

the books were colored by their authors' views on the Cuban Revolution and the still-frigid relationship between the United States and the Pearl of the Antilles. No Cuban can be objective about Fidel Castro and his Revolution; certainly not one who, like myself, spent his formative years in the hot-house of Miami's Cuban exile community.

Fortunately, Ian Lumsden is a Canadian; this alone frees him from the US's continuing obsession with Fidel. Lumsden likes the Cuban people—"among the warmest and most generous people in the world"—in general, and Cuban men—whom he rightly describes as "hot and handsome"—in particular. A frequent visitor to the Island, Lumsden admired the Revolution and its beneficial effects on Cuban society, even as he remains critical of the regime's autocracy, bureaucracy and conformism. **Machos, Maricones, and Gays** is the second of a three-volume study of homosexuality in Latin America; it was preceded by **Homosexuality, Society and the State in Mexico** and will be followed by a similar study of homosexuality in Costa Rica. In all cases, because of the author's limited contacts with lesbians, the scope is limited to gay males.

Gay opponents of the Revolution have blamed Cuba's negative treatment of its gays on the tyranny of the regime. On the contrary, Lumsden writes, Cuban homophobia predated the Revolution by centuries: "The oppression of homosexuals in contemporary Cuba cannot be fully understood without relating it to the ways in which male sexuality and gender identity were constructed prior to the Revolution." Spanish machismo, which continues to be a major component of the Cuban psyche, colors Cuban attitudes towards homosexuality, just as it does the status of women and relations between the sexes. However, unlike North American Puritanism, Cuban machismo seems less concerned with sexual relations between men than with traditional gender roles. *Bugarrones*, men who take the active role in male sex, retain their male identity and macho privileges while *maricones* or *locas*, men who take the passive role, are despised and ridiculed as traitors to their sex. (A third category, conventionally discreet *entendidos*, resembles pre-Stonewall, North American gays.) Though Castro and his colleagues are relatively tolerant of homosexuality among their friends and allies, they share in their culture's prejudices against sex variance in men.

Still, the status of homosexuals in Cuba has steadily improved, as seen in the award-winning film *Fresa y Chocolate*: "It was evident by the mid-1980s that Cuban gays had begun to feel much less intimidated by the state in relation to the way they publicly expressed the sexual dimension of their lives. ...More and more, young gays are developing a sense of gay identity and consciousness." The Catholic Church is not as powerful in Cuba as it is in other Latin countries, and many Cuban straights are *civilizados* (gay-friendly). Even the controversial policy of quarantining Cuban PWAs in sanatoria is

viewed more favorably by Cuban gays than it is by outsiders who see it as proof of the regime's brutality. (They would be more appalled by the fact that many PWAs in the US do not have health insurance.) All in all, Lumsden concludes, "the current situation of Cuban gays is much more oppressive than the Cuban government is willing to acknowledge. Yet it is also much less restricted than it was a decade ago and much better than many émigré gays and lesbians are willing to concede in public."

Machos, Maricones, and Gays is sure to upset both sides of the Cuban Question, which speaks well for the author's thoroughness and his open-mindedness. Having left the land of my birth long before I became aware of my sexuality, I enjoyed Lumsden's description of gay life in Havana and the provinces—a lifestyle that I might have shared had things turned out differently. After all, blood is thicker than water or politics, and Cuban machismo is as potent in Little Havana as it is in "Big" Havana. (Lumsden cites me [!] as the authority on this matter.) If this madness ever ends, gay Cubanos from both sides of the Florida Straits will be able to come together once more. Adding to **Machos, Maricones, and Gays'** value as a resource on gay Cuban life is a comprehensive bibliography, an essay on *santería* by Tomás Fernández Robaina, and the "Manifesto of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Cuba."

—Jesse Monteagudo

GAY MEN'S FICTION

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PROMISCUITY

by Brad Gooch

Knopf

ISBN 0679447083

hardback \$24.00, 301 pp.

Despite its promising title, Brad Gooch's book fails to bring **The Golden Age of Promiscuity** to life. Born, like Gooch, in 1952, filmmaker Sean Devlin is an innocent who experiences nearly unscathed the wonders of New York in the 1970s. Throughout most of the book, although he travels in a glamorous world of sex and creativity, he and the characters around him remain as thin as the paper they are printed on, without motives or insights to interest the reader.

