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The Gay Men's Edition

March 2004

Volume 1 Number 4

By Richard Labonte

Five Worth Reading - And Hearing - At Wilde About Sappho

Back in early February, I left my rural environs for a spell in the (relatively) big city - for readings at Wilde About Sappho, an annual week-long literary feast served up by the Lambda Foundation, which raises money for academic scholarships for queer students at a number of Canadian universities. The five authors who participated this year, at events in Montreal, Ottawa (where I was) and Toronto, were Felice Picano, Karen X. Tulchinsky, George K. Ilsley, Suki Lee, and Will Aitken - one venerable American writing and publishing pioneer, two established Canadian authors, two newer Canadian voices - all writers worth reading. On one day, the writers spent a couple of hours with students from a city high school; the next, they read to about 75 students – and a few professors – at Carleton University. The main reading drew about 350-400 people to a cosy auditorium at the National Library of Canada. WaS isn't a literary festival in the sense of Saints & Sinners, say, or the Lambda Literary conferences – it's more of an ambitious reading series. But - especially the gala reading – it does bring queer readers together, some in leathers, some in tuxes, and everyone bundled against Ottawa's winter deep-freeze.

Will Aitken's first book was **Terre Haute** (Delta, \$19), a 1989 coming-out novel set in Indiana - his home town before he moved to Montreal, where in the mid-70s he co-founded L'Androgyne, a gay bookstore that closed a couple of years ago (years after he moved on to a broadcasting career). His most recent (2001) is **Realia** (Vintage Canada, \$18.95), from which

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he read - a hilarious take on mid-80s Japanese pop culture, based on his teaching years there. He also read from a work in progress, **Glass Rain** (no publisher yet), a thriller set in Amsterdam - and the excerpt, chilling and creepy, left the audience stunned, queasy, dead silent for several heartbeats after he finished. *Realia* is only available in Canada - try an online Canadian bookseller. And keep *Glass Rain* in the back of your mind.

There isn't a monotonous moment in **Sapphic Traffic** (Conundrum Press \$9.95), Suki Lee's urbane first collection - she's an alluring writer with a wide-range of storytelling skills. The longest of Lee's 20 engaging short stories is "3," an enervating, straightforward tale about women

swallowing condoms to smuggle hash oil into Canada from Jamaica. The shortest, utterly different in tone and intent, is "In a Perfect World," a poignantly potent lament - in just one sentence of several hundred words - for the many ways the world savages women. "Diva Antoinette Concherez" is an intense reflection on how adulation flirts with obsession, as operatic in form as are its two characters; "Only Once" is erotica about unrequited lesbian lust, raw and sardonic in style and content; "Home Life" is the heartrending story of a lesbian couple coping with one partner's troubled brother - writing that embodies true family values. Each story is illustrated by Elaina Martin's photographs; her delicate depictions of women's bodies nicely complement Lee's fluid, passionate prose. The result is an artful marriage of words and images, and a first book from a writer of stylish promise. I'm a big booster of women's books that men ought to read - this is one.

As they grapple with coming out, growing up, and getting a life, the boys of **Random Acts of Hatred** (Arsenal Pulp Press, \$19.95) are scared, sad, sexy, and always intriguing. George Ilsley's debut collection of 11 short stories is about desire and disintegration, fear and survival, self-loathing and learning to love: all the inevitable terrors of any young queer lad, delineated with a deliciously nervy voice. There are echoes throughout of Dennis Cooper's poetic depravity, of A.M. Homes' ironic eroticism, and even of Bernard Cooper's memoirish emotionalism - but Ilsley's lucid prose is infused with invigorating originality. The title story is a harsh, heart-stabbing vignette about a skinhead hustler - "too pretty to be a boy" - who accepts raw sex as a substitute for real love. It's bracketed by two quite different, subtler, stories - "The Big Red Picture," about two men whose love survives the death of the wife of one of them, and "Acting Innocent," about two gay brothers and the family that abandons them. It's quite a range,



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evident in every one of these accomplished pieces. Ilsley is working on a novel, but he's had work published online and in a number of anthologies, including Arsenal Pulp's **Quickies** series.

Karen Tulchinsky is probably best known in dykedom for her **Hot and Bothered** anthologies for Arsenal Pulp Press, but she's garnered a queer boy crossover readership for her two novels **Love Ruins Everything** and **Love and Other Ruins**. Her most recent work, **The Five Books of Moses Lapinsky** (Polestar, \$34.95 CDN), crosses over even farther - it's historical fiction about the generations of a Canadian Jewish family, set both in 2003, where the Moses of the title is researching the biography of his boxer-father, and in 1933, when an anti-Semitic riot broke out in Toronto, involving thousands and injuring hundreds. And for boys with a hard-on for boxing, Tulchinsky's blow-by-blows are exciting reading.

The organizers of Wilde About Sappho knew I've known Felice Picano for eons, so they connected me with the editor of *Capital Xtra*, Ottawa's community monthly, to manufacture some pre-event buzz. The result was the following article - which didn't much discuss Felice's literary output. The editor (who has since left the paper) thought the January issue of his paper had been literary enough (with Karen X. Tulchinsky on the cover), so he asked me to focus for the February issue on Felice's co-authorship of the third edition of *The New Joy of Gay Sex*. As always, Mr. Picano had plenty to say that was thoughtful, and provocative:

Read it at: <http://www.xtra.ca/site/toronto2/archCapX/body142.shtm>

Felice also gave a more rollicking interview, to Richard Burnett, who writes the "Three Dollar Bill" column for a Montreal weekly. Here's an excerpt:

Another of my heroes with a fab sense of humour is Los Angeles-based international bestselling author Felice Picano, one of the most important gay writers from the first generation after Stonewall, who - with Robert Ferro, Christopher Cox, George Whitmore, Michael Grumley, Edmund White and Andrew Holleran (four of whom have died from AIDS) - founded the now-mythical Violet Quill literary society in NYC in 1981.

"We legitimized publishing your book as an openly gay writer," Felice tells me over the phone from his home in the Hollywood Hills. "Younger writers today have reaped most of the benefits of what we struggled to achieve. It was historic, though I'm still surprised whenever I'm reviewed in The New York Times."

