



The Lavender Salon Reader

The Newsletter & Literary Review for
Gay & Lesbian Reading Clubs

Volume 2 Number 3
September 1994

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Menasha, WI

Club News

Afterwords Book Club, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

At our August meeting we discussed *Growing Up Gay, Growing Up Lesbian: a Literary Anthology*, edited by Bennett Singer (New Press, \$21.95, 1565841034). Therein followed a lively retelling of personal coming out tales. *Growing Up...* is an anthology of essays and short stories on the coming out theme; most of us wished this

book had been around when we were coming out. It was interesting that the women found the gay male tales more interesting than the lesbian stories, and vice versa. A minor complaint of the book is that it is a very positive book; there are no horror stories: no one is tossed out from their parent's home, etc.

Last July we analyzed Robert Rodi's book *Closet Case* (Plume, \$10.95, 0452272114). There was a comparison of *Closet Case* and Rodi's previous book: *Fag Hag* (Plume, \$10.95, 0452269407). Much of the discussion concerned how accurately Rodi depicted Lionel's work situation, i.e. how homophobic is the advertising/marketing industry. There was also some discussion of relationships between gay men and the straight women who are attracted to them.

Our September meeting will feature *Honor Bound* by Joe Steffan.

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.

Due to conflicts the correspondent from the Brown Bag Book Club was not able to attend the August meeting where Frank Browning's book *Culture of Desire: Paradox and Perversity in Gay Lives Today*. (Vintage Books, \$11.00,

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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

W elcome!

Great news this month!

Through the magic of networking, we have located a new reading club (The Gordon Merrick Memorial Book Club). You will find their latest activities listed in the Club News section and their correspondent, Paul Nygaard, has written a lively introduction to their group. Contact has also been established with three clubs in the Chicago area. So plan to see some expansion of the Club News section!

Some readers may recall that The Lavender Salon Reader is being subscribed to by the Gay & Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California, San Francisco; now a second library has joined the subscriber ranks! A hearty welcome to the Appleton (WI) Public Library! Networking is, I suspect, how most of our clubs developed. Libraries can be a great method to generate interest in your club. They can help you find new members, or help you generate interest to develop reading clubs in communities where none exist. Consider donating a gift subscription of The Lavender Salon Reader to your public library. Generating use of their collections is what their business is about!

Publisher Highlights

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

From Women's Press:

(517 College Street, Suite 233, Toronto, Canada M6G 4A2)

- 📖 *Women Healthsharing* edited by Enakshi Dua, Maureen FitzGerald, Linda Gardner, et. al. \$15.95 0889612013
- 📖 Brant, Beth. *The Good, Red Road*. \$14.95 0889612005
- 📖 *Resist!: Essays Against a Homophobic Culture* edited by Mona Oikawa, Dionne Falconer & Ann Decter. \$15.95 0889611971
- 📖 Brand, Dionne. *Sans Souci*. \$12.95 0889611963

(Continued from page 1) Club News 0679750304) was discussed. Comments elicited afterwards from members who did participate displayed a wide range of responses to Browning's book. One fellow disliked the way the author injected his own personality into the text and ideas; someone else felt that was what made the book interesting and valuable. The book is written as a series of essays, allowing it to be read during those times when only a short time available, like during a bus ride. Generally summed, the book is well written, good reporting and enjoyable reading.

Our next book will be Bruce Bawer's *A Place at the Table: the Gay Individual in American Society* (Touchstone Books, \$12.00 0671894390).

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

The Gordon Merrick Memorial Book Club
St. Paul, Minnesota

The Gordon Merrick Memorial Book Club just read *Living Upstairs* by Joseph Hansen (Plume, \$9.95, 0452269253), which people thought was OK, but we were not as enthusiastic as the Lambda Literary Awards folks. The book felt unfinished — like it needs that sequel which the book jacket says Hansen is at work on.

Currently we will be discussing (August 27th) Ethan Mordden's *I've a Feeling We're Not in Kansas Anymore:*

Tales from Gay Manhattan (NAL, \$8.95, 0452259290).

[See the "Reading Club Introduction" for more information about this reading club.]

Hardy Boys Book Club
Ann Arbor, Michigan

At our last meeting, the HBBC discussed Michael Cunningham's novel, *A Home at the End of the World* (Bantam, \$6.99, 0553550020). This book caused more discussion than any other in recent memory. The club seemed to be divided into two groups: one that liked the book because of the interesting characters, and one that disliked it because of its plot. Everyone seemed to have strong feelings one way or the other.

Our next book will be *Love You to Death* by Grant Michaels (St. Martins Press, \$8.95, 0312088418).

