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The Gay Men's Edition

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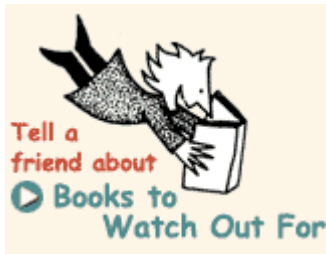
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a collection of passionately romantic original fiction
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Volume 2 Number 1



By **Richard Labonte**

Mondohomo: Quirkily Essential, Indisputably Delightful

Over the next couple of editions of this newsletter, I'll be weaving thoughts (and facts) about the Lambda Literary Awards - the Lammys - through my comments on queer books. This issue: my lament for a book that wasn't nominated as a finalist.

About BTWOF

Books to Watch Out For publishes monthly e-letters celebrating books on various topics. Each issue includes new book announcements, brief reviews, commentary, news and, yes, good book gossip.

The Lesbian Edition

covers both lesbian books and the whole range of books lesbians like to read. It covers news of both the women in print movement and mainstream publishing. Written and compiled by Carol Seajay.

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The Gay Men's Edition

announces and reviews new books by and about gay men as well as other books of interest and gay publishing news. Written and compiled by Richard Labonte.

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That would be **Mondohomo: Your Essential Guide to Queer Pop Culture**, edited by Richard Andreoli, abetted by a cast of smart and smartass contributors, from Alyson Books, \$17.95.



A while back, when Alyson was still owned by a man named Alyson, there was *The Gay Book of Lists*, a snappy compendium of firsts and bests, worsts and commendables, usefuls and indispensable; it was clever, eclectic, and valuable, in its combination gay history-coming out-contemporary snapshot way. It was revised over the years; a few months ago, it was totally reinvented as *Mondohomo*, and I - unhip, unfashionable, disinterested in music, living in a town with neither a movie theater nor a video rental outlet larger than the corner gas station (that is, as far from gay ghettos as one can get): in other words, not its primary audience - enjoyed every essay, every list, every irreverent postulation, dismaying fact, and cockeyed edict.

Unfortunately, it seems *Mondohomo*, a gleeful celebration, definition, and dissection of queer pop culture, slipped through the Lammy cracks: too sassy to fit into LGBT Studies, too serious to qualify as humor (though its wise observations are almost always married to wit), and - though it's certainly as insightful and distinctive as any of the other nominees - too eccentric for Nonfiction Anthology (*Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative; I Do/I Don't: Queers on Marriage; Mentsh: On Being Jewish and Queer; That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*; and *Wonderlands*, a collection of gay travel essays).

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More Books for Women will launch in 2005.

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



Ah, well. It's never easy shoehorning a year's worth of good books into a file of five finalists.

Mondohomo's essays cover 15 broad categories, and all of them combine quirky individuality with invigorating reflection. Smith Galtney writes in one essay about how movies made him a homo, in another about the beat beat beat of music that moves him, and in another about queer club culture; editor Andreoli ruminates on the power of TV images; Aaron Krach discusses the gay theater gene in one essay, and the gay fashion gene in another; Christopher Lisotta reads the beads of queer media, walks the walk in gay neighborhood/ghettos, and considers how the gay community gathers together; David Ciminelli focuses on gym muscles and the love muscle - fitness and porn flicks; Parker Ray does a Queer Eye for the Bar Guy number on liquor and drinking, and celebrates sex in all its fascinating formulations. And Dave White writes about books - the essay closest, of course, to my heart - lamenting the fact that not enough queers read and honoring books that made him the kind of queer he is today...

But those essays, every one fine fun, are just a part of the book. *Mondohomo* is studded with dozens of sidebar lists and mini-essays fleshing out the thesis that there's lots to a good queer life: for example, "Pete Burn's Top 11 Albums Every Queer Kid Should Own" starts with Sonny and Cher's *The Beat Goes On* and ends, penultimately, with Victoria Beckham's *Victoria Beckham* ("I think she's fabulous and I don't have a crush on her husband," he writes; and if you don't get the spicy reference to a hunky husband, you *really* need this book); number 11 on his list is Dead or Alive's *Evolution: The Hits...* he's the lead singer of the group, good enough reason to stretch a 10-best to 11. Elsewhere, Dan Jinks (*Academy Award, American Beauty*) starts with *All About Eve* and finishes with *Some Like It Hot* in his "Top 10 Movies Every Queer (or Straight Person) Should See"; "How Aaron Spelling Turned Our Country Gay" is pretty obvious: *Dynasty, Charlie's Angels, Melrose Place...*; and "How To Host A Home Orgy" leaves nothing to the imagination.

And those essays, and those lists, wouldn't be nearly as functional without the clever, uncluttered design. Matt Sams is credited with the cover design and art direction; interior art and incidental photography is by Steven K. Thompson. From its faux-magazine cover ("Confessions of a Go-Go Boy: A Tea-bagging Tart Tells All") through its snappy chapter headings and sidebar teasers to its versatile use of varied fonts and engaging photos, *Mondohomo* is a handsome, handsome book.

And, of course, it has that chapter on writing. I interviewed both Dave White, whose essay champions unfashionable homolite, and Christopher Rice, scion of a writing family and a writer in his own right, who contributed his own must-read list. I was curious to see what attracted them to words, particularly since they're a decade, or two, or maybe almost three, younger than I am, in terms of gay lit (and real life).

In their interviews, both White and Rice refer to book lists of recommended reading:

Christopher Rice's Top 10 Books Every Gay Man Should Read

(A nice mix of influential classics, easy-read queer theory, and some playful fiction.)