Others wonder how the former Fire Island party boy has adjusted to life in the City of Angels. Felice cracks, "People say, 'Didn't you retire in 1966?' They'll call me at 2 a.m. and ask, 'Aren't you awake yet?' They think I'm on a permanent vacation."

To read the full Three Dollar Bill: <http://hour.ca/columns/3dollarbill.aspx?iDArticle=113>

For information on Wilde About Sappho (including snaps of the five featured authors - and one of me):

www.lambdafoundation.com/wascurrent.htm

Felice Picano's site: www.felicepicano.com

Suki Lee's site: www.sukilee.com

For an interview with Will Aitken about his gay activism and his novel *Realia*: <http://www.tradequeerthings.com/archive04.html#interview>

Karen X. Tulchinsky's site: www.karenxtulchinsky.com

An interview on transgressive literature that includes George K.

Ilsley: www.xtra.ca/site/toronto2/archvx/body92.shtm

And here's an Ilsley short story from 1997:

<http://collection.nlc-bnc.ca>



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Six (+ One) Good Books To Watch Out For

Two (plus one) for April...



...both mysteries. The first is **Jackson Square Jazz** (Kensington, \$23), the second in Greg Herren's Scott Bradley series. In the first book, **Bourbon Street Blues**, young Scotty was a well-buffed personal trainer, sometime go-go dancer, and very accidental sleuth romping through the hot days and steamy nights of New Orleans. There he encountered a strapping FBI agent, Frank, and a wiry cat burglar, Colin; both Frank and Colin, rippling as ever, return to woo - and rescue - Scotty when he's caught up in a new adventure. The mystery, such as it is, involves the disappearance, 15 years previously, of one of just four Napoleonic death masks, stolen during a New Orleans museum fire. Car chases, a kidnapping, a couple of killings, one bloody shootout, a lost mother found, several nights of sweet sex, one champion-class queer figure skater, several hangovers, and a *menage a trois* ensue. This is not a leisurely read. Think adrenaline. In a review I wrote of the first book, I said: "Herren's sassy mix of sex and sleuthing marks the debut of what promises to be a titillating series." The promise is kept.



The second is **Murder by Design** by Jon P. Bloch (St. Martin's Minotaur, \$23.95), another sophomore (but not sophomoric) novel in an ongoing series, featuring Hollywood TV gossip Rick Domino. Bloch's clever concept is to marry his mysteries to pop culture - so this is based on that noxious TV makeover reality show, *Trading Places*, here called *My House, Your House*. I've never seen any of those HGTV/Learning Channel/BBC America/Discovery Channel staples, so I'm sure I missed much of Bloch's wink-wink insider patter. But he's a witty writer, Domino and his hapless gay policeman sidekick are an endearing not-quite-couple, and there's a serious mystery underneath the slapstick and shenanigans.

As for **Best Murder of the Year** (St. Martin's Minotaur, \$13.95), Bloch's hilarious, catty debut - I have watched the Academy Awards on TV every year since 1960 (and been in the audience once), so the insider wit is even more fun. Here, Domino is deeply enamored of deeply closeted action-adventure heartthrob Shane Kirk, a callow opportunist who'll bed any gender to further his career. When Domino is discovered on Oscar night holding a smoking gun over the body of the Best Actress winner, a paramour of his occasional beau Kirk, he's an instant suspect in the slaying. That's the premise of this delightful comic whodunit, in which Domino, desperate to resume his celebrity career, teams up with off-duty cop Terrance Zane, attractively strapping and allegedly straight, to find the killer. The mystery itself is a predictable by-the-zany-numbers effort, but movie buffs will hoot at Bloch's askew view of Hollywood. A trenchant send-up of awards shows is just one of his many satirical zingers - Jewel is joined at the murderous Oscar ceremony by Meat Loaf and Placido Domingo in a performance of the supposed nominated song "I Can't Find Me Anywhere" from the supposed animated feature *Where's Waldo*. It's a scenario just as plausible as - though probably less entertaining than - the campy plot of this sly crime caper.

Two for May...

Alyson Books has come up with a number of quite fine first-novelists in the past year. Aaron Krach fits right in. **Half-life** (\$13.95) isn't stereotypical coming-out fiction - its two main characters are best 18-year-old friends Adam and Dart, living through the last weeks of high school and the first weeks of pre-college summer. Both know they're gay; that's not the issue. Daring to fall in love is the problem - independent Adam with the muscled 38-year-old cop who is investigating the apparent suicide of Adam's melancholic father, and geeky Dart with an equally nerdy peer he meets at a regional high



school science fair. L.A., by the way, is my favorite city in America - and Krach captures its many atmospheres, moods, and surrealities just right.



Baseball is what turns Steve Kluger on. His first novel, **Changing Pitches** (St. Martin's, 1984; Alyson, 1989) was about a young gay pitcher in love with his grizzled and presumably straight catcher. His second, **Last Days of Summer** (William Morrow, \$13), was a sentimental but never sappy story about a young boy's adoration for a 1940s baseball star. **Almost Like Being in Love** (Harper Perennial, \$13.95) is about football and baseball jock (there's that baseball affinity again) Craig and nose-to-the-academic-grindstone nerd Travis, who fall in love in high school, fall out of touch through their college years, and 20 years later - Travis is the first to figure it out - learn their love was meant to last. Kluger doesn't write traditional narrative novels. His first consisted mainly of excerpts from the puppyish pitcher's anguished and emotional diaries; his second was entirely epistolary in form; this third is written through emails, letters, faxes, memos, bulletin board notes, news clippings, website postings - and some traditional narrative, but no normal chapters. Though the writing approach is beyond unorthodox, Kluger juggles his scraps of story with hilarious skill, crafting a solid novel out of his fictional ephemera. And it's a great gay love story.

And two for June...

