



The Lavender Salon Reader

The Newsletter & Literary Review for
Gay & Lesbian Reading Clubs

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Club News

AfterWords Book Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

AfterWords Book Club met July 11 to discuss Robert Rodi's *Closet Case*. Rodi's hysterical farce illustrates the dangers of clinging to the closet.

The August selection is Bennett Singer's acclaimed anthology, *Growing Up Gay, Growing Up Lesbian*. The AfterWords Book Club scheduled meeting in August will be on Monday, August 8 at 7:30 p.m.

For more information contact AfterWords at 2710 N. Murray Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53211. (414) 963-9089.

Brown Bag Book Club Madison, Wisconsin

The Brown Bag Book Club meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month.

We met in June to discuss David Leavitt's controversial novel *While England Slept*. This story is all action, fast moving, breathless; about a middle-class man who falls in love with a lower-class ticket taker working for the Underground.

Our July selection, Mary Renault's novel, *The Charioteer*, was about a wounded army man who falls in love with a young Quaker lad while in a veteran's hospital during World War II. The two novels are told in very different styles. Renault's novel is very British, told in a quiet, genteel manner. Surprisingly, Renault's novel, published in 1959, is in part a coming out story. While both stories address class issues, Leavitt's book dwells more on the differences that class makes on one's view of life.

The August selection is Frank Browning's *Culture of Desire*.

For more information

concerning the Brown Bag Book Club call (414) 738-0497.

Hardy Boys Book Club Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Hardy Boys Book Club met July 7 to discuss Harlan Greene's *What the Dead Remember*. The discussion started on a positive note when one hard-to-please member announced that he liked the book. Most of us agreed that it is an interesting, well-written book. Some people felt that the characters were not appealing, but our southern transplant informed us that it was an accurate picture of closeted gay life in the south.

At our next meeting we will

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Editorial Policy

The Lavender Salon Reader seeks to represent the broad interests of gay & lesbian book clubs; to present a place to share our activities; to provide a forum for the discussion of gay, lesbian and bisexual literature and their related industries. Opinions expressed in reviews of books, videos, and recordings represent those of the authors alone. The Lavender Salon Reader does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. The Lavender Salon Reader is not responsible for unsolicited materials.

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Editor's Notes

B

rave Women!

Last month the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Task Force presented Phyllis Burke and Leslie Feinberg with their Book Award for the best in gay literature and non-fiction. These are strong stories of the problems faced by lesbians, gay men and the transgendered living in our modern world where difference is viewed with antipathy more often than not. These are stories of how people grow and change in response to the difficulties society places before them.

Phyllis Burke, author of *Family Values*, in her acceptance speech, read of the incident when she had to meet with a social services worker in an attempt to adopt her lover's child that they were both raising. Preparing for that meeting, they stripped their home bare of anything that might have given the counselor cause for displeasure or concern. The scene is at once funny, poignant and very sad. That the pictures hung on our walls should be critical to our political and economic well-being is a statement of the politics of our time; the need to manage the details of our lives.

Leslie Feinberg, author of *Stone Butch Blues*, addressed the audience with concern for the transgendered. In her novel, Jesse — a young lesbian growing up in the 60's — finds herself not only not being accepted in the straight community, but also being rejected by the lesbian community because she is so visually male identified. An outcast from all worlds, Jesse must first make peace within herself and then fight for the life she knows and understands. Leslie Feinberg is still fighting that good fight.

These are brave women. Brave survivors who have written of their lives with love and eloquence.

Publisher Highlights

(The following books are recent publications and have been offered as books of interest by the publishers.)

- 📖 Segrest, Mab. *Memoir of a Race Traitor*. South End Press.
- 📖 Moraga, Cherrie. *The Last Generation: Poetry and Prose*. South End Press.
- 📖 *Women, AIDS, and Activism: ACT UP/New York Women and AIDS Book Group*. South End Press.
- 📖 Chapkis, Wendy. *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance*. South End Press.

(Continued from page 1) Club News discuss *A Home at the End of the World* by Michael Cunningham.

Your correspondent, Paul McCullough, had recently returned from the Gay Games in New York and had photographs and stories to share with the group. He picked up autographed copies of *Harlan's Race* and *Barrel Fever* and met the authors (Patricia Nell Warren and David Sedaris). Armistead Maupin, author of *Tales of the City*, announced in New York that *More Tales of the City* would be shown on Showtime in 1995.

We send our greetings to the newly named Rainbow Literary Salon of Phoenix!