Becoming a Man, by Paul Monette; *The Gay Metropolis*, by Charles Kaiser; *Love Undetectable*, by Andrew Sullivan; *A Queer Geography*, by Frank Browning; *Vamps & Tramps*, by Camille Paglia; *Vulgar Favors*, by Maureen Orth; *Like People in History*, by Felice Picano; *The Married Man*, by Edmund White; *The Catch Trap*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley; *Sex Toys of the Gods*, by Christian McLaughlin.



The Book Series To Collect

(And, I do say, a distinctively non-queer list it is!)

The Chronicles of Narnia; Dune; The Great Brain series; Harry Potter; The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy; Weetzie Bat.

A Bunch Of Gay Books Worth Checking Out

(There isn't a book on the *Mondohomo* lit list that isn't worth reading, but there's a distinct odor of committee about it - and unfortunately, not enough

imagination. Not every book has to be part of the eternal bibliography - those authors who get mentioned on everyone's lists - nor do they all need to be in print. Off the top of my head, I miss Robert Ferro, Sarah Schulman, Richard Hall, Robert Gluck, Denton Welch, Michael Nava, James Kirkwood, James Leo Herlihy, Andrew Holleran, Foreman Brown / Richard Meeker, Jane DeLynn, William Burroughs, any number of poets...well, I guess any list needed to be limited to one page. Here is *Mondohomo's*.)



Bastard Out of Carolina & Trash by Dorothy Allison
Lost Illusions by Honore de Balzac
Rubyfruit Jungle by Rita Mae Brown
Other Voices, Other Rooms by Truman Capote
Frisk & Closer by Dennis Cooper
The Hours by Michael Cunningham
My Big Fat Queer Life by Michael Thomas Ford
Maurice by EM Forster
Invisible Life by E. Lynn Harris
The Swimming-Pool Library by Alan Hollinghurst
A Single Man & The Berlin Stories by Christopher Isherwood

Blue Heaven by Joe Keenan

Faggots by Larry Kramer

Sarah by JT LeRoy

Rolling the R's by R. Zamora Linmark

Stranger Among Friends by David Mixner

Borrowed Time by Paul Monette

the *Flesh & the Word* anthologies edited by John Preston

City of Night by John Rechy

Barrel Fever by David Sedaris

And the Band Played On by Randy Shilts

The Man Who Fell in Love With the Moon by Tom Spanbauer

The City and the Pillar & Myra Breckinridge by Gore Vidal

A Boy's Own Story & The Beautiful Room is Empty by Edmund White

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

Oranges are Not the Only Fruit by Jeanette Winterson

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia Woolf

(Chris Rice would like to have seen *Barrel Fever* by David Sedaris, on the list, as well as *The Mayor of Castro Street*, by Randy Shilts, "which reads like a wonderful novel." And Dave White laments the lack of gay exploitation paperbacks and a couple of comic novels; see below.)



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Dave White: All the orgies in *North Dallas Forty*

RL: So: nature or nurture - were you born with a reading gene, or did you choose to be that way?

DW: I was born without the gene for going outside and rolling around in the dirt like other little boys. Neither one of my parents were readers but they didn't know what else to do with me, so when I showed interest in books and reading they were like, "Uh... okay here's a Dr. Seuss book." I suppose I chose it. I even chose those horrible little phonics workbooks that were essentially homework for five-year-olds. I loved those. I was such a little nerdo.

Think back to that day when you decided the Hardy Boys weren't hearty enough: what was your first big gay book-reading experience? Did you read it openly, or in the closet? What books that you read as a nascent fag do you still love? Any you regret?

Well, as I say in *Mondo Homo**, one of my favorite teenage reads was *North Dallas Forty* because of all the orgies. I was still sorting out the fact that the reason I was so into it was because there was a big group of *men* in those scenes. But the first gay literary stuff I got hold of was when I was already well into my twenties: David Wojnarowicz's *Close To The Knives* and Larry Kramer's *Faggots* and Dennis Cooper's *Frisk*. I don't remember which one was first, but the craziest context-related read was *Frisk* because I was proctoring a high-school placement exam - I used



to be a teacher - and reading it while the kids were taking the test. I had no idea what I was getting myself in for when I brought the book to school that day and was silently sort of cracking up that I was reading about people being murdered during sex and getting paid overtime for it.

Forget about the books, now: since you also write about sex in Mondohomo, let me ask you which writer earned your first crush? Any current flames?

Of the living ones - since I'd really like to fuck Walt Whitman - I have the hots for Jonathan Safran-Foer, but he's straight and I'm totally last in line behind every woman at *Jane* magazine. I have a pop-culture crush on Douglas Coupland. Derek McCormack, who wrote *The Haunted Hillbilly*, is really talented and really cute. Wayne Koestenbaum. He's great. And I idolize Dennis Cooper but sadly I'm too old and bearish for him. Plus he smokes.

Seriously now - in your essay, you lament the illiteracy of homosexuals. I'm less despairing - from my earliest bookselling days, which began three decades ago, I recognized that readers were at best one in 10 of the one in 10, and have probably been about that in number since the time boys and girls of succeeding generations first tuned in to movies/TV/dance clubs/the Internet - and, as the years went by, the age of readers got younger and younger. Is my glass half full or is yours half empty?

To be totally honest, I was sort of being facetious. I have lots of fag friends in Los Angeles who read. It just took a while to move out here and then begin hunting and gathering them. The glass is half full unless you live out in the sticks somewhere, which is where I'm from originally. Then it's totally empty.

Why aren't Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* books, Ethan Mordden's *Buddy* novels, Simon Raven's *Alms for Oblivion* series, Mary Renault's Greek World novels (*The Persian Boy*, *The Praise Singer*, et al.), or any of the *Queer as Folk* novelizations on the *Book Series to Collect* list? (One of these is not like the other.)