Timothy James Beck have previously written **It Had To Be You, He's the One**, and the forthcoming **I'm Your Man** (December) for Kensington Books - giddy, implausible, pleasantly time-passing romantic froth. I say "have," plural, because TJB's books come from a collective writing group. Now, Timothy J. Lambert and Becky Cochrane - part of, if not all of, that collective - have written, under a joint byline, **The Deal**, (Alyson, \$14.95). It, too, is a giddy, implausible, time-pleasantly-spent thing of froth . . . but also better written than the collective Mr. Beck's books. Two hands typing are better than several? It's about a circle of friends - these books are always about quirky circles of friends - yearning for love. So come one New Year's Eve, they form a pact ("The Deal") to meet monthly to gossip about their love lives - and if they haven't found their respective Mr./Ms. Rights in one short year, they're to stop whining about the lack of love. It's a ramshackle premise for a novel, and of course love wins all hearts. But Patrick and Vivian (the straight couple), Aaron and Alex (the destined couple), and even gloomy Miranda, are all quite engaging characters. With good anti-Bush politics.



Father's Day (Knopf, \$22.95) - dull title - is wonderful fun. As

a gay novel that unfolds partially over a New York sex phone line ought to be. Philip Galanes' debut is about preppy Matthew, bred in a tony New York suburb, who copes with his father's suicide and his mother's weirdness by developing a hapless, hilarious addiction to the Pump Line. Men - or at least their sexy, promising voices - come and go at the touch of a touch-tone button, allowing neurotic Matthew to exude disinterest, unworthiness, sexiness, and neediness, depending on his mood. This one has both style and wit - few queer novels have either, even fewer both - and, gosh, intelligence and emotion as well.



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Four True Treats

I'm grateful to Cormorant Books/Riverbank for reintroducing me, after an absence of many years, to Geoffrey Chadwick, a curmudgeonly Canadian coot of a certain age who is every bit as foppish as the spelling of his name might suggest. He dresses with style, drinks nothing but the best scotch - neat, no ice - and tolerates fools, egos, and the politically correct not at all. For more than 20 years, he's been a gentleman of admirable reserve, more often than not a lover of men, occasionally linked romantically to women - boundaries are for fields, not people. I first met Geoffrey in 1981 (though, somehow, he's only aged about 13 years since then): his wife and daughter had recently died, a meandering affair with a male high school teacher had wound down, his mother was tipping too much, he had just turned 50 and was fretful about aging - but his main preoccupation was hacking apart and disposing of the body of a hustler who had tried to shake him down. All in all, quite a mordant fellow. Well, more like macabre. But witty, oh so witty. That 1981 novel, by Montreal writer Edward O. Phillips, was a delightful blend of comedy of acerbic manners and drama of drawing-room panache. After **Sunday's Child**, there was **Buried on Sunday**, **Sunday Best**, **Working on Sunday**, and now - alas, it's the last - **A Voyage on a Sunday** (Riverbank Books, \$22.95). Like all five novels in Phillip's Geoffrey Chadwick series, *Voyage* wanders with aplomb and attitude from plot point to plot point, from opening scene to The End. Its considerable charm stems not so much from its plot as from its characters (and, in some cases, caricatures) - an array of Westmount uppercrusts whose timeless Anglophone enclave in Montreal is oddly but not unforgivably disconnected from the realities of a vibrant Francophone city. It's okay to start with this fifth book - accessorize with a comfy armchair, a



relaxing drink, good music, perhaps even a pipe; a rainy day would be a bonus. And do find the other four novels . . .

Talking In the Dark (PUSH/Scholastic) is a remarkable memoir. Remarkable because it's a collection of free-verse poems. Remarkable because it handles fear, passion, emotion, hope, and romance with amazing maturity. And remarkable because its author was 21 when the book was published - and a high school student when much of it was written. Billy Merrell comes from the queer generation that didn't agonize much about coming out - he was openly gay in high school, more concerned with handling relationships than with handling bullies. Despite his youth, he's been touched by life - his parent's divorce when he is seven, boyfriends break his heart, and a lover dies of AIDS. The maturity of his writing, and the surety with which he expresses himself, are - again - remarkable. Scholastic pitches this book for grades 9 to 12, but it's as adult as, say, the early writing of Mark Doty - one of Merrell's writing models.



For an excerpt: www.thisispush.com/read/excerpt_merrell.htm

For a high-energy interview with Merrell, by PUSH Editor

David Levithan: www.thisispush.com/voices/merrell_ga.htm

(Levithan is the author of a wonderful YA novel, **Boy Meets Boy**; go to his cheerfully goofy author website,

www.davidlevithan.com, for more information on his own

work, and Watch Out For his forthcoming novel **The Realm of Possibilities**, coming in August from Knopf.)

On March 30, 1892, orator Robert G. Ingersoll memorialized Walt Whitman at his funeral, with thousands in attendance. On Oct. 10, 2000, Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich read a statement, honoring the 25th anniversary of the Lesbian/Gay Community



Service Center of Cleveland, on the floor of the House of Representatives. It's an easy guess as to which address is

more moving and memorable - but the inclusion of both in

Speaking for Our Lives: Historic Speeches and Rhetoric for Gay and Lesbian Rights, 1892-2000 (Harrington Park Press,

\$49.95) is testament to the breadth of this remarkable

anthology. Robert B. Ridinger has collected more than 200

exhortations in more than 900 pages. Some, like the boilerplate

from Kucinich, represent a sort of validation for gay rights.

Many, even flat on the page for a single reader rather than

soaring in the air for hundreds or thousands of ears, tug at the

heart, engage the intellect, and stir the soul. In September,

1952, Donald Webster Cory addressed the International

Committee for Sexual Equality; in March, 1963, Antony Grey

spoke to the Homosexual Law Reform Society of London,

England, on the topic "Towards a Sexually Sane Society;" on

February 14-15, Mattachine founder Harry Hay gave the

keynote address to the Western Homophile Conference; in August, 1972, Madeline Davis addressed the Democratic National Convention, as did Mel Boozer in August, 1982; on April 30, 1988, NGLTF policy project director Sue Hyde spoke to the just-the-second annual gay pride march in Dubuque, Iowa; and in October, 1999, Reps. Mark Udall and Nancy Pelosi, days apart, "celebrated the memory" and spoke of "the tragic death" of Matthew Shepard. Other voices: 1950s gay activists Barbara Gittings, Franklin Kameny, Hal Call, and Jack Nichols. African American author and publisher Barbara Smith and African American poet Joseph Beam. Daughter of Bilitis pioneer and publisher Barbara Grier, Philadelphia activist Tommi Avicolti Mecca, leather activist Joseph Bean, MCC pastor Troy Perry. And dozens and dozens of names, gone, that ought not be forgotten. Like Harrington Park's 2003 book **Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context**, edited by Vern Bullough, this is an indispensable queer resource.