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 had their discussion of Lindsay Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt's *Are You Two... Together? A Gay and Lesbian Travel Guide to Europe*. (Random House, \$18.00, 0-6797-3599-2). We found the book to be a very good resource for learning about the gay subtext of the great cities of Europe. The authors tend to

focus on gay male happenings, a fault they recognize in their introduction. The conversation then drifted into a more general discussion of "gay travel" with questions asked such as: what is it like to reside at a "gay" hotel, have we had problems boarding as a gay couple, favorite cities and favorite haunts within those cities and towns. The conversation switched between our personal experiences to those related in the book. One couple (our own Tim and Pete) will soon be travelling to Italy and found the two sections on Italy to be timely indeed.

Our September meeting will focus on a viewing and a discussion of the documentary film *Sex is...* The book for review in October is Robert Rodi's *Closet Case* (Plume, \$10.95, 0452272114).

For more information about the Lavender Reading Salon contact Michael Nitz at (414) 738-0497.

Rainbow Literary Salon
Phoenix, Arizona

The Rainbow Literary Salon meets the last Sunday of each month.

This month they will be discussing Michelangelo Signorile's *Queer in America* (Anchor Books, \$12.95, 038547377X). They will also be viewing a televised interview of Mr. Signorile. A full report will appear in the October issue of *The Lavender Salon Reader*.



A Literary Horror

a review by Scott Nyugen

Drawing Blood

by Poppy Z. Brite
Delacorte
0385308957: \$19.95

Poppy Z. Brite's latest effort in the horror fiction genre proves to be a tedious and cheap-thrilled effort at bringing the haunted house to the present day. The story concerns two young men who literally stumble onto one another and end up falling in love. Throw in some forgettable characters and a terribly cement-foot dragging story line and you have the essentials of Ms. Brite's efforts.

Trevor McGee, a young, drifting, underground cartoonist, returns after twenty years to the house in which his father bludgeons (using the ever popular toolbox hammer) his wife and youngest son to death. As the only survivor, Trevor's only wish is to understand why he was not made into food for worms by dear old daddy. On the second day of his arrival, he attempts to attack nineteen year old computer hacker Zach Bosch with the same hammer. Bosch is a troubled young man running from the law whose parents had used him as a punching bag. Bosch was sent to bring Trevor food when the unfortunate incident took place. Miraculously, the two fall in love after Trevor fails in his I'm-gonna-split-your-head-

open-for-invading-my-privacy thing. Thus, the crux.

The most difficult part of Ms. Brite's writing is her Vanna White way of describing scenes using a "let me show you" technique that wears thin quickly. The effect is a lack of intimacy with any of the characters, an uncomfortable rhythm with the book (each chapter ends like a mini cliffhanger) and a detachment that leaves the reader unsatisfied.

She begins the prologue with the voice of a five year old child and the short staccato sentences work until she begins asking the reader to believe that the same narrator can write descriptively about the deaths of his parents. Clever idea but when one enters the heart of the book, the voice barely changes. Her love of New Orleans and Southern ways of life come through much too heavily, like a Third Reich mother forcing down another spoonful of liver and tongue stew to her Aryan son. One just gets tired of it all and the phrase, "Oh, puh-leeeeeze" comes to mind frequently.

Ms. Brite is effective in two aspects. Her descriptions become uncannily chilly when describing death and loneliness. I occasionally found goosebumps on me as well as an overturned stomach. As boring as the plot may be, it hold some notes of plausibility:

the stupidity of the U.S. government, and while things "work out" in the end, it isn't a neat and tidy disposal. On the other hand, many of her characters are gratuitous; they are fully explicated in one chapter and disappear in the next. Go figure. In addition, too many things in the book are obvious. Carefully read the prologue and one can figure out the ending long before the last page.

Interestingly, I was nearly halfway through the book before I came upon the reason I was reading the book in the first place. Unfortunately, I fell asleep as the two young men took off their clothes and finally some unabashed sex occurred. After the midpoint, the book turns slightly soft-core. In every chapter, Trevor and Zach go at one another; that is, after they have one of their little domestic disputes where they try to kill each other. A sort of kiss and make-up variation of the dysfunctional family from Hell.

Overall, Ms. Brite bites off more than she can chew. She has tried to write a psychological study of family slayings, an awed testament to computer hacking and cyberspace, a ghost story, a drug abuse story, a sex story and even a political statement on racism. None of it really ever gels, and I personally don't care much for characters who choose to do marijuana and

(Continued on page 7)

Reading Club Introductions



Dear Michael,

At the most recent meeting of our book club, we all read through the materials we received and voted enthusiastically to contribute to The Lavender Salon Reader. I was selected as our first official correspondent.