For more information about The Hardy Boys Book Club contact Paul McCullough at (313) 925-1080

Lavender Reading Salon, Appleton, Wisconsin

The Lavender Reading Salon met in June and watched the film *Parting Glances*. We had a phenomenal turnout; about thirty people attended.

Our July meeting focused on Michael Allen Dymmo's mystery novel *The Man Who Understood Cats*. The story pits a detective and a psychiatrist together to try to find the murderer of a client of the psychiatrist. An enjoyable read that kept most of us guessing who done it until the last few pages.

In August we will discuss the delightfully informative *Are You Two... Together?: A Gay and Lesbian Travel Guide to Europe* by Lindsay Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt.

For more information about the Lavender Reading Salon

contact Michael Nitz at (414) 738-0497.

Rainbow Literary Salon Phoenix, Arizona

The Rainbow Literary Salon met this past Sunday (July 25) night to discuss *Stonewall* by Martin Duberman. Six of our members were in attendance and the discussion centered on the changes which have been taking place in people's lives since Stonewall. There was consensus that the gay and lesbian community is more openly visible, and we talked a lot about the ways gays and lesbians are portrayed in the media, in film and on television.

Our next book to read is *Queer in America* by Michelangelo Signorile, and we'll be watching a televised interview with Mr. Signorile which was taped by one of our members.



Salon Cooking! The best of the Potlucks



Jicama Salad in Pepper Boats

2 cups shredded jicama
2 tablespoons chopped onion
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup plain yogurt
1/4 cup dairy sour cream
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 large green peppers, each cut into 8 sections
fresh cilantro
cherry tomatoes

After shredding the jicama, pat between paper towels to remove excess liquid. In a medium mixing bowl combine jicama, onion, and lemon juice. Set aside.

In a small mixing bowl, combine yogurt, sour cream, salt, cayenne pepper, and pepper. Stir into the jicama mixture. Cover and chill.

Spoon the jicama mixture into the green pepper sections. Garnish with cilantro and cherry tomatoes.

[Jicama is a moist, fleshy, edible root]

Tony Rominske

Our Story

a review by Tom Allen

Straight from the Heart

by Rod and Bob Jackson-Paris
Warner Books, 1994

Bob Paris and Rod Jackson are gay men who opted to jeopardize their promising careers — Paris's as a professional bodybuilder and Jackson's as a model — by coming out publicly and then marrying in a much publicized religious ceremony, rather than remain closeted about who they were as individuals and as a couple. *Straight from the Heart*, a joint autobiography, is one of their latest efforts to advance the recognition of gay civil rights, the cause to which they have been dedicated since the mid-eighties when homophobia forced them to abandon their lucrative jobs.

Their activism is the key to appreciating this book. When I had finished reading their story, I felt a bit frustrated and disappointed, wondering in fact why I had read the thing. Only after rereading the book jacket's blurb did I understand my reaction: readers such as I are not the audience explicitly intended for this work.

The purpose of their writing is not so much to inform the reader of the events of their lives (they are, after all, still young men and cannot have as many memories to recall as someone with more years of

experience) as to educate the non-gay public about what it is like for a gay child to grow to maturity in a homophobic world, and to support young people still coming to terms with their homosexuality by reaffirming their right to happiness and to remind them that they are not alone, that being gay does not preclude living a complete, meaningful, and purposeful life.

The Jackson-Paris's tour the country giving seminars, designed primarily for teenage audiences, on what it means to be gay, how to combat homophobia, both internalized and external, and to show that being homosexual does not prevent fulfillment and meaning in one's life. The conversational prose style of *Straight from the Heart* shows obvious relation to such presentations. Both men's "voices" are heard throughout. This is done in the first and last sections of the book by a technique in which Rob's words are printed in standard print while Bob's contributions are indicated in boldface, which is appropriate, although at times confusing. Such an organizational scheme lends an immediacy and chattiness to the work, as if the reader were witnessing an interview, which is in keeping with the joint nature of the autobiography, but since in many instances the two authors say very similar things, more than once I lost track of who was whom and had to backtrack to figure

out whose words I was reading. It is left to the reader to comprehend this format, as no explanation of the scheme is given anywhere in the book.