The first issue of **Bloom** has blossomed. What a delight. Beautiful binding, clean graphics, glossy stock for the color art in the center. Short fiction by Andrew Holleran, Stacey D'Erasmus, and Judith Nichols. A memoir essay by Bernard Cooper. And such a wealth of poetry, from 28 writers, practically an anthology of its own – Adrienne Rich and Beatrix Gates, Edward Field and David Trinidad, Eileen Myles and Mark Doty, and a bevy of newer luminaries, too. *Bloom's* quality recalls the heyday – many homo generations ago - of *Mouth of the Dragon*, with better production values. There's good work in The James White Review; and the more artful online journals, Blithe House Quarterly and Lodestar "publish" excellent work – but holding a work of word-art in one's hands is so fine. What is editor Charles Flowers looking for in future issues? "*Bloom* does not discriminate against the imagination. Gardeners must identify as Queer (LGBT), but the flora of their labor need not serve any pre-conceived notion of beauty. Peonies, sweet williams, ragweed, and gladiolas - every shade & shape of blossom - are all welcome. Let the garden grow. *Bloom* publishes poetry, fiction, memoir, essay, travelogue, and any other piece of writing that dazzles us. We are also pleased to present artwork that offers a fresh, sexy, startling, and/or original view of the world."

For more info: www.bloommagazine.org



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Logrolling in My Life

One of my favorite bits of the old *Spy* magazine was a feature called, if memory serves, "Logrolling in Our Time" - a half-page listing of noted authors trading back cover blurbs. I was reminded of those mutual literary blowjobs by an article in a British newspaper, in which "a number of prominent writers confessed to giving glowing 'sound bite' reviews to work they did not rate highly. One admitted to providing inaccurate tributes to raise her own literary profile ... a bestselling woman author said that she gave 'generous' praise for books she considered 'dire'. She described it as a 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' culture, with authors helping each other irrespective of the merits of the books."

In my bookselling days, I was never sure that blurbs sold books. A good cover was always more important, I thought; so was a solid plot outline on the dust jacket flap or back cover - a belief borne out by a reader survey that passed through my inbox a couple of months ago. Unfortunately, I didn't save it - but it essentially said that when readers wonder whether to buy a book by an unknown author, they are swayed more by a sense of what the book is about than by what other writers said about it.

Do you see movies based on the glowing quotes reproduced in ads? Do you believe the praise on the back of video boxes or DVD cases about direct-to-cable movies you've never heard of?

And now I'll confess to my own career as a blurbist. I'm asked to blurb a book a couple of times a month. I accept as often as I decline - even as I wonder whether my name really can convince someone I've never met to take a chance on a book. Why do I write them? Vanity: it's flattering to be asked. Ego: I write 104 real (short) reviews for Book Marks for Q Syndicate, so maybe my name is known by those few queers who buy a lot of books and pay a lot of attention to reviews. And, mainly, because blurbing a book is akin to "handselling" - a bookseller's enthusiastic, honest touting of titles to customers, one-to-one communication that makes an independent bookstore such an important link in the chain that runs from writer through editor and publisher to reader.

The blurbs I've written in the past year follow. These *aren't* reviews: I'm not passing judgment on any of these books. The purpose of my often-extravagant (though never insincere) words is to coax browsers into becoming buyers. A few of the authors whose books I've blurbed are acquaintances, writers I met when I was a bookseller, or spent time with at literary conferences, or have developed an email relationship with. Most of them, I've never met. The only real friend is Ian Philips

- though I have come to know his husband Greg Wharton since writing a blurb for his first anthology. And because I've never written a book, and have no plans to ever write a book - I do edit the *Best Gay Erotica* series for Cleis Press, but those aren't blurbed - these flowery paeans aren't really "logrolling." And I did read every book...

Here are a dozen of my hosannas, the first three for books that aren't out yet:

Love Under Foot, edited by M. Christian and Greg Wharton, STARbooks Press:

It's all here: the ticklish, tortuous brush of the finger across a sensitive sole; the languorous massage of an aching arch; the arousing sight of a smooth ankle, a calloused heel, ten hot pink nails; the heady stink of soiled sneakers, sour socks, a sweaty athlete's foot - these are just a few of the pedes-erotic possibilities in this explicit, titillating exploration of plantigrade pleasure. Sometimes the foot is active - the pressure of a powerful toe in the crotch. Sometimes the foot is passive - may I suck your toes, sir? But in every way, *Love Under Foot* is a Size 14/XXX anthology. And Wharton and Christian are Bigfoot editors. (July)

That Man from C.A.M.P.: Rebel Without a Pause, by Victor J. Banis, ed. by Fabio Cleto, Harrington Park Press/Southern Tier Editions



For a kid who knew he was gay at 15, self-acceptance was nurtured by Vidal, Burroughs, Capote, all found on library shelves - writers who gave literary affirmation to nascent queer thoughts. But just as formative, and much more fun, were the battered, sticky paperbacks of soft-porn pioneer "Don Holliday," borrowed from the enlisted men in the barracks where the kid delivered daily newspapers after school. Here was a writer whose blazing, purplish prose gave erotic stimulus to half-formed sexual desires. From the literary authors, that teen learned there was gay life beyond sex. But from the memorable men of C.A.M.P., he learned sex was hot, strong, fantastic fun. For readers just discovering these campy treasures, welcome to a time machine whisking you back to an era - not so long past - where swish had substance, where flaming queens ruled, and where the gay secret agent always got his man . . . into bed. And for this now middle-aged reader - thanks for the classic memories and the reminder that there's a lot more to gay history than dates, demos, and court decisions. (Summer, 2004) P.S. - I wrote two blurbs, one long, one short; this is the long one.