Well, that list, while brazenly interrupting the flow of my chapter, was not written by me. I think I contributed the *Weetzie Bat* book series to it and that's it. If I'd had more of a hand in it then the *Tales of the City* books would absolutely have been in there. The *Encyclopedia Brown* books would have made the cut, too. The *Queer As Folk* novelizations would not...

There's an eclectic list of A Bunch of Gay Books Worth Checking Out as a sidebar to your essays. What titles that you like a lot didn't make the cut?

I collect old gay exploitation books (the ones with titles like *Gay Whore* and *Homosexuality: The International Disease*, a book that was written in the mid-1960s and blames British homosexuality on The Beatles), and I think those are really awesome. That they're impossible to find unless you scour low-traffic thrift stores in small towns makes the score that much more exciting. I'd have those kinds of books on the list. Also *Screening Party* by Dennis Hensley and *Sex Toys of The Gods* by Christian McLaughlin, not because they're both my friends, which they are, but because they're both really funny books. These guys are hilarious writers.

Lastly: best book you've read this year? Upcoming book you can't wait for? Queer book you've re-read most often, if any?

Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of The Satanic Metal Underground, by Michael Moynihan and Didrik Soderlind. It's a few years old but I finally got around to reading it this year. It's about the weird phenomenon of Norwegian black metal bands who run around killing each other and setting churches on fire and it's just crazy. Also *Moirai Orfei in Aigues-Mortes* by Wayne Koestenbaum and *Colors Insulting to Nature* by Cintra Wilson. And I hear that Lynda Barry is working on a new one, but who knows. Her novel *Cruddy* from a few years ago is one I push on people all the time.



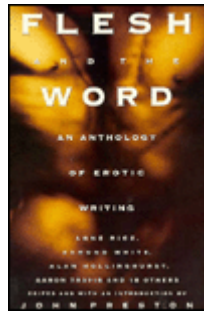
Christopher Rice: A Muscled Barbarian Type on the Cover

RL: So: nature or nurture...

CR: Even if a child has the reading gene, I think it helps if the kid's parents are routinely disappearing into books and keeping them in piles around the house. This takes the act of reading and cloaks it in adult magic and mystery. I was born with a fantasy and escape gene and it first took the form of obsessive movie and television watching, then I realized that reading could be done absolutely alone, and the resulting state of fantasy was that much more total as a result. I remember there was an old paperback copy of *Jaws* in my elementary school library and the teachers kept having to put it on a high shelf because I would take it down during class and start reading it.

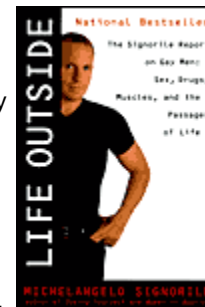
Think back: what was your first big gay book-reading experience...

I know few other gay children who can claim that their mother was best friends with some of the best gay erotic writers of the '80s and '90s. The works of John Preston were routinely coming through our home in various drafts and I would routinely steal them when my mother wasn't working. The first highly charged gay reading experience I had was with his first volumes of the *Flesh and the Word* series. But there was also this old paperback fantasy novel that I stumbled across in my high school library. I can't remember the name of it but there was a hugely muscled barbarian type on the cover and at one point he had a slave tied up in his quarters. I remember reading in shaking disbelief as things between barbarian and slave turned intimate. How such a novel ended up in my conservative high school's library, I have no clue. I regret not going back for more at the time but the risk of being discovered in high school was too great for me.



There are *more than 10* books that gay men should read: please discuss. How hard was it to winnow your list down, what books didn't make the cut imposed arbitrarily by either or both a harsh editor or a demanding designer?

It was brutal but I made the cuts myself. The one book that just barely didn't make the cut was *Life Outside* by Michelangelo Signorile which I think is one of the most important treatises on contemporary gay life we currently have. This may sound odd, but the reason I didn't include it is because I agree with everything Signorile says in it. I gave two of the nonfiction slots to Camille Paglia and Andrew Sullivan because I do not agree with a great deal of what they write and that made my experience of reading them much more charged and profound. I respect both of them as intellectuals, and I enjoy being provoked and challenged by their wilder and more controversial assertions. Also, bear in mind, even though the list is supposed to seem authoritative, it's also limited by what I haven't had the chance to read. Ethan Mordden and Andrew Holleran are both on my must-read list, but the list is always growing. I am also not of the belief that gay lit is dead or dying, and I think the past few years have offered up a huge selection of titles that were impossible to winnow down. Rather than try to pick between multiple novels by Paul Russell, John Morgan Wilson, William J. Mann and the like, I went with the first and most influential gay male novels I read.



Now, one of those generational questions: You say, of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Catch Trap*, "One of my favorite accidental discoveries in the used books section," How can this be? Not so long ago... well, a couple of decades ago... okay, a quarter-century ago... it was the one trashy sensual gay romance novel that every homo reader had read. Thrice. What went wrong in your coming-out?



Well, I dare say I don't think *The Catch Trap* was that trashy. Honestly, I think the reason it was an accidental discovery has to do with the fact that gay men aren't exactly hurting for romance fiction anymore, as evidenced by the fact that the Lambda Literary Awards introduced a romance category a few years back. Kensington is publishing multiple titles a year that deliver gay romance, along with frank sex scenes. I think the

reason young gay men don't travel back through the years is because they're not interested in reading something where the sex is muted or restrained as a result of the time. To some of them, it can feel like a cheat. I'm not sure I agree. I'm at the point where I've read about so many rock hard chests and pulsing members that I get goose bumps when I read about two men cuddling.

The Dave White essay curling around your booklist laments the illiteracy of homosexuals at large. Are you as despairing?

