http://www.axiongrafix.com/preston.html>

Preston on good writing manners: [http://www.io.com/~eighner/books/lavender\\_blue/introduction.html](http://www.io.com/~eighner/books/lavender_blue/introduction.html)

For October: **Arts and Letters**, by Edmund White collects 350 pages worth of 35 essays about the queer world and beyond - Marcel Proust and Andy Warhol, Catherine Deneuve and David Geffen, Robert Mapplethorpe and George Eliot. And there are two Woolfs, new in paper: **The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf**, edited by Louise DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska; and **Melymbrosia**, by Virginia Woolf, her previously-unpublished first novel.

For November: Two more books to learn from: **The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance, and Musical Theater**, edited by Claude J. Summers; and a new edition of Felice Newman's **The Whole Lesbian Sex Book**.

For December: The Bests month of all - **Best Gay Erotica 2005**, edited by a Richard Labonte, selected by William J. Mann; **Best Lesbian Erotica 2005**, edited by Tristan Taormino and selected by Felice Newman; **Best Women's Erotica 2005**, edited by Marcy Sheiner; and a new entry, **Best Black Gay Erotica**, edited by Darieck Scott.



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## Bestsellers at InsightOut Book Club

### June Bestsellers/Men & Women

1. *Maybe Next Time*, by Karin Kallmaker
2. *You Are Here*, by Wesley Gibson
3. *The Funny Thing Is...*, by Ellen DeGeneres
4. *Queer As Folk*, by Paul Ruditis

5. *Wonderlands*, edited by Raphael Kadushin
6. *Judy Garland: A Portrait in Art and Anecdote*, by Jordan Fricke
7. *What We Lost*, by Dale Peck
8. *Telling Moments*, edited by Lynda Hall
9. *Spank the Monkey*, by Rik Isensee
10. *Original Youth*, by Keith Fleming

ISO Editor-in-chief David Rosen also reports that: Tom Dolby's **The Trouble Boy** is InsightOut's best-selling Main Selection to date - "now breaking records here"; Greg Herren's **Jackson Square Jazz** and **FratSex** "will be number 1 and 2 in July!"; the anthology **M2M** in an exclusive club hardcover edition is shaping up to be a top backlist title for several months running; and **Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good For Gays, Good For Straights, and Good For America**, by Jonathan Rauch, "is the best gay marriage title for us to date."

In addition to bestsellers, ISO customer favorites, in no particular order, include:

- Ultimate Gay Sex*, by Michael Thomas Ford (sex manual/photo)
- Male Nude Now*, by David Leddick (photo)
- Latter Days*, by C. Jay Cox and T. Fabris (movie novelization)
- The Adventures of a JoeBoy!* by Joe Phillips (cartoon art)
- The Joy of Gay Sex*, by Dr. Charles Silverstein and Felice Picano (illustrated, incidentally, by Phillips)
- The Body of Jonah Boyd*, by David Leavitt (fiction)
- The Year of Ice*, by Brian Malloy (fiction)
- Van Allen's Ecstasy*, by Jim Tushinski (fiction)
- Dick*, by Dr. Michele Moore and Dr. Caroline De Costa (um; serious fun)
- Going the Other Way*, by Billy Bean with Chris Bull (autobiography)
- Last Summer*, by Michael Thomas Ford (fiction)
- Rare Flesh*, by David Armstron, text by Clive Barker (male nude photo essays w/prose and poetry)
- Huddle*, by Dan Boyle (fiction)
- Bad Boys*, edited by Paul J. Willis (erotica)
- Sex Tips for Gay Guys*, by Dan Anderson (how-to)
- Cleopatra's Wedding Present*, by Robert Tewdwr Moss (travel memoir)

*Dan Elhedery, online marketing manager, recommends:*

**That's Why They're in Cages, People!** by Joel Perry. Wish I had the wit to write a book like Joel Perry. For every wild, crazy, out-of-control, absurd, sweet or loving thing we've done in our lives, I think Joel has outdone us all! In short, and to keep it professional (although I'm still laughing out loud right now just from looking at the cover): "Thank you Joel for

sharing with us these great untamed stories."

*Dan Kelly, copywriter, recommends:*

**Pulling Taffy**, by Matt Bernstein Sycamore. Ever wonder if a hustler's life is all about forfeiting dreams and desires for the sake of sex? Then check out this unexpurgated, unapologetic look at the ups and downs of hustling - in every sense. This is the narrator's stream of consciousness detailing of his non-stop, explicit, dangerous sex acts of every kind with johns and tricks, and his drug use to heighten pleasurable experiences - and numb the not-so-pleasant ones.

*David Hughes, creative director, recommends:*

**Natalie Wood: A Life**, by Gavin Lambert. She made us laugh in *Miracle on 34th Street*, cry in *West Side Story*, sigh in *Splendor in the Grass*...and we let her entertain us in *Gypsy*. Now we get more than a glimpse of the real Natalie, from her zest for living to her dark side. Who did she bed and what really happened on the night she drowned at the age of 43? It's all here.

*Rosemary Kiladitis, marketing manager, recommends:*

**Queer Eye for the Straight Guy** by Ted Allen, Kyan Douglas, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley, and Jai Rodriguez ...has done wonders for straight men everywhere - and for that, we love them. However, I have a few gay friends that could benefit from their advice as well (you know who you are!) Whether it's Kyan's instructions on products (repeat after me: mere soap and water is NOT SKIN CARE) or Carson's wisdom on clothes shopping (don't be a bargain whore!), the Fab 5 manage to get the point across. Get the book. Learn it. Live it.