(There's a delightful essay by Banis about his career as a writer of pulp fiction, queer and otherwise; scans of the covers of his many Man From C.A.M.P. titles; and a bibliography of the

books written under his many pseudonyms, here:

<http://efanzines.com/EK/eI6/index.htm>)

Upon a Midnight Clear: Queer Christmas Stories, ed. by

Greg Herren, Harrington Park Press/Southern Tier Editions:

At its rare best, Christmas is all about fine sentimental traditions: nostalgic carols and ruddy Santas, holiday bustle and basted turkey, far-flung families coming together to celebrate their past, present, and future. This standout collection of holiday-themed short stories at last brings great queer tidings of comfort and joy into the festive season - by celebrating found families and new lovers, exploring new traditions and fond memories, and adding dazzling rainbow lights to the trimming of the tree. Some of the stories are witty, some are wistful, some dwell on loneliness and estrangement, some revel in romantic interludes and lusty adventures. But every one is a gift worth getting, and reading. (Fall, 2004)



Homosexuality and Civilization, by Louis Crompton,

Harvard University Press

A masterwork of interpretive scholarship. Before this exhaustive and exhilarating study, a long shelf of books considered the intersection of homosexuality and civilization. Now there is one that does it all. Crompton's lifetime of academic gay activism powers this erudite, entertaining distillation of same-sex politics, practices, and passions across centuries and through cultures. He was born to write this book; generations yet unborn will draw knowledge and strength from it.

Secret Buddies, by Mike Newman, GLB Publishers

Innocence this raunchy is a rarity; sex this uninhibited is a delight. I'll take Mike Newman at his word, that he truly means his first novel to be read primarily as meat-beating entertainment. But there was scant erotica with as much wit, insight, or originality when *Secret Buddies* was published more than a decade ago - and despite a flood of erotica since, this welcome second edition of a remarkably sweet novel is as hot as they cum.

Familia Affairs, by Rod Palmer, GLB Publishers

Set in a not-so-long-ago era (1970s) when "Gay Pride" was more than a marketing slogan, Rod Palmer's one-handed erotic *Familia Affair* provides an amusing *Sopranos*-lite plot about mob families, gay activism, and falling in love in post-Stonewall New York City. It's a fast and fun synthesis of accomplished anthropological porn and sweet, almost Puritan, romance.



A Good Cop, by Dorien Grey, GLB Publishers

With each book in the delightful Dick Hardesty series, Dorien Grey enriches a popular niche in the gay-mystery genre - that of the hard-boiled softhearted sexy-yet-sensitive sleuth, a sure bet to bed the good guys and get the bad guys. And like Joseph Hansen's classic Dave Brandstetter, Hardesty has a life of continuing friendships, ongoing self-doubts, and emotional growth, which adds fascinating facets to his likeable character - just what a fine series needs.

Through It Came Bright Colors, by Trebor Healey, Harrington Park Press/Southern Tier Editions

Love hurts, love heals - that's the crystalline message at the core of Trebor Healey's complex, accomplished coming-of-age story about a cautiously queer suburban kid whose heart is unexpectedly squeezed hard by a young junkie's quicksilver mind and beautiful lean body. Neill's life-affirming attraction to life-weary Vince is doomed from this wise novel's very first line, but their fumbling struggle for physical love, emotional connection, and mutual maturity is mesmerizing. The searing implosion of their passion is no surprise, but it shimmers with the compelling honesty of real lives, while Healey's refreshingly original tale hums with the potency of poetry.

Elf-Child, by David M. Pierce, Harrington Park Press/Southern Tier Editions

A finely tuned blend of several genres of fiction, among them the supernatural thriller, the queer cruising-for-sex read, and, most winningly, the romantic love story. Pierce brings strong plotting, plausible characters, and a true element of suspense to his fantasy, along with something rare in contemporary gay fiction - originality. I can't think of another gay novel which uses the rich concept of body transformation at will to deal so ably with matters of male beauty, attraction, and commitment... an entertaining light read with some unusually serious things to say about gay life.

Bear Like Me, by Jonathan Cohen, Harrington Park Press/Southern Tier Editions

There is a madcap pleasure to this book, a cheekily improbable comic read which is both an insider's appreciation of the contemporary bear community, and something of a send-up of it, as well. Jonathan Cohen writes about bear customs, mores, and quirks with charming archness, coordinating a sociologist's keen eye and a gossipmonger's sharp tongue with gleeful precision. That's the fun part; what delights is Cohen's old-fashioned way with romance. Self-identified bear readers will find images of themselves lumbering lustily and lovingly through these cheery pages; non-bears, or curious cubs-in-

waiting, will enjoy Cohen's saucy take on one of the queer world's proudest subcultures.

See Dick Deconstruct: Literotica for the Satirically Bent, by Ian Philips, AttaGirl Press

In this bountiful collection, Ian Philips proves himself a master of the nasty. His work is nasty in word, nasty in deed, nasty in the most (en)grossing way possible. His varied-voice fictions, brimming with style and bubbling with wit, are lusty and lascivious, wackily intelligent, and wildly erotic, sassy and messy and very, very sexy.

Of the Flesh: Dangerous New Fiction, ed. by Greg Wharton, Suspect Thoughts Press

...each touched on lust, obsession, and the dangerous moods of need with exquisite intensity, a quality that infuses Wharton's accomplished anthology.

Follow the web:

For the article that spurred this write-up:

www.telegraph.co.uk/news/

M. Christian's own site: www.mchristian.com

More STARbooks erotica: www.starbookspress.com

For more reviews of the Southern Tier Editions titles I've endorsed, follow the LGBT button at

www.haworthpressinc.com

To read what other blurbists had to say about the Crompton book, go here:

www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog/CROHOM.html

Dorien Grey has his own site: www.angelfire.com/home/doriengrey/

For more Trebor: www.treborhealey.com

Ian Philips' website: www.ianphilips.com

Of the Flesh was the first book from Suspect Thoughts Press, but its list has since grown substantially:

www.suspectthoughts.com



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Blurbs from the Bookstores:

What Two Bookstores Are Saying

As far as I can tell, only a couple of the continent's queer bookstores email weekly (or so) newsletters about new titles received, bargains on old books, information about author events, and/or bestseller lists. This is unfortunate: I always like

to read what's being said about queer books.

The most comprehensive is from Sacramento's The Open Book, a benefit of that store's recent move into book distribution; it took over Alamo Square Distributors, the only wholesaler specializing in solely LGBT titles, several months ago. In addition to its queer stock, the store (at least virtually) has a healthy subsection of science fiction and fantasy titles, but the author of its New Books column is careful to note which books are general interest and which have some queer interest. The newsletter is also one of the few semi-exhaustive sources for information on self-published and publish-on-demand titles (iUniverse, XLibris, Author's Library, etc).