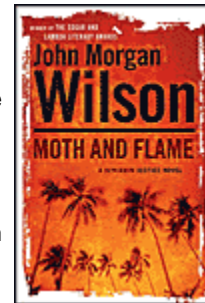
Let me put it this way. Recently, I went into a paroxysm of panic over my forthcoming novel *Light Before Day*. It's a gay thriller with gay villains, and some of those villains are child molesters. I lapsed into fantasies of how I was going to be torn apart for being politically incorrect, imagined protestors with signs showing up at my readings. A close friend of mine, also a gay writer, remarked, "Darling, if these queens get themselves that worked up over a *book*, then you have truly accomplished something!" I think my friend is right, and I think his sentiment dovetails with those expressed by Dave White. Gay men are just not reading the way they used to. Trite explanations for this abound, and I'm not sure I'm willing to pick one of them as the right answer.

The fact of the matter is, and I'm not the first one to say this, the majority of them go to gay bookstores for poppers and porn. I am holding out hope that this will change as a result of the political climate. As I've expressed in my columns for *The Advocate*, I believe America's gay men have been kicked in the teeth by this president, and maybe they will react with a sense of urgency that makes them hungry for the kind of varied explorations of gay identity they still can't find on cable television.

But we're not alone in this. Just a few years ago, Spike Lee was upbraiding the black community for not supporting strong films by black filmmakers. I also think it's important to remember that the publishing industry itself has been in a state of tumult for a while now and literary fiction across the board has suffered as a result. When the Bertelsmann corporation took sixteen minutes to fire Ann Godoff, the head of Random House, it sent a deeply distressing message to everyone from independent booksellers to established authors - the multimedia conglomerates who now own most of the publishing houses believe that serious literary fiction is hurting their profit margins. This was even more distressing to gay writers who don't fill their work with car chases and scorching sex scenes. Industry support for these writers was tenuous to begin with and now it is even more so. In other words, I think the current state of gay lit is the result of a matrix of factors, not simply the supposed illiteracy of gay men at large. I have floated above this for two books because I have the power of my mother's last name and my work is, for the most part, high-concept (i.e. car chases and scorching sex scenes).

Lastly: best book you've read this year? Upcoming book you can't wait for? Queer book you've re-read most often, if any?

I discovered the work of classic mystery writer Ross MacDonald this year and it has had a profound impact on me. It was part of my preparation for writing a first-person detective thriller, the part I enjoyed the most. The best queer book I have read this year is probably *Moth and Flame*, by my good friend John Morgan Wilson. I may be a bit biased because John is my friend, but it's a wonderfully compelling mystery set entirely in West Hollywood. I'm not a big re-reader, probably because I'm always so desperate to catch up on my must-read list, but the gay novel that never leaves my head is *Like People In History*, by Felice Picano. I love its scope, the level of emotion in it and the attention to detail. An upcoming book I can't wait for? Anything and everything by James Lee Burke.



(*Everywhere in and on *Mondohomo*, from the front cover and the spine to the title page and the page headings, the spelling is *Mondohomo*. The authors and assorted reviews refer to the book as *Mondo Homo*. Let the bibliographic fussing begin!)

Mondohomo Editor info:
<http://www.richardandreoli.com/>

Dave White maintains a chatty blog that's sheer fun to read:

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/djmrswhite/>

An interview with Christopher Rice:

<http://www.januarymagazine.com/profiles/crice.html>

More from Rice on reading, writing, and literary influences:

<http://www.pageonelit.com/interviews/CRice.html>

Some snippets from the book:

http://www.sdbuzz.com/entertain/books/183_mondo.html



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Frederick Prokosch & Desmond Hogan: Welcome Back

About 20 years ago, I discovered two superb writers, one near the end of his long career, the other just beginning his. Frederick Prokosch came to my attention in 1984 when FSG published a jewel of a memoir, *Voices*, that told the delicately gay story of a life lived in the mind and on the road. Desmond Hogan came to my attention a couple of years after George Brazillier published the novel *The Ikon Maker*, some time around 1981, a few years after it appeared in Ireland. What I remember about both books is how their authors handled their homosexuality with a shimmering subtlety: it was clear to a queer reader that these were kindred souls.

About Prokosch: I wrote a glowing little blurb for *Voices*, and for a new edition from FSG of his first novel, *The Asiatics*, published in 1935, for *Booked For Brunch*, the occasional catalogue of new arrivals distributed in the pre-Internet days - by mail! with stamps! we licked them! - by A Different Light's original Silverlake store. A copy made its way to France, to an American banker who was one of our most loyal mail order customers. It happened he lived on the same hillside, a few hundred feet down from Prokosch's villa; David Niven was a neighbor, and they often played bridge together with other friends. Prokosch, then in his late 70s (he died in 1989) wrote a charming note thanking me for liking his work. In later years, I collected and read all of his 20 or so novels; most were out of print, though FSG brought out a couple of others after publishing *Voices* and *The Asiatics*, including, I think, *The Missolonghi Manuscript*, based on the life of Lord Byron.

What brought on this orgy of reminiscing was Pico Iyer's essay about Prokosch in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*. Iyer's piece is taken from his introduction to the new edition (just now released) of the book, about which he writes: "As soon as *The Asiatics* was published (it was, not surprisingly, a runaway success, ultimately translated into 17 languages and turning its young author, as his friend and champion Gore Vidal recalled, into a figure of almost Byronic panache." It tells the story of a perceptive young American who hitchhikes across Asia, from Beirut to the border of China, living off the land and the hospitality of the people he meets along the way, with remarkable vividness - even though at the time Prokosch had never traveled there; he was a 29-year-old research fellow at Yale, gleaning emotion and perception from atlases and travel diaries.

That same day, I read a lengthy report online from *The Guardian* about Hogan, who after years of living reclusively - though for a spell he did teach English lit to La Jolla surfer boys - had surfaced in the U.K.'s literary world. It reminded me how much I'd admired *The Ikon Maker*, and how I'd wondered for years when his next book was due.