When we first began meeting in October 1988, we discussed adopting an official name for our group. The only name we came up with was the Gordon Merrick Memorial Book Club (though we've never read anything by Gordon Merrick! I swear!!) We informally took that name, but usually we just refer to ourselves as "the gay boys book club,"

There are five men in our group, and we average 10 meetings per year. We do not meet unless all five of us can be there. We have a potluck meal, and anyone can bring anything they want to contribute, except the host has to provide a main course. (This rule came from another book club I belonged to where we once had a meal consisting of three loaves of cranberry bread, two bottles of wine and a carton of ice cream.) Whoever hosts the meeting is responsible for selecting the next book we read. We read both fiction and non-fiction.

One distinctive feature of our group is our rating chart. At the end of each book discussion, we record our individual appraisals of the book. We have a chart in a large sketchbook where we stamp our ratings. There are four possible ratings: a star, good, fair work, and a turkey. In addition, there is a fifth stamp: "did not finish." This last stamp has been used only twice. Once a member opted not to read a book because the issues addressed were too emotionally painful for that time in his life; the other time the stamp was used to indicate a rating *below* "turkey." The chart has been a great way to keep track of everything we've read and how we felt about it. We regularly review it.

There are two books which have gotten stars from four out of five members: *Hold Tight* by Christopher Bram and *Borrowed Time* by Paul Monette. Books which have gotten the most

turkey ratings are: *Chrome* by George Nadar [out of print] (a science fiction fiasco that gave us a lot to laugh about), and *The Dreyfus Affair* by Peter Lefcourt. The latter book, we decided, was written by a straight man who thought he was being very "liberal," but was in fact, very homophobic. A couple of our members were really angry by the time they finished the book.

In regard to our rating system, if another reading club were to introduce a similar chart to their proceedings, I would recommend using more than four levels of ratings. We need more gradations to accurately represent the variety of stuff we read. In fact, one of our more creative members has super-imposed two stamps on a couple occasions to indicate an in-between rating. From time to time, we've talked seriously about adding two more stamps. I fear we'd have to get them custom made, however, to match our cute dinosaur motif.

Currently we are reading *I Have a Feeling We're Not in Kansas Anymore* by Ethan Mordden. We're meeting at my house. I'm going to try my hand at making Lo-Mein. We have a couple vegetarian members, so I'm always on the look-out for good recipes which will appeal to people who are not generally excited by typical vegetarian dishes. By the way, thanks for including a potluck recipe in your August issue!

We read *A Place at the Table* by Bruce Bawer last June. This book generated a very lively and lengthy discussion. We thought Bauer had some good ideas, but the further we got into the book, the more judgemental he got. But it was definitely a good choice, we recommend it!

I'm excited about being part of your gay/lesbian reading club network. It will be fun for our group to see what others are reading, and to put in our two cents worth, too. Thanks for the work you are doing in writing and coordinating *The Lavender Salon Reader*.

Paul Nygaard, The Gordon Merrick Memorial Book Club.

Tim and Pete

by James Robert Baker
Penguin Books
0140234934, \$9.95

Reviewed by Erick Jackson

While browsing Barnes & Noble for a new sci-fi read, I was momentarily disoriented: a shapely torso atop the longest of legs breezed by and, unable to control myself, I followed. Our journey ended with him in the “computers” section and me one aisle over in the “gay and lesbian studies.” (Yes, Barnes & Noble has a “gay and lesbian” section, and if you haven’t checked it out you should.) Alas, Mr. Torso disappeared but I came home with *Tim and Pete*, a novel by James Robert Baker. Wasn’t he George Bush’s Secretary of State? Probably not.

Tim and Pete begins with every cat owner’s nightmare (when you read it you’ll know what I mean) and proceeds to tell the story of the next twenty-four hours

in the lives of Tim and Pete. Tim and Pete are ex-lovers who chance across one another one year after breaking up. Tim is stranded in Laguna Beach, California and he convinces Pete to give him a ride back to Santa Monica. What a ride!

Along the way they encounter two lesbians with attitude, past lovers and tricks, a demented (but intriguing) drag queen, and most significantly a gang of queer HIV+ terrorists plotting to kill Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

The novel is both touching and funny. The writing never slows you down and is at times quite witty and thought provoking. Even though I abhor violence as a means to an end, I found myself swayed by the terrorists’ arguments. Are there really terrorist or are they freedom fighters? It all depends on your point of view. The sex scenes are H-O-T! And, yes, Tim and Pete get back together. This is, after all, a love story. So pour your favorite beverage, relax in your easy chair, and enjoy *Tim and Pete*. I certainly did!