My favorite list, though, comes from Boston's Calamus Books. It's written by longtime activist and bookseller John Mitzel (manager of Glad Day Bookshop for many years), and his blurbs on books are cheerfully chatty, often knowledgably personalized, and with a fine sense of history - more engaging than mere catalogue copy.

As for other major gay bookstores: email from A Different Light in West Hollywood (www.adlbooks.com) in March touted a handful of its bestsellers, including the decade-old book *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, and offered me bestsellers from The New York Times; Giovanni's Room in Philadelphia (www.gioannisroom.com) offered a special on the Queer As Folk DVD; Outwrite in Atlanta (www.outwritebooks.com) offers an email newsletter on its personable and colorful site - but nothing has arrived since I signed up several weeks ago; Lambda Rising's several bookstores (www.lambdarising.com) do offer a newsletter from its info-filled site - but, again, it's been weeks since I signed up, and my inbox awaits.

Here are excerpts from the most recent newsletters from Calamus Books (www.calamusbooks.com) and The Open Book (www.openbookltd), providing some sense of their respective flavors. Both stores picked up on news that the children's book *King & King* was challenged in mid-March by "concerned" North Carolina parents...

CALAMUS BOOKSTORE E-NEWSLETTER

Vol. IV #7 · March 22, 2004

Can you keep a secret? Can you maintain a pose? I am trying to develop a theme here - see the Dawn Pepita Hall Simmons bio below [*not excerpted here - go to www.calamusbooks.com.*] And G. EDWARD WHITE's

new meditation on Alger Hiss, ALGER HISS'S LOOKING GLASS WAR, is an exploration of the pose, the deceit, the lie. White's father-in-law, John F. Davis, was counsel to Hiss in a 1948 hearing at HUAC. White begins with the belief that Hiss was a Soviet agent from the get-go, that everything Chambers said about him was true. Given this set-up, White wants to know why Hiss didn't admit, as many others did, that they had been wrong in their romance with Soviet Communism, come clean and move on. Hiss went to prison, on a perjury rap - White's account of Hiss's time in the fed pen is illuminating - and, for the remainder of his life, and he lived into his 90s, fought to restore his reputation and deny the various accusations.

I met Hiss once. He spoke at Boston University and we had a couple friends in common and I went up and introduced myself. My friends in New York lived next to the residence of Hiss when he was still married to Priscilla and my friends told me that, right after Nixon assumed the White House, the Hiss house was broken into, and not by New York junkies, as the assailants didn't take anything fencible, just scattered Hiss's personal papers about. The Hiss story remains compelling to me - there's his background, there's Chambers, there's the marriage to Priscilla, there's son Tony, self-identified as gay until 50 then marriage to a woman and the child; there is also his son Timothy Hobson, discharged from the military service because of sex with a man or men, and because of this, unable to testify on Alger's behalf in an important factual matter regarding Chambers and documents. There's also something I've always [wanted] to know more about but no books yet on it - the gay subculture in Washington DC during the first and second FDR administrations. Then there is Chambers. I believe in one essay I referred to Whittaker Chambers as a "Freon Quean," a sobriquet coined by the late Truman Capote, meant to describe a certain type of Dorothy's friends, something along the line of Roy Cohn, and my point in my essay was to acknowledge that Chambers was, in fact, the founder of the line! His Freon descendants are numerous.

...I mustn't go on, as on I could go. My point here is that the books I have read on Chambers, Hiss, the trials, good as they are, and Mr. White's makes his own contributions, no one has yet gotten the whole story between covers; all leave something out. Years ago, I proposed Tony Hiss write the definitive volume. I have yet to hear from Tony. I still want the whole story, not just the blind men feeling up the elephant.

ALGER HISS'S LOOKING-GLASS WARS is a

hardcover from Oxford University Press. There are a few black and white photos amongst the text, also notes and an index, \$30.00

IN THE NEWS...

According to my local tabloid's account today (19 March), two North Carolina parents were "fuming" after their daughter brought home from her school library a copy of KING & KING. This "controversy" was also central to the conversations of some of the TV frothers last night - someone named O'Reilly was particularly upset. The book is about two boys who get married; they both happen to be royal - clearly a fairy story. The co-authors are LINDA DE HAAN and STERN NIJLAND, Dutch artists and writers. My advice to the North Carolina parents and their frothing sympathizers - come on, guys, lighten up and swill a little whimsy. KING AND KING is an oversized hardcover from Tricycle Press, recommended for ages six and up, \$14.95

THE OPEN BOOK

March 20, 2004

This past week the children's book KING & KING ... (a cleverly illustrated book in which a prince marries another handsome prince after rejecting all the princesses) was challenged in Wilmington, N.C. by angry parents of a student at Rachel Freeman Elementary School... The Open Book, Ltd. is offering a 20% discount (or \$11.96) to anyone who buys this book and donates it to a public or private elementary school library. The Open Book, Ltd. will ship the book, free of charge, to the elementary school library of your choice. This offer is not available on [Open Book's] web site, and The Open Book, Ltd. asks that you send an email to The Open Book, Ltd. at openbook@openbookltd.com, with your name, address, and phone number as well as the address of the elementary school library that you would like the book shipped to.... Please indicate if you would like to be recognized as the contributor of this book.

NEW ARRIVALS - FICTION

MY NAME IS RAND, by Wayne Courtois. (Suspect Thoughts Press, 2004, 224 p., \$16.95, ISBN 097108467X). (Gay Erotica). Mapped out on a playing field of ticklish male flesh, *My Name is Rand* follows a young man on his search for the ultimate erotic adventure. Betrayed by his own skin into a helplessly

eroticized state, he becomes a captive of The Compound, a bizarre torture camp where men practice extreme tickling...



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What Two Bookstores Are Selling

That's what two of our stores are saying - here's what two of our stores are selling: the bestseller lists from *Outwrite* and *Lambda Rising*. There isn't much overlap between the two lists - and no erotica. Both stores use the American Bookseller Association's Book Sense template for their web sites, and so the brief book descriptions below don't have much personality to them - a mix of publisher PR and jacket copy synopsis. *Outwrite* sticks with the traditional 10 titles, whereas *Lambda Rising* meanders on to 14 - though the last four are without commentary, publisher information, or even price.