"The first time I saw Desmond Hogan, a name that means almost nothing now, he was on the fringes of a literary in-crowd at a book party in someone's flat in west London," wrote Robert McCrum in *The Guardian*. "Even then, he was shunning the limelight: everyone knew who he was. 'Des is in the kitchen,' they said." A feline and aloof figure, he was standing next to a gas cooker among the empties and plates of half-eaten food, engaged in an intense conversation with a beautiful girl.

"At that time, the early 1980s, Des was about as hot as they come: widely celebrated as the author of a short story collection, *The Diamonds at the*

Bottom of the Sea and, among literary circles in London and New York, beginning to be spoken of as a dazzling young Irish writer to watch.... In his black silk shirt and neatly pressed jeans, with long strands of hair falling over his pale Celtic features, he was half-poet, half-priest in appearance, but shy to talk to, answering with half-closed eyes, or awkwardly lunging his head down, not looking at you at all."

After hunting Hogan down through mutual friends, McCrum - who was his editor for a few years, before Hogan dropped out of view as both a writer and a personality - met with him. "To a new generation of Irish writers, Hogan has become, in his ascetic but romantic way, a fine example of a writer sacrificing everything to his art.... Writers like (Colm) Tóibín revere him. '*The Ikon Maker* was an iconic book for anyone interested in writing,' he says."

So: watch out for these two writers, one born a century ago whose writing still matters, one born half a century ago who's finding his feet again as an author. They're both authors to watch out for.

Hogan's new book, after a lapse of some years, is due in September 2005: *Winter Swimmers: New and Selected Stories* by Des Hogan, from Lilliput Press in Ireland; *The Asiatics* was out in January from FSG, the publisher of his last book, 20 years ago; it's a memoir to savor.



McRum's full article:

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0%2C6000%2C1350544%2C00.html>

A short story from *Winter Swimmers*:

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,1350066,00.html>

Hogan's most recent book:

<http://www.lilliputpress.ie/listbook.html?oid=320526>

A bio of Prokosch:

<http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/biop2/prok1.html>

Voices for sale: www.rileybooks.co.uk/si/001543.html

Prokosch considered:

<http://www.edrants.com/reluctant/000430.html>

And in this 1999 evisceration of James Dickey, poet J.D. McClatchy derides Dickey for everything short of breathing, including (about half-way through) for "his studied plumping for second-rate writers like Frederick Prokosch and Brewster Ghiselin":

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9501E5DC1731F93AA25751C1A96F958260>

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Invite Liza's Penis to Your Funky Shui Dinner Party

Let's Dish Up A Dinner Party: A Fab Guide To Entertaining With Style, by Nelson Aspen, Kensington Books, \$12.

"A Fab Guide" - hmm, could that be a clue? Aspen's chirpy suggestions for entertaining the boys at home owe much to those guys with a gay eye, but there's nothing wrong with being derivative - can style be copyrighted? - particularly when you've written a how-to book that's more fun to read than it is to use. The recipes are basic but colorful, tips on proper place settings are always useful, and a segue into face creams, while odd, makes good use of leftover cucumber slices, raw onions, minced garlic, and egg yolks. The best dish comes after the recipes, though, where cable TV gadabout Aspen gossips - never, ever, ever meanly - about stars he has met: Jeff Goldblum has a firm handshake, Jeff Probst's handsome home is Pottery-Barntastic, Danny Bonaduce is "buff!", and Erik Estrada wears his son's foreskin in the locket around his neck. *Literary merit*: 4/10. *Fun time delivered*: 7/10. *Gift potential*: 8/10 (for friends who think books don't need to be read).

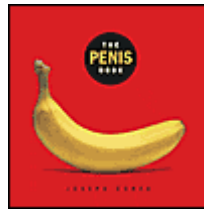


Decorating With Funky Shui: How To Lighten Up, Loosen, Up, and Have Fun Decorating Your Home, by Jennifer O'Neil and Kitty O'Neil, Andrews McMeel Publishing, \$14.95.

Free (your inner) Martha Stewart (well, she's just about out of prison now, isn't she, except for that tacky house confinement thing) with this ebullient riff on Feng Shui. The sisters O'Neil acknowledge the essential tenets of Feng Shui - energy flow, a centered room, promoting harmony - but are otherwise all about fun, personality, fun, color, and...fun. Arrange your snow globes all in a row, turn your guest room into a shrine for your travel souvenirs, blow bubbles while luxuriating in a bubble bath while listening to the song "Tiny Bubbles," and know this truth: "A plant placed on top of the fridge feeds the air, but take care not to use an edible plant as its placement in the kitchen could put it on the defensive, thus upsetting nutritional balance." That's just one of several dozen pithy "Rules of Fun" or "Licenses for Fun" that pepper the colorful book. *Literary merit: 4/10. Fun time delivered: 7/10. Gift potential: 7/10* (avoid friends with a taste for antiques).

The Lisa Minnelli Scrapbook, by Scott Schechter, foreword by Billy Stritch, Citadel Press, \$21.95.

Liza, Liza, Liza, how Scott adores you. All those nasty stories about weight and drugs and canceled concert appearances and marriages to supremely inappropriate men - they're not for him. He's a fan, a giddy fan, and this is one big fan's big happy scrapbook. And the adoration is, well, infectious. The first 30 or so pages are a timeline of Liza's life, artfully scrubbed of angst but overflowing with star turns, career highs, and critical accolades. The 200 pages that follow explore The Liza Look, Liza's Major Awards, Liza as a Broadway Baby, Minnelli's Movies (note the alliterative shift), Liza on TV, "For the Record": Liza's Recordings, Liza Live, and (alliteration alert!) Minnelli's Musings. This is certainly the bible of choice for anyone playing Trivial Liza Minnelli Pursuit! OK, enough sniping: for Liza fans, this is a lavish, comprehensive, and loving compendium of All Things Liza, compiled by an award-winning author and journalist who has immersed himself in the star-crossed lives of the mother-daughter Judy-Liza duo (his previous book was *Judy Garland: The Day-by-Day Chronicle of a Legend*). *Literary merit: 2/10* (but give it 10/10 for reproducing a treasury of photos, magazine covers, album covers, concert posters, and other illustrative ephemera). *Fun time delivered: 4/10. Gift potential: 7/10* (real fans probably have it already; bonus points for finding a fag under 35 who'll appreciate it).