Salon Cooking! The best of the Potlucks



Chocolate-Espresso Cheesecake

Crust:

1 9oz package of chocolate wafers, crushed
1/4 cup vanilla wafers, crushed
4 tablespoon chopped almonds
7 tablespoons melted cooled butter

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup butter

3 large eggs

1 tablespoon ground coffee & espresso

6 oz semi-sweet chocolate

1/4 cup heavy whipping cream

Cake:

2 tablespoons instant espresso
3 8oz packages cream cheese

Combine the crust ingredients to form coarse crumbs and press firmly into a 9 or 10” springform pan. Set aside. Preheat the oven to 400° F.

Dissolve the instant espresso in 1 tablespoon water. Set aside. Beat the 3 packages of cream cheese until soft. Add the sugar and beat until fluffy. Add butter. Beat in 3 eggs one at a time. Mix well. Stir in the coffee grounds and the espresso coffee. Stir well and set aside.

Melt semi-sweet chocolate in heavy whipping cream. Blend together and keep warm. Pour 1/2 of the cream cheese batter into the pan (2 1/4 cups). A tablespoon at a time, drop 1/2 the chocolate mix into the pan. Swirl with knife. Repeat with remaining batters.

Bake for 40 minutes or until the edges begin to puff and crack. Let cool. Refrigerate overnight. Can be made three days ahead.
Scott Nguyen

The Children's Corner:

Reviews of children's books concerning gay and lesbian issues

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads

by Johnny Valentine. Illustrated by Melody Sarecky.
Alyson Wonderland, 1994 (1-55583-253-9) \$10.95

Reviewed by Wendy E. Betts

If the title of this book makes you think of Dr. Seuss, you won't be disappointed by the text, a lively story with a familiar syncopated rhyme scheme and a goofy sense of humor. Lou, who is brown, has two dads — who are *blue*. Of course his friend has lots of questions about what it's like to have blue dads: "Do they work? Do they play? Do they cook? Do they cough? If they hug you too hard, does the color come off?" But as Lou explains, "Did you think that they simply would stop being dads, just because they are blue?" And no, they didn't drink too much blueberry juice as young boys, or play with too many blue toys: "They are blue because — well — because they are blue. And I think they're remarkable wonders--don't you?"

It's delightful to see a book about alternative families that makes its point in such a playful, entertaining way. In making the *color* of Lou's dads the focus (the fact that he has two dads is

taken completely for granted), Valentine not only creates a friendly atmosphere for acceptance and pride, but exposes the silliness of prejudice. Adult readers will get a chuckle out of the subtext, in which all the questions that children might ask about gay parents ("Is it catching? How did they get that way?") are turned into absurd questions about blue parents; young children may not be as quick to see the unspoken analogy between blue dads and gay dads, but they'll still take away a positive message while they enjoy the zany humor of the

story. Exaggeratedly "normal," cartoony illustrations complement the text nicely, although they're not as distinctive as the book deserves. Highly recommended either for reading aloud (3-6) or for beginning readers (4-8).

[This review was originally published in an abbreviated form in *The WEB Online Review*. Wendy E. Betts also edits *The WEB: celebrating children's literature*. Sample copies may be requested by writing to The WEB, Box 401, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.]


(Continued from page 4) *Literary Horror...*
mushrooms in a house they know is haunted!
Call me conservative, but Ms. Brite has written much better books.. *Drawing Blood* simply pales into the background like the bad pun its title is.

YES!!!

The Lavender Salon Reader is TERRIFIC!

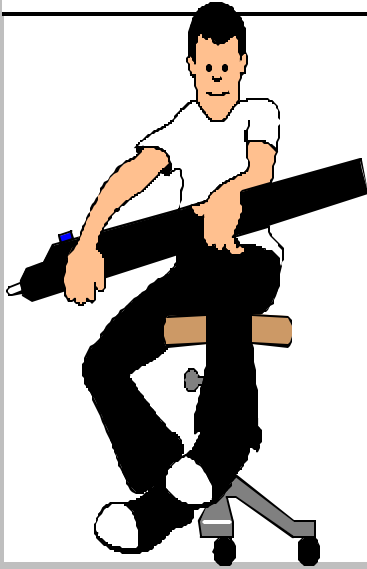
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The Lavender Puzzler



Directions: The text below is an excerpt from a popular book. Each letter has been replaced by different letter. To solve the puzzle, determine what letter each letter stands for and replace all instances of its use. For example in the quote below the letter "c" represents the letter "a". (The answer will be in next month's issue.)

...c rknnkoho usqthn Uccj fiqqho if cbo c xniqv
uxcnxqsbw vkibw qhujscb wxk kix cbo rczh cnkibo xk
zah qseikn uxknh. Uah aco uaknx-rnkffho jnkyl acsn,
czpsbw fhcra udsb, c acboukzh mcrh xacx nhzsboho zh
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