*And David Rosen recommends:*

**The First Time I Met Frank O'Hara**, by Rick Whitaker. The author of the highly praised hustler memoir *Assuming the Position* gives us a lively tour through many of the greatest books ever penned from a gay or lesbian sensibility. I loved reading his brilliant takes on faves such as Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* (is it the gay *Great Gatsby*? Is that redundant?). And what was up with Paul and Jane Bowles?...How gay is Gore Vidal's body of work, anyway?... Loved it!

For the past year, InsightOut has been conducting a membership drive, hoping to reach 50,000 - a threshold set by BookSpan, the company that runs about 30 different book clubs, so the gay-book club could stay in business. The target's been met as of June - "a milestone," says Rosen. InsightOut will hit its "necessary target" this month, the latest new-member campaign a success.





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## It Came In The E-Mail

*Letters to the editor. How sweet. Every issue has elicited a couple, but it never occurred to me to run them. These have more substance, however, than just how-de-do.*

Dear BTWOF:

Thank you immensely for the review of my novel *Cicatrix* in **Books to Watch Out For**. I was delighted to read it (may I comment that there was only a circumcision, not a penis removal?). Xlibris is a little cavalier about some things including publication date (they put 2003 on the title page verso and when I objected told me that it was the year in which they applied for the copyright). Xlibris offers quite a strenuous copyediting service which I took advantage of. We were some months at this. There are a couple of paragraph indentation errors that occurred afterwards when they were sending me galley proofs that inexplicably had errors not in the approved copyediting forms. Every time I corrected one, another would appear. I finally let the wrong paragraph indentations stand through desperation. A sequel to *Cicatrix* is underway, set in Naples. I am ecstatic about your review. (Re: the citation of the Carney dedication): William Carney and I were lovers from 1951 through 1968. He died in 1978. I was with him as much as possible during his final year. He lived in Tucson at that time and I was in Los Angeles.

-Edward C. Wilson

Dear BTWOF:

I wanted to say a special thank you for mentioning the games book (*Gladstone's Games to Go: More than 50 Games You Can Play Anytime, Anywhere - No Board Required!*) in **BTWOF**... The level of detail and the interesting connections you make among titles is great; It was kind and generous and I really do appreciate it. The NPR (interview) was a real trip. The actual interview was rather awkward (Scott Simon tried to get me to play Saint Marks, which is a very challenging pen-and-paper game I developed, via the phone and it was a disaster). Fortunately, the interview was quite nicely edited and the sales impact of the piece (at least using the gauge of Amazon numbers, which are, of course, dubious) was significant. Your interest and support are a great boon to my writerly morale.

-Jim Gladstone

Dear BTWOF:

...kudos for the splendid **BTWOF** column. A wonderfully

yeasty, tasty brew, as you yourself might say. Your Lammy pre-picks will add interest to the festivities in Chicago... Anyway, the discussion of PoD and the authors' experience was very interesting and a cautionary tale if there ever was one, although I doubt writers will look at it that way, we're such a starry-eyed, hopeful lot. The business of the business is brutally hard, but everyone thinks they'll be an exception. Good thing, or we'd have damn few books.  
-Katherine Forrest

Dear BTWOF:

Found your issue #6 that not only had your great review of Peter Mitchell's *Oliver Trent*, and provided the link to my stuff (in same) in Ron Donaghe's *Independent News Magazine*, but contained a whole lot of other genuinely interesting and informative information (especially for this author who has gone mainstream and, recently, dabbled in POD, via iUniverse where, yes, an author does have to make sure that his book is publishing-ready pre-edited before publication, or ...!) Luckily, I've been around for long enough so that - hopefully - the typos, et al, are minor.  
-William Maltese

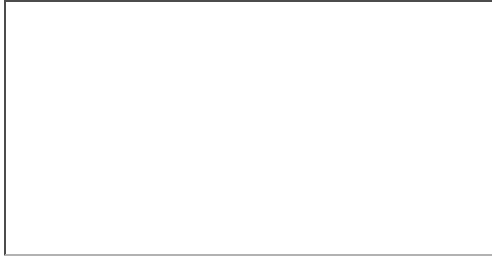
Dear BTWOF:

Was just reading the latest Books to Watch Out For/Men's Edition, where Perry Brass said: My second book, a novel, *Mirage*, came out in the same year, and they were both named Lammy finalists: something that had never happened before, or since, to have two books, in two different categories, named finalists in the same year. I'm afraid his statement is not true. Last year, Lesléa Newman was a finalist for three different books in three different categories. Or, if you look at this year's nominees, you'll see that Michael Thomas Ford is a finalist in Romance, Humor, and also one of four joint authors in a third book nominated in the Erotica category. So even if you only count him as having 2.25 finalist nominations for 2.25 books, this still surpasses the books/nominations incident you mention with *Mirage* and *Sex-Charge*. Which is not to disparage your double nomination. Even if not dealing with authors like Lesléa or Mike with triple nominations, a number of other authors have had two books as a finalist in different categories in recent years, including myself. In 1998, I was a finalist in three categories (Best Nonfiction Anthology, Best Transgender, and Best Science Fiction) for two different books (*PoMoSexuals* and *The Drag Queen of Elfland*) and won one of them.  
-Lawrence Schimel



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