The Penis Book, by Joseph Cohen, Broadway Books, \$12.95.

A book about penises. Right. Many of us have them. Not all of them are as large as the banana on the cover of this book, and one hopes, few to none of them are as yellow. "It's hard to imagine that something tinier than a Chihuahua can stir up so many emotions, escapades, steamy page-turners, phone sex businesses, visits to the shrinks, babies, dirty jokes, sleepless nights, dreamy sighs, lies, embarrassed giggles...." Cohen writes on the first page of his innuendo-rich but remarkably snigger-free large-palm-sized book, before plunging into all things penile: get close to the bowl if you're pissing with a Prince Albert; 600-pound gorillas have at best two inches; masturbation is good for you (duh); testicles pack the greatest concentration of nerves in the male body; the furthest medically recorded ejaculation is 27.5 inches; penises reach their "manly max" around age 17; and - OK, time for the size question - despite "some amazing exceptions," more penii than not are under six inches erect. Koneman, a German publisher, sold (claims Broadway Books) about 240,000 copies when it released this naughty little gift book back in 1999; its new publisher has great - and probably not misplaced faith - in its staying power. *Literary merit: 6/10. Fun time delivered: 9/10. Gift potential: 8/10* (if you exclude known George Bush voters).



A Gay Old Cruise With Auden, Cooper, & Spender

WH Auden, Chester Kallman, Carson McCullers, Klaus Mann, Paul Bowles, Benjamin Britten, arguing about dirty dishes and dust bunnies, and making great art (*NY Times* reg. req'd):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/06/nyregion/thecity/06feat.html>

Dennis Cooper IM's with an earnest interviewer about his oeuvre, including his newest novel, *The Sluts*:

http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_02_004345.php

Stephen Spender: inept poet, major toady. That's what Stephen Metcalf thinks of the off-and-on British homosexualist who, crankily, once sued David Leavitt for basing a novel on his life (if you're not a Salon subscriber, you'll need to sit through a few seconds of a "site-pass" ad that allows free access):

<http://www.slate.com/id/2113164/>

Mike Albo and Virginia Heffernan chew over *The Underminer*, their comic novel about pseudo friends:

<http://newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/arts/books/10962/>

Albo's a performance artist, too:

<http://www.culturebot.org/interviews/000384.php>



Michelangelo Signorile weighs in on Gay Abe, and Susan Sontag's Sapphic vibes:

<http://www.nypress.com/18/3/news&columns/signorile.cfm>

Doug Ireland on Sontag:

<http://www.laweekly.com/ink/05/06/news-ireland.php>

A long, very long blog thread about Sontag, her work, her life, and her lovers:

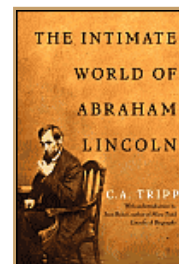
<http://www.memefirst.com/000894.html>

More on Mr. President, from the Washington Blade:

<http://www.washblade.com/2005/1-21/arts/feature/abe.cfm>

An excerpt from *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*:

<http://www.simonsays.com/content/content.cfm?sid=33&pid=500875&agid=2>



A sweet review of Ron Padgett's memoir about Joe Brainard:

<http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/arts/books/documents/04377257.asp>

The *Advocate's* Top 10 for 2004:

<http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/930/>

[930_ten_books.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/930/930_ten_books.asp)

And Mike Fleming hops, skips, and jumps through his notable books for 2004:

<http://www.houstonvoice.com/2004/12-31/arts/books/books.cfm>

Carol Queen really, really wants your sticky old porn collection:

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/12/29/DDG92AHN9T1.DTL>



Jaime Hernandez, co-creator of the queer-friendly *Love & Rockets* comic series, discusses *Locas*, his "700-plus-page tome (the biggest Fantagraphics has ever published) about two friends-cum-lovers, Maggie Chascarillo and Hopey Glass, rebellious gals who strive to define themselves against the socioeconomic and sexual pressures of the fictional Hoppers 13 barrio - and end up in love."

<http://www.salon.com/books/int/2004/12/16/jaime/> (Salon site pass req'd)

A sample page:

<http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2004/12/16/comic/>

In an article about a boom in literary translations, there's mention of *The Yacoubian Building*, by Al Aswany, a bestselling Egyptian novel that includes a gay character. "Reading a novel from another culture may not be an entirely easy experience but that's what makes it rewarding, said Humphrey Davies, who translated Yacoubian. He said foreign readers might be taken aback, for example, by Al Aswany's sometimes clumsy portrayal of a gay character. 'It adds to the fertile tension both within the book and between the outsider reader and the text itself,' Davies said."

<http://www.thestandard.com.hk/stdn/std/Weekend/GB12Jp16.html>

And here's a two-part essay, translated from the Spanish, on Gays in Cuban Literature:

Part 1: http://www.periodico26.cu/english_new/culture/homosex260105.htm

Part 2: http://www.periodico26.cu/english_new/culture/homosex300105.htm



There's a Gay Kitchen Sink In Here Somewhere

Andrej and Matt Koymasky are a cheerfully odd and charmingly obsessive couple whose sprawling queer website has many virtues, the most notable of which is that they keep it up to date – it's organic, with new material constantly being added. According to their bio page (<http://andrejkoymasky.com/bed.html>), Andrej is over 60 and lives in Italy, Matt is around 30 and lives in Tennessee, and they're as coupled as coupled can be – so much so that Andrej, who started compiling queer facts of all sorts himself a few years ago, has "moved" Matt onto his site as well as, emotionally, into his life.