The two "chatty" sections of the work deal with the men's meeting (both claim to have felt love at first sight), courtship, and marriage. The conversational format is abandoned in the two center chapters, where first Rod, then Bob, narrate the course of their lives up to the time of their first encounter. Their early years are surprisingly similar, marked by emotional and/or physical abuse, the divorce of their respective parents, and a generally homophobic environment in which to grow. Both remember feelings of isolation, inadequacy, self-hatred, and even despair — which is, sadly, the typical experience for too many gay men and women who have grown up in Middle America.

In the last section, the men return to the conversational format to contrast the self-destructive attitudes and tendencies of their youth to their feelings of wholeness and genuineness experienced since coming out privately and publicly, both as individuals and as a couple. They are honest in relating their problems, both past and current, with their families and with each other as they have built their relationship, but the closing tone of the book

(Continued on page 7)



Lammy Winners!



he winners of the sixth annual Lambda Literary Awards were announced May 27, 1994, at a gala banquet in the Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles. The Lammys are sponsored by the Lambda Book Report, a bimonthly review of lesbian and gay literature. The Lambda Literary Awards honor excellence in gay and lesbian book publishing during the previous year.

More than half a million nominating ballots were distributed throughout the U.S. from September through February. A panel of judges representing leading booksellers, gay magazine editors, book reviewers, and Lambda Book Report contributing editors chose five finalists in each category from among the nominees. Those finalists were announced March 1, 1994. A separate panel of 80 judges, also chosen for their stature within the book publishing industry and their experience in reviewing literature, voted independently and anonymously for the final winners. This year's winners follow:

Lesbian and Gay Science Fiction / Fantasy
The 5th Sacred Thing by Starhawk (Bantam)

Lesbian and Gay Anthologies
Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader edited by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David Halpern (Routledge)

Lesbian and Gay Drama
Angels in America: Millennium Approaches by Tony Kushner (Theater Communications Group)

Lesbian and Gay Humor
Spawn of Dykes to Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel (Firebrand Books)

Children's / Young Adult Literature
The Cat Came Back by Hilary Mullins (Naiad Press)

Lesbian and Gay Small Press Book Award (tie)
Stone Butch Blues by Leslie Feinberg (Firebrand Press)

Sojourner edited by B. Michael Hunter (Other Countries Press)

Lesbian Poetry
The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance by Audre Lorde (W.W. Norton)

Gay Men's Poetry (tie)
Collected Poems by James Schuyler (Farrar Straus Giroux)
1990 by Michael Klein (Provincetown Arts Press)

Gay Men's Mystery
Catalina's Riddle by Steven Saylor (St. Martin's Press)

Lesbian Mystery
Divine Victim by Mary Wings (Dutton)

Lesbian Biography / Autobiography
Marguerite Yourcenar by Josyane Savigneau (University of Chicago Press)

Gay Men's Biography / Autobiography
Genet by Edmund White (Alfred A. Knopf)

Editor's Choice
A Star Bright Lie by Coleman Dowell (Dalkey Archive Press)

Publisher's Service Award
Michael Denny, St. Martin's Press

Lesbian Fiction
Written on the Body by Jeanette Winterson (Alfred A. Knopf)

Gay Men's Fiction
Living Upstairs by Joseph Hansen (Dutton)

Lesbian Studies
Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold by Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (Routledge)

Gay Men's Studies
Conduct Unbecoming by Randy Shilts (St. Martin's Press)

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Insight or Insanity

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Spare Ass Annie and Other Tales

by William S. Burroughs

Island Records

Reviewed by Arun Pradhan

Spare Ass Annie and Other Tales combines the raspy, monotone voice of William Burroughs with the music of the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy. We are treated to extracts of Burroughs' work ranging from "Wrinkled earlobes are a sign of impending heart attacks" to "Did I ever tell you about the man that taught his asshole to talk?" (from the book The Naked Lunch).

Burroughs' narrative style is sometimes compelling and the music has been skillfully woven into the 15 stories, but the album still falls short. We are left with Burroughs' work without a context or an understanding of his politics.

Burroughs challenged the dominant ideas of the time. He was not shy about launching attacks on anything from accepted literature styles to the politics of Nixon and the existence of the CIA. He was a part of a movement that questioned and did not accept things at face value, but amidst this questioning Burroughs failed to find a coherent explanation or analysis of what was wrong.

He saw one of the main problems of society as the existence of so many institutions with different vested interests. On one level he identified the power structures, the monopolization of resources and information.

Yet he came this far only to reject theories of socialism and anarchism. Thus he rejected the need for a political solution, often leaning towards personal, even metaphysical, answers. This led him to some very confused positions, such as claiming that US industry is basically state controlled

(because of government regulations) and that women have a vested interest in the existence of the family.