The real purpose of the novel is to catalogue the places and people of the period, drowning us in a sea of irrelevant details. Every time someone hails a taxi, it's a roomy Checker cab (now extinct). If a cigarette is lit, it's a Tareyton. The titles of several current songs and their singers are reported whenever there's music. At parties,

every name of the period is dropped with a clatter: Warhol, Fassbinder, Halston, Mapplethorpe, Dylan, Bowie and even Lotte Lenya all show up, along with a legion of others. Every bar, club, bathhouse, theater and restaurant is here in a series of dull lists. The book might better have accomplished its goal if it had been written as nonfiction.

So intent was Gooch on parading his research that he failed to acknowledge all his sources. Michael Bronski alerted me to a scene that borrows heavily from Rita Mae Brown's 1975 essay "Queen for a Day," in which she describes her visit to the baths disguised as a man. I found no fewer than fifteen borrowings: phrases, descriptions, incidents, whole scenes, and unparaphrased ideas, such as "It's romanticism in a mechanical setting." He uses the term "urban aboriginals," citing it as a phrase Sean had "heard somewhere," rather than as the title of Geoff Mains's later book. He even borrowed some descriptions and phrases from my own **Under the Rainbow**, referring, for example, to the Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse mural as "a family portrait," but he does credit the image to a gay activist he names "Arnie." (Although he does not acknowledge my help, Gooch interviewed me on the telephone for over an hour while he was writing his manuscript.)

The style, perhaps in an effort to provide a substitute for complexity, frequently employs strings of redundant adjectives that are usually the first device edited out in creative writing classes: "...he was slow, saturnine, melancholy, passive, indifferent." Despite the frequent sexual scenes, not one is erotic. The words "dick" and "cock" appear only a few times. Everywhere else, we hear nearly erotophobic references to "his thing." Some impenetrable lines attempt to pass for wisdom: "People you feel the least about are the people you feel the most about."

Only in the final months of the story does Sean manage to have a sado-masochistic sexual adventure that affects him and to begin a love affair that may transform him, and this final fifth of the novel provides the only reading that is not laborious. In the last scene Sean meets the infamous "Patient Zero," credited with single-handedly spreading the AIDS epidemic across North America, so the book ends on a note of warning about the tragedy to come; but when many of the book's minor characters reunite by implausible coincidence, it also ends on a note of despair about the novelist's skill.

—Arnie Kantrowitz

GARY IN YOUR POCKET:

STORIES AND NOTEBOOKS OF GARY

FISHER

edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Duke University Press

ISBN 0822317990

paper 14.95, 291 pp.

It is impossible to read **Gary in Your Pocket: Stories and Notebooks of Gary Fisher**, and not marvel at his talent while trying hopelessly to calculate the immensity of the loss incurred by his early death. When Gary Fisher died in February 1994 from HIV, the African-American gay writer had not yet published any of the literary works he had been honing for more than a decade. Fisher had assembled a far-ranging collection of short stories and poems; and from the age of 17 until his death at 32, he had filled eleven volumes of journals along with dozens of smaller notebooks of writings.

Too unwieldy to be published in their entirety, selections from Gary Fisher's notebooks, with all of his short stories and many of his poems, were brought together for **Gary in Your Pocket** by editor Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a professor and friend of Fisher's, and a respected author (**Epistemology of the Closet, Tendencies**).

The journals and notebooks make up slightly more than half of **Gary in Your Pocket**. From the thousands of pages culled emerges a unique documentation of late 20th century gay life. Gary was an Army brat, growing up in Arizona, Texas, Germany, Virginia, and North Carolina. Here is the unfolding world of a young gay man of the post-Stonewall generation, learning to embrace a gay identity with innocence and without shame. His initial romances and sexual experiences are presented in an illuminating detail that reveals the early promise of Fisher's writing skill. Fisher unstintingly recollects his observations of race and racism, and especially sex and sexuality.

Later, after years of watching the appearance and spread of the strange new malady, Fisher tracks the eerie progression of what he suspects are the symptoms of his HIV infections. He brings his readers along for his pre- and post- test emotions, and his internal debates over revelation of his HIV-status to friends, family and sex partners. The fear of death, and the insights of living with AIDS as much as being a black man with AIDS are not glossed over. For such exquisite prose, Gary Fisher did not wrap his punches in a velvet glove. The rawness startles and keeps getting sharper and keeps digging deeper 'til the end. With this single book, the whole of AIDS literature is broadened and given another portal to look through.

Fisher's rich evocations and point-blank honesty are always treading territory untouched, by his calling up demons and asking thorny questions: "How do you give in to the act of dying, the act of believing what your body is doing?"

Gary in Your Pocket redefines the dimensions of African-American literature. The body of black gay literature is all the more so enriched. It's a crime that this volume was not in print before Gary Fisher died. How fortunate, though, that his book will be in the world to take future generations of readers on a tour through a writer's formative

experiences, to provide a legacy of his work, and to give the future a sense of an extraordinary life during a tumultuous era.