It's easy to spend hours noodling around their easily-navigable pages; one of my favorites is the Living Room - <http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv.html> - with, in their words: "*Gay Marriage Rite, Old Egypt Male Lovers' Tomb, Ulrich's Memorial Book, The Art of Steve Walker*, the old story "The Priest and the Acolyte," a book of *Homoerotic Poems*, the book of *Famous GLTB People*, the book *Faberge's Imperial Easter Eggs*, the *Japanese Family Crests* book, drawings of *Jean Cocteau, Oedipe, Gløeden's Pictures*, the *Codex Manesse*, the art of *Paul Cadmus, Shakespeare's Gay Sonnets*, Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, drawings by *Keith Haring*, and *Plüschow's Pictures*."

There are hours of cogent reading there, and also in The Lounge: "For Andrej's opinions and other information about gay matters, take a look at Andrej's personal newspaper. Here we have also a *GLTB Slang Dictionary* and the *Polari/English-English/Polari Dictionary*, the *GLTB Symbols* scrapbook, *Andrej's Gayphabet*, and Maurice Vellekoop's *ABC Book*. You can submit your problems and opinions to Andrej at the *Counseling Desk*, or you can read the *Jokes' Scrapbook*. Here we also keep our special *Friends' Album* with their writings. In this room, we have also *Gerard Donelan's Album*, the *GLTB Movies Album*, and the x-rated *Cadinot Videos Album*. We also have here paintings in the *Malcolm Lidbury's Album*, in *Rafi Perez Album* and in *Three Japanese Artists Scrapbook*."

Other rooms in the Koymasky online home include The Library (an archive of Koymasky's 110 love stories (that's how Matt met Andrej); The Workshop (graphics and animations free to anyone); The Guest Room (links); and Memorial Hall (documenting the Holocaust).

And, not content with words, they've broadened their interest to include homoerotic art: <http://www.homoerotimuseum.net...>

... it's quite a resource, not incidentally including its large and growing archive of biographical sketches of gay writers.



Bestsellers From Our Bookstores

From **Little Sister's/Vancouver**

1. *Damron Men's Travel Guide*
2. *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst
3. *Fresh Men* edited by Donald Weise and selected by Edmund White
4. *Some Night My Prince Will Come* by Michel Tremblay
5. *Spartacus International Gay Guide 2004/2005*
6. *The Swimming-Pool Library* by Alan Hollinghurst
7. *Magical Thinking* by Augusten Burroughs
8. *Dream Boy* by Jim Grimsley
9. *Tangled Sheets* by Michael Thomas Ford
10. *Best Gay Erotica 2005* edited by Richard Labonte (Reflects sales for the 60 days before Feb. 10)



The eight booksellers at Little Sisters have a few favorites:

http://www.littlesistersbookstore.com/staff_picks.asp

And the store publishes an occasional e-newsletter with reviews of new books (the last one available seems to be last October's) and the work of a featured author - in this one, an essay by Michael Rowe:

<http://www.littlesistersbookstore.com/lbreview/october2004/index.html>

From **A Different Light Bookstore/Online**

1. Stoney Rainbow Bear
 2. *Ten Thick Inches* erotic stories by Ken Harrison
 3. Top Loader Athletic Tee
 4. *Naked Magazine's Real Stories: Encounters and Adventures* edited by Kyler O'Leary
 5. *Best Gay Erotica 2005* edited by Richard Labonte
 6. *Dirty Young Men And Other Gay Stories* by Joseph Itiel
 7. *Fantasies Made Flesh* edited by Michael Huxley
 8. Hard Humpin' Men: #3
 9. *One Night Stand* by Ben Tyler
 10. *Out Traveler*. Mar-Apr 2005
- (From the www.adlbooks.com website, Feb. 9: rainbow bears, come-hither tees, travel mags...those computers track it all!)

From **Outwrite Bookstore/Atlanta**

1. *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst, Bloomsbury - In the summer of 1983, as the boom years of the British '80s unfold, Nick, an innocent in the world of politics and money, finds his life altered by the rising fortunes of a glamorous family while experiencing two vividly contrasting love affairs, one with a young black clerk and one with a Lebanese millionaire.
2. *I'm On My Way* by Christopher David, AuthorHouse - A passionate tale of a sometimes bitter, sometimes angry, but always hopeful young man and his search to uncover the love of his life and in the process, himself.
3. *Best Gay Erotica 2005* edited by Richard Labonte, selected by William J. Mann, Cleis Press - Like the perfect lover, the tenth anniversary edition of *Best Gay Erotica* has it all in a collection of 21 stories that explore a heart-pounding range of male-male desire.
4. *Finding the Boyfriend Within: A Practical Guide for Tapping Into Your Own Source of Love, Happiness, and Respect* by Brad Gooch, Simon & Schuster - In the tradition of the perennial bestseller *I'm OK, You're OK*, Gooch offers single and coupled gay men a provocative, sophisticated, and inspirational guide that addresses the big issues of love, romance, and being alone.
5. *So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez, Simon & Schuster - Frederick is the shy new boy, and Xio is the bubbly "chica" who lends him a pen on the first day of class. They become fast friends - but when Xio decides she wants to be more than friends, Frederick isn't so sure. He loves hanging out with Xio and her crew, but he doesn't like her "that way." Instead he finds himself thinking more and more about Victor, the captain of the soccer team.
6. *Last Summer* by Michael Thomas Ford, Kensington Books - Josh Felling has always been a romantic - up until the moment his lover Doug announced that he'd had an affair with a guy from their gym. Now, with his life playing out like a very bad movie of the week, Josh impulsively heads to the Cape for the summer of his life.
7. *At Ease: Navy Men of World War II* by Evan Bachner, Harry N. Abrams -



In the years following World War II, images of comradeship, particularly of men being physically close, largely disappeared from the public record. But, as these stunning photographs attest, ordinary American men in the extraordinary circumstances of World War II were affectionate, winsome, and playful, disarmingly innocent in a time of cataclysmic peril.