Outwrite Bookstore & Coffeehouse

Atlanta - March 15, 2004

Men's Interest

1. **Passion Marks**, by Lee Hayes, Strebtor Books, \$13

A gifted young writer makes his literary debut in this haunting and powerful novel about a gay black man grappling with his sins from the past - and with the dream lover who turns out to be the lover from hell.

2. **Rainbow Boys**, by Alex Sanchez, Simon Pulse, \$7.99

Jason Carrillo, Kyle Meeks, and Nelson Glassman have a few things in common. All three of them go to the same high school. They're all crushing on someone they can't have. And they're all confused. High school's hard enough as it is without being in love with your best friend. Or not knowing how to accept who you are. Or fearing the truth.

3. **The Mandates: 25 Real Rules for Successful Gay Dating**, by Dave Singleton, Three Rivers, \$13

Gay men in search of a hip, honest guidebook to dating have been out of luck, until now. This is the hilarious, definitive gay man's guide to finding Mr. Right.

4. **Running with Scissors**, by Augusten Burroughs, Picador, \$12

The true story of a boy whose mother (a poet with delusions of Anne Sexton) gave him away to be raised by her unorthodox psychiatrist who bore a striking resemblance to Santa Claus. So at the age of twelve,

Burroughs found himself amidst Victorian squalor living with the doctor's bizarre family, and befriending a pedophile that resided in the backyard shed.

5. **Vintage Baldwin**, by James Baldwin, Vintage, \$9.95

James Baldwin's ability to create lasting literature that continues to challenge readers is made abundantly clear in the short story "Sonny's Blues," the essays "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation" from *The Fire Next Time*, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem," and other celebrated pieces.

6. **Tommy's Tale**, by Alan Cumming, Regan Books, \$12.95

Tommy is twenty-nine, lives and loves in London, and has a morbid fear of the c word (commitment), the B word (boyfriend), and the f word (forgetting to call his drug dealer before the weekend). But when he begins to feel the urge to become a father, and the pressure from his boyfriend to make a real commitment to their relationship, Tommy starts to wonder if his chosen lifestyle can ever make him happy.

7. **The Winter of Our Discotheque**, by Andrew W. M. Beierle, Kensington Publishing, \$15

Before his eighteenth summer, Tony Alexamenos was content to spend his mornings riding the waves, his afternoons pumping gas, and his nights secretly lusting after bronzed surfer boys. But all that changes when a gleaming Caddy convertible pulls into the gas station.

8. **Rainbow High**, by Alex Sanchez, Simon & Schuster, \$16.95

Nelson may have been exposed to the HIV virus and is terrified of testing positive... but what if being positive is the only way to keep the guy of his dreams? Kyle finally has the guy of his dreams and is ready to do anything to stay by his side... but will "anything" include sabotaging his own future? Jason Carrillo knows he has to face his future and is prepared to face it out and gay... but is he prepared to let go of the dream that has sustained him all of his life?

9. **My Guy: A Gay Man's Guide to a Lasting Relationship**, by Martin Kantor, Sourcebooks, \$15

My Guy offers a step-by-step approach that any gay man can use to dedicate himself to finding and keeping Mr. Right. Dr. Martin Kantor, a psychiatrist who specializes in gay relationships, shows readers the benefits of lasting relationships.

10. **Boyfriend Material**, by Jon Jeffrey, Kensington, \$14
Boyfriend Material was taken as a selection of the InSight Out Book Club-. Will appeal to fans of Rob Byrnes, Andy Schell, Chris Kenry, Robert Rodi, and

Christian McLaughlin
(www.outwritebooks.com)

Lambda Rising Bookstores

Washington DC, Baltimore MD, Rehoboth Beach DE,
and Norfolk VA

and Oscar Wilde Bookshop in New York

March, 2004

Men's Bestsellers

1. **The Mandates: 25 Real Rules for Successful Gay Dating**, by Dave Singleton, Three Rivers, \$12

2. **Queer Eye for the Straight Guy: The Fab 5's Guide to looking Better, Cooking Better, Dressing Better, Behaving Better, and Living Better**, by Ted Allen, Kyan Douglas, Thom Filicia, Carson Kressley, Jai Rodriguez; Clarkson Potter, \$27.50

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy enjoyed a Survivor-style launch in its first season, with blockbuster promotion and feature coverage. The premise of the book, of course, is just like the show: five gay men - experts in lifestyle areas from fashion and grooming to culture - invade a straight guy's life, and zero in on his more froglike ways to release his inner prince.

3. **Ten Smart Things Gay Men Can Do to Improve Their Lives**, by Joe Kort, Alyson, \$12

Openly gay therapist Joe Kort provides 10 powerful and positive steps gay men can take to isolate and overcome self-defeating behavior patterns, and move in healthier and more rewarding directions:

4. **The Substance of God: A Spiritual Thriller**, by Perry Brass, Belhue Press, \$13.95

Immortality anyone? What happens when Dr. Leonard Miller, a gay bio-researcher - who is secretly addicted to "kinky" sex - is found mysteriously murdered in his laboratory, after working on a living human tissue close to two thousand years old? And what happens when this constantly regenerating substance brings Miller himself back to life?

5. **Latter Days**, by Jay Cox, Alyson, \$13.95

Combine a hunky, repressed Mormon missionary and an L.A. party boy, sensual sex and knowing humor, and the result is a sure-fire crowd-pleaser. Christian is a handsome, young man who flits from guy to guy without much of a thought in his pretty little head. So when his roommate Julie discovers that the gorgeous group of young men who moved in next door are Mormon missionaries, they bet on whether Christian can bed one of them.

6. Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes: Part One: Millennium Approaches and Part Two: Perestroika, by Tony Kushner, Theatre Communication Arts, \$15.95

Tony Kushner's two-part masterwork is now available in a single edition to coincide with the broadcast of the epic HBO special.