—Mark Haile

BLINDSIGHT

by Hervé Guibert

George Brazillier

ISBN 0807614149

hardback \$17.50, 120 pp.

There is a word in Spanish to describe an illicit attraction, generally sexual, to someone or something unusual and seemingly unappealing. The word is *morbo*, and derives from the same root as the English word morbid. French writer Hervé Guibert was fascinated by *morbo* and made it the basis for several of his stories. In his screenplay for the film *L'Homme Blessé*, Guibert's main character, a teenager, falls for a straight hustler, becoming involved in a relationship that could only culminate in death. The autobiographical novel **Fou de Vincent** narrates the love affair of Guibert himself with someone whom, as Edmund White describes, is totally "unsuitable." *Morbo* is at the core of his newly translated novel, **Blindsight**, the story of a couple whose lives become entwined in a macabre *ménage à trois*. The twist in this tale is that all three protagonists are blind.

Josette and Robert live in an institution for the blind, the *Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles*. The first half of the novel is about their childhood, their courtship and the dynamic of their relationship, and is narrated from their blind perspective. Their perception of reality is composed not only, as one would expect, of the impressions of the other four senses, but also of dreams, intuitions and fantasies about visual information. The surreal world of the couple is disrupted by the arrival of Tailleueur, a ruffian posing as a masseur. He is hired by the center and immediately seduces Josette. Their relationship is brutally sexual. Tailleueur is an obscene and wild beast, and Josette, mesmerized, is unable to resist the *morbo* she feels for him. Predictably, Tailleueur's malice turns toward a single goal: killing Robert. He plans a murderous scheme that is abruptly and somewhat unconvincingly resolved. No matter. Guibert creates a decadent world spiced with small cruelties, so exquisitely described that one must succumb to its allure.

Blindsight was written after Guibert became a reader for the blind in the *Institut* where the story takes place. Part of the story is written in autobiographical style, like his most famous novel **To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life**. In **Blindsight**, only three small segments are autobiographical and they are found at the beginning, middle and end of the book. These framing sequences describe a sub-plot about a paradoxical masquerade in which Guibert himself is an observer. The party ends with a horror movie-like finale. It is so shocking that it

appears to be one of the author's gruesome fantasies and not part of the story. The novel concludes with a second startling sequence that is so completely supernatural that it leaves no doubt that this story is, ultimately, a total fabrication despite its autobiographical elements.

Morbo makes people do strange things, sometimes so strange that they can lose their sense of reality. Guibert knows this process well and brings us along for this ride into madness.

—José Villarrubia

GETTING OVER HOMER

by Mark O'Donnell

Alfred A. Knopf

ISBN 0679445900

hardback \$21.00, 208 pp.

Getting Over Homer zings with one-liners and wordplay worthy of S.J. Perelman. It is chockfull of comic notions: A musical comedy version of **The Odyssey**; poofy Fire Island weekends with wealthy grown men called Phizz and Cuddles; 11-year-old celebrities on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Unfortunately, all of O'Donnell's witty set-pieces and oddball details prove to be mere surface decoration on what proves to be a rather generic novel at base: Gay man from midwest moves to the perceived glamour of New York, pines for romance, falls in love, gets dumped, repeats steps 2, 3, and 4, wonders if he'll ever find true love. Fade out. If this is one of the first gay novels you read, it's fine, especially because of the humorous leavening. If you're an avid reader, it's hackneyed despite the yuks.

The book's section headings point to its uninventiveness: the first 35 pages, deemed "My, You Know, Life," fill us in rather chattily on narrator Blue Monahan's formative years in an Ohio family of 12 kids. Before we have much reason to care about Blue we get to suffer through his oft-told anecdotes. It makes you feel like you're on a bad first date, not reading a book.

O'Donnell, whose previous books, **Elementary Education** and the critically admired **Vertigo Park** have been collections of brief comic bits, is at his best within the constraints of quick hits and rimshot observations. He has a great eye for telltale cultural artifacts and attitudes, often forging plot or character development for witty stand-up style riffs: As Blue rides home on the subway one day, he stares at a woman reading a fashion magazine with the headline "BEAUTY IS BACK!—as if ugliness had ever been given a chance—and underneath, more startlingly, CAN YOU HOLD ON TO YOUR MAN? You'll never see a men's magazine with the headline CAN YOU HOLD ON TO YOUR WOMAN? Holding on is not a top male priority." This is funny, thoughtful stuff; Dave Barry with triple-the-usual gender consciousness.

O'Donnell blesses Blue with an identical