8. *Looking for It* by Michael Thomas Ford, Kensington Books - The critically acclaimed author of *Last Summer* whisks readers off to a small-town community in upstate New York, where seven gay men - regardless of their circumstances, background and age - are still "looking for it."

9. *Best Gay Love Stories 2005* edited by Nick Street, Alyson Books - Simon Sheppard (*Kinkorama*), Jay Quinn (*Metes and Bounds*), Lawrence Schimel (*Boy Meets Boy*), and Jim Gladstone (*The Big Book of Misunderstanding*) are just a few of the leading gay writers who present new stories of gay love and longing in this collection of passionately romantic original fiction.

10. *Homo Art* by Gilles Neret, Taschen - From phallic statues and racy antique urns to homoerotic etchings and orgiastic paintings, the pieces portrayed in this eclectic collection of images pay homage to men and men on men via a very special voyage through the history of art.

Read the staff picks behind the smiling faces:

<http://www.outwritebooks.com/NASApp/store/IndexJsp.jsessionid=8587E2DFAF70C89D86C970C171622B05.t8?s=storepicks>

More Outwrite info:

www.outwritebooks.com

An interview with Christopher David, author of the number 2 book on Outwrite's bestseller list, even after two years:

<http://blog.stevengfullwood.org/archives/000370.html>

And David's own web site:

<http://www.christopherscypher.com/TheBooks.htm>

Obviously, all three stores collect sales data in different ways and set different parameters for what they want to include: Little Sisters includes travel guides, though they're steady sellers rather than titles that start strong and taper off; A Different Light's online top 10 is skewed to the erotic (which I can't complain about, since *Best Gay Erotica shows up*); and Outwrite's is the most eclectic, and apparently the best-defined.

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A Letter

My remembrance of editor Donald Allen, reprinted from BTWOF recently in Lambda Book Report, drew this letter from Michael Rumaker:

Blessings on you for saying... what needed to be said in your wonderful tribute to Don Allen and his attention paid early-on to publishing gay and lesbian writers. As I wrote to North Carolina writer and editor Leverett T. Smith, Jr., this morning: "It does make visible, as Labonte (a longtime champion of writing with an edge) points out, the gay/lesbian side of Don's publishing, which was erased or barely touched on in the mainstream obits." Blessings, too, for mentioning my own books that Don published, especially *A Day and a Night at the Baths* and *My First Satyrnalia*, which have disappeared so completely from the literary scene, I'm thinking of calling my next memoir *Invisible Fag!*

-Michael Rumaker

(Michael's next book, his first poetry collection, available anytime now, is *Pizza: Selected Poems*. This poem, from Oyster Boy Review, may or may not be in it:

<http://www.oysterboyreview.com/archived/08/rumaker2.html>)

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A Note

There are fewer reviews in this installment of **BTWOF-The Gay Men's Edition** than there ought to be, and it's a few weeks later than it was meant to be. Continuing problems with *les yeux* have slowed down my reading, and my writing about reading. Things are clearing up, however, and it's still the depths of winter here in rural eastern Ontario, so I'm starting to catch up. I was able to keep up with my fortnightly Book Marks column for Q Syndicate, sometimes by dictating reviews to a fast-typing friend; here are links to recent columns, which include...

...reviews of *Freedom In This Village: 25 Years of Black Gay Men's Writing*, edited by E. Lynn Harris; the mystery that Christopher Rice likes, *Moth and Flame*, by John Morgan Wilson; and *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch*, essays by Dwight A. McBride:

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050131-bookmarks.html>

...my take on Gay Abe; the flighty mystery *The Actor's Guide to Adultery*, by Rick Copp; and my review of *Mondohomo/Mondo Homo* ("intelligently bipolar and hilariously schizophrenic..."):

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050117-bookmarks.html>

...reviews of David Plante's memoir *American Ghosts*; Thomas Waugh's *Lust Unearthed: Vintage Gay Graphics from the DuBek Collection*; Pam Tent's *Midnight at the Palace: My Life As a Fabulous Cockette*; and Storm Constantine's SF novel *The Shades of Time and Memory*:

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books05/050103-bookmarks.html>

...reviews of Michael Alvear's *Alexander the Fabulous*; the anthology *Fresh Men*, edited by Donald Weise; and Wayne Koestenbaum's *Moirai Orfei in Aigues-Mortes* (one of Dave White's raves)...

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books04/041206-bookmarks.html>

...Edmund White's collected essays, *Arts & Letters*; Robert Taylor's interracial romance *Whose Eye is on Which Sparrow?*; and the Alex Sanchez YA novel *So Hard To Say*:

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books04/041122-bookmarks.html>

...and there was my Top 10 list for '04, including fiction by Blair Mastbaum, Derek McCormack, Robert Gluck, Susan Stinson, Alan Hollinghurst, Emma Donoghue, Keith Banner, Stacey D'Erasmus, and David Levithan, and the *Fresh Men* anthology; and nonfiction by Patrick Moore, Jack Nichols, Ron Nyswaner, Douglas Crase, Mark Simpson, and David Carter, books about Laud Humphreys and Audre Lorde, and the first two Queer Encyclopedias compiled by Claude J. Summers:

<http://www.gmax.co.za/feel/books04/041220-bookmarks.html>

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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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