7. Man of My Dreams, by Dave Benbow, Jon Jeffrey, and Ben Tyler, Kensington, \$14

8. Huddle, by Dan Boyle, Southern Tier Editions, \$16.95
Huddle, the first novel from author Dan Boyle, is the engaging account of a season in the life of the L.A. Quake, a ragtag collection of Hollywood types who drink too much, snort too much, and screw too much as they wage weekend seven-on-seven battles against the likes of the Culver City Centurions, the Santa Monica Seahawks, and their bitter rivals from the Gay Flag Football Winter League - the West Hollywood Warriors

9. Different People, by Orland Outland Alyson, \$13.95
Ever since high school, Cal Hewitt and Eric Hamilton have had a thing for each other. But they are so different, so opposite, neither has had the nerve to do anything about it. When two men are this perfect for each other, however, nothing is going to keep them apart - if they can only stop hating each other long enough to figure that out.

10. Best Murder of the Year, by Jon P. Bloch, St. Martin's Minotaur, \$13.95

Rick Domino is one of the most sought after men in Hollywood but he's not an actor, director or even a film producer. He's a popular gossip columnist covering the Hollywood scene and a word from him can be very influential. Normally, Rick loves his job and the scene itself but tonight it's different. Tonight he's hosting a live telecast of the Academy Awards and his secret lover, young heartthrob Shane Kirk, is one of the nominees for Best Actor.

11. The Year of Ice, by Brian Malloy

12. The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government, by David K. Johnson

13. Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth, by Wayne R. Besen

14. Queer Street: The Rise and Fall of an American Culture, 1947-1985, by James McCourt

(www.lambdarising.com)

Lambda Rising also has a list of 25 Classic Men's Bestsellers, defined as "old, older, and more recent." It starts with *A Boy's Own Story*, by Edmund White - surely now it's "older" - and

ends with the "more recent" *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, by Michael Chabon.

The full list is here: <http://www.lambdarising.com/mensclassics>



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One Store Opens, One Store Closes

A Brother's Touch closed more than a year ago in Minneapolis; in early March, *Query Books* - quite a clever play on "queer" - opened. The new independent GLBT shop is next door to a coffeehouse under separate ownership, Wilde Roast Cafe. Owner Lyle Starkloff hopes he won't be competing even indirectly with the *Amazon Bookstore Co-op*, the nearby 34-year-old women's bookstore that added gay titles and hosted gay readings after *A Brother's Touch* closed - but it's a shrinking market for queer-friendly outlets. Beyond specifically gay and lesbian titles, Starkloff plans to carry "books that are good books in general, no matter who wrote them or what the target audience is - I'm going to have books about gardening, cooking, and pets. And we don't want to just focus on current trends, but also on the classics - Whitman, Wilde, Proust. I think there's a need to educate the gay community on their forebears."

Add one, subtract one: "Gay and lesbian bookstores are becoming a thing of the past," according to *Out Word Connections* co-owner Tammy Nerenberg (with Rhonda Chattin), before the March 20 closing of her Roanoke, Va., store, which has been open about 10 years - they bought the business a couple of years ago from the founders. Sales declined in 2003 by about 30 per cent from 2002, she said, and in January of this year, after a slow Christmas, a ruinous flood in mid-2003, and road closing because of construction, the owners made a decision to wrap it up if a buyer could not be found. "It's not about the money. It's about being a resource to the community," she said. "But there's a point where you have to say 'How much are we willing to sacrifice?'"



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And a Call for Members

A few days ago, I received an email from David Rosen, editor-in-chief of InsightOutBooks, the first queer book club to survive more than a few months. His message follows - it's a

plea to readers to sign up themselves, or friends, so that the club can get past the breakeven point. InsightOut is one of dozens of mail-order clubs under the Bookspan umbrella – there's a club for crafters, a club for the spiritual, a club for history buffs, a club for fans of wars, a club for African Americans, a club for architects, a club for Hispanics, a club for conservatives, a club for dog-owners (well, I'm not sure about that one). And one queer club that needs to pay its own way. Now, understand that *the first place – always - to buy a book is at your local, preferably independent, better yet lesbian, gay, or women's bookstore*. But if you must buy through the mail, consider InsightOut. It doesn't offer every gay book, but its catalogue includes exclusive reprints of out-of-print classics – reason enough to join. Here is David's personal email to his mailing list; the membership pitch follows. Read on.

*Everyone-
As always, thanks for your support!
Please forgive the slickness of this presentation.
Any help you can muster in this needed push for
new members is greatly appreciated.
(. . .What with this economy's increased printing,
warehousing, mailing, etc. costs, the club is just
about to break even, and can do so with your help .
. . .)
The bottom line: We need more members to keep
the club thriving
Best,
-D.*

From the Desk of David Rosen
InsightOutBooks Editor-in-Chief

Dear Friend of InsightOutBooks,

I'm writing you today because I need your help. We need to work together to grow InsightOutBooks, so we can continue to thrive - and so we can together continue our support of LGBT organizations and events and make a difference in our community. This is a major part of ISO's mission.

The good news:

InsightOutBooks, now celebrating its third year, is the nation's only book club for LGBT-interested readers. We are 40,000 members strong and have won awards-including the Lambda Literary Foundation Pioneer Award for our work supporting gay literature. Your membership

continues to help us give back to the community through our ISO Outreach program. We support organizations such as GLAAD, SAGE, PFLAG, HRC, GLSEN, The Harvey Milk High School, and over 20 other organizations making a difference in the fight for LGBT freedom, equality, and free expression.

We thank you for your pioneer membership to ISO, a club that gives you access to thousands of great LGBT books-at unbeatable prices!

Now we need to help each other to keep ISO going!

The truth we must now face is that in order for InsightOut to continue our mission, we need to greatly expand our membership. I need your help to get more members into the club.

Please tell all your friends to join InsightOut . . .

Let's share the wealth about ISO. Our words, our lives, our Fabulous Books! Please help us get more new members into the club-just email this link to your friends so they can join the club today. They'll get a great deal!

<http://insightoutbooks.ed4.net/h/WTE7W/623ST/PJ/AM9P>

If you have access to any personal email lists or LGBT organizations' newsletters, won't you please help us get the word out - and list our website and help get folks to join us?

Thanks for your help.

Yours,

David Rosen, Editor-in-Chief

InsightOutBooks

Richard can be reached at tattyhill@sympatico.ca, at 613 264 5409, or at 7-A Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 2J3 Canada. Books for review, author news, interesting links – all appreciated.



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