Burroughs pushed the boundaries of what was accepted at a time when many were rejecting the society they found themselves in. He challenged the prevailing system, was aware of many of its injustices and spoke out against some its more nasty warts. However, to challenge the system with something that is arbitrary and irrational seems just a bit ... well, arbitrary and irrational.

At the risk of being told that I'm missing the point by the hardened coffee shop goer, to me Burroughs was at his most insightful on track three, which has him telling us "This is insane" over and over again.

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The Lavender Puzzler Answer Box

Last month's Lavender Puzzler was a quote from *Stonewall* by Martin Duberman. The quote follows: "The TPF was a highly trained, crack riot-control unit that had been set up to respond to the proliferation of protest against the Vietnam War. Wearing helmets with visors, carrying assorted weapons, including billy clubs and tear gas, its two dozen members all seemed massively proportioned. They were a formidable sight as, linked arm in arm, they came up Christopher Street in a wedge formation that resembled (by design) a Roman legion. In their path, the rioters slowly retreated, but - contrary to police expectations - did not break and run. Craig, for one, knelt down in the middle of the street with the camera he'd retrieved from his apartment and, determined to capture the moment, snapped photo after photo of the oncoming TPF minions." *Stonewall*, page 200.

(Continued from page 4) *Our Story...*

is optimistic and affirming. If you are a young gay person living in seeming isolation, or older but still in the closet, this autobiography offers an example of what two men in similar circumstances have done to enrich their lives. The goal of the book is to present a positive example of gayness in a world that has a nasty knack of acknowledging only the negative.

A series of photographs of the men as individuals and as a couple is used to give graphic representations of the various stages of the lives Rod and Bob narrate. The book jacket itself offers a full color portrait of the two, and it's anyone's guess how little Bruce, a teenager struggling with his homosexuality, would ever 1) have the guts to buy the book with such a cover at B. Dalton's and 2) be able to explain a book containing photos of only a male model and a bodybuilder if it were found under his mattress by his parents or heterosexual peers. Then again, Bruce's challenges are what this book is all about.

What if the reader has survived his or her childhood in a homophobic society, has come out personally, and even to an extent, publicly? What does this book offer such a reader? Above I noted that upon finishing reading *Straight from the Heart* I felt a mixture of disappointment and frustration, which at the time struck me as unwarranted. The material in the opening and closing conversational sections had held my interest for the most part, but the two chapters that are really the heart of the book seemed to lack something, even though they are generally complete in detailing childhood and adolescent

years over which the writers have triumphed as adults. Why did they leave me unaffected?

While most gay people (men, in particular) of my generation affirm repeatedly that "they always knew that they were gay," few are able to say that they did not experience considerable personal turmoil while coming out — first and critically, to themselves, then to others. This is the emotional hell that the Jackson-Paris's aptly devote half of their autobiography to describing. When that long process is completed, or just well on its way, a new being is revealed who perhaps resembles superficially in most ways the old, closeted one, but who has undergone a transforming process of self-awareness and discovery. There is continuity (I assume) in the sexual development and socialization of a "typical" straight child as he or she grows to maturity, and he or she usually (I assume) has no reason to doubt the validity of his or her past. I do not think that this is the case for a gay person who has come out long after puberty. A large portion of "my" past is not mine; it belongs to all the forces that for most of my formative years (Wonder Bread notwithstanding) convinced and, often, coerced me to do and be things that violated my true nature. Much of the history of this body and of this mind is not my story because I, my real I, was not really aware of itself until well into adulthood; many of the events that occurred before then simply happened to someone else.

So, in a way, reading Rod and Bob's story was similar to reading my own. The details differ, but the generalities apply. My feelings of

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(Continued from page 7) *Our Story...*

being disconnected and removed from the events of their troubled, young lives result not because their autobiography is flawed, but because our stories are all the same story; the stories of our "old selves." Although *Straight from the Heart* may not be written with middle-aged, more-or-less out gay readers in mind, its reading can be a valuable reminder of how terrible the past can be and how important our honesty to ourselves and to our loved ones and to our still-homophobic society

is and will continue to be.

Straight from the Heart gives an account of two lives that should be illuminating for non-gay readers and affirming for young gay ones who are in the process of coming out with few positive role models and a host of misconceptions about the quality of life a self-accepting gay person can expect. For those of us who are older, there are potential insights to be gained from the work, too.



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