

# Porno, Ergo Sum: The Incredible Lightness of Being Male

This literary monograph was written in April 2000 for the award-winning book *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers on Sex Writing*, an anthology collected by M. Christian, Alyson Books, November 2001. The text is the original unedited essay included to illustrate one of the ways *Drummer* was written.

- I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context  
Introduction written July 12, 2003
- II. The essay as published in *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers on Sex Writing*, collected by M. Christian, Alyson Books, November 2001
- III. Eyewitness Illustrations

## I. Author's Eyewitness Historical-Context Introduction written July 12, 2003

Having earned an extremely useful double major in philosophy and literature, I titled this essay "Porno, Ergo Sum" as a satirical spin on Rene Descartes' "*Cogito, ergo sum. I think; therefore, I am.*"

The premise of *The Burning Pen* anthology, published October 2001, was to investigate how writers create literary fiction which happens to be erotic. The samples of erotic writing quoted in the book represented bits from all the authors' works of fiction. In the original anthology, my essay was published in tandem with my World War II short story, "Wild Blue Yonder."

The contributors examining themselves in *The Burning Pen* were Laura Antoniou, Scott Brassart, Patrick Califia-Rice, M. Christian, Jack Fritscher, R. J. March, Leslea Newman, Felice Picano, Carol Queen, Shar Rednour, Thomas S. Roche, Simon Sheppard, Cecilia Tan, and Lucy Taylor.

- II. The essay as published in *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers on Sex Writing*, collected by M. Christian, Alyson Books, November 2001

## Porno, Ergo Sum: The Incredible Lightness of Being Male (Why I Wrote, among Other Things, *Some Dance to Remember*)

Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

The British critic Edward Lucie-Smith told me that if my once-upon-a-time lover Robert Mapplethorpe had written a monograph on how and why he shot his photographs, the world would have had an invaluable insight into his work. Because Robert wrote nothing, his beautiful work stands on its own. Answering why and how I write my literary erotica is like skating a Figure 8 on an ice cube, naked. Anne Rice and I started out on Castro Street at the same time both writing books about the occult. From interviews, I wrote the nonfiction satanic history *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth* (1972); she wrote the fictional *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Both of us have double careers writing fiction and literary erotic fiction. Behind the mask of eros, we write literature. Erotica is literature with velocity. My writing is like thinking while cuming. I'm Gatsby's Daisy: "I write because men are so...so...beautiful," and because of the incredible lightness of being male.

Readers and critics feel my writing is autobiographical when it's only *verite*. In truth, from 1965 to the present, I've been downloading my personality into books, magazines, video features, and telephone tapes. Jeez, I have lived it up to write it down; but my work is no more autobiographical than the movie, *Platoon*, which director Oliver Stone said, "...is not about me, but if I had not been in Vietnam, I could not have written and directed such a film."

So it is with my signature novel, *Some Dance to Remember*, which is a gay history novel of the Golden Age of Liberation, 1970-1982, in San Francisco. *Some Dance*, full of real tales of the City, weaves its emotional and historical and erotic ropes around a specific group of people in a specific place at a specific time. My "quantum style" folds time, squeezes a dozen years into 562 pages so structured with Aristotelian unities and limned with stream-of-consciousness that readers willingly suspend their

disbelief which is the aim of fiction. “Daddies” who were at the 1970s Gay Renaissance party write me that they make their “Boys” who missed the party read *Some Dance* to experience the High Water Mark to which gay culture once rose before plague and politics destroyed the most erotic decade in American history.

Born in 1939, the year after Thomas Wolfe (*Look Homeward, Angel*) died, I grew up as the other Tom Wolfe (*The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*) popularized gonzo journalism in which the writer must participate in the story. I came of age on the rhythms of James Joyce, Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. I cried when at fifteen I first read Walt Whitman, forbidden at my high school as filthy erotic literature, and I wondered why the parts the teacher thought dirty seemed so achingly beautiful. I’ve been balancing Whitman with Rimbaud ever since. Some of my writing is erotic, *porno verite*, because Oscar Wilde was right as usual: “Nothing can cure the soul but the senses.” Style sample:

“In the end, he could not deny his human heart.”

—Opening sentence, a memoir-novel,  
*Some Dance to Remember*, 1990

I confess. I breathe in experience. I exhale fiction.

Feeling, emotion, is the oxygen of my fictive voice.

Stories for me begin as raw emotion felt, or a disembodied “voice” heard. As a humanist, who is neither a feminist nor a masculinist, I welcome all emotions as well as women’s voices and men’s voices which I channel.

As literary critic Michael Bronski points out, “In *Some Dance*, there are 9 plot lines and 15 major characters sweeping through the epic story of the rise and fall of everyone who was ever anyone.” Those plot lines and characters are intricate to the way I write: avoiding sexual stereotype (Freud), going for erotic archetype (Jung). Slice-of-life stories rule, because that angle best matches our human lives lived in slices of time, emotion, and awareness.

Fiction should render the writer invisible behind strong story arcs, and layered characterizations, and strong dialog. Fiction actually “works” when the suspension of disbelief tips the reader into saying, “Aha! This is real. This happened. This is autobiography.” Perhaps what is recognizable is my intention to try to reflect something universally human about “the autobiography of the reader’s inner self.” Readers of my erotic adventure-fiction want to know how I read their private sex journals, how I read their dirty minds, how I know what they did last summer. The storyteller is a trickster, a conjure man. Sex is only three degrees of separation.

**Excerpt source:** ©[Jack Fritscher](#), *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

At the baths, one time, a man whose tits were in my steely fingers, slipped down past my face, my cock, looking up at me, saying, “Do to me what you did to that guy in that story.” I sent him on his way. My sex life is not a tour of my “Greatest Hits of Fritscher Friction Fiction,” but erotic reputation is a pisser after more than thirty-five years in adult entertainment: literature and photography and video. With more than 8,000 pages in print, and around a thousand photographs in magazines from *Drummer to Bear* to *Unzipped to Honcho*, and more than 170 feature videos, I’ve been a busy boy living a wonderful life. My mantra is: “He who dies with the most column inches wins.” That’s a joke.

Personally, I *am* leather; I *am* wicca; I *am* bear fetish. But, in my literary poker hand, my “wild card” as “culture critic” trumps leather culture’s Full House to top me; trumps satanic culture’s four Aces of Spades to claim me; trumps bear-fetish culture’s Hearts and Diamonds to seduce me.

I create erotic videos, but, maverick, neither join nor validate any adult director’s guild or video corporation run by the Mafia. I am a unique hybrid: I am personally leather and a pioneer action-figure in leather culture as well as a scholar-historian of gay male leather culture, but not part of the establishment Leather Reich of “Mother-May-I S&M.” In my *Porno Manifesto*, art for art’s sake may go beyond the pale of consent as in this excerpt that pre-dates the murder of Matthew Shepard by almost thirty years. Style sample:

The rest of that particular Wyoming night was the sort of history that never gets recorded, but’s never forgot either: how three fairground fellows, all rodeo cowboys, paraded into the bar duded up...and started a punch-out with the barful of working cowboys in a brawl they could never win...The biggest one escaped when Arrow’s dad kicked his ass through the bar window...The middle-size cowboy...revived fast when the barkeep dragged him across the floor to the john and shoved his face into the cold piss-water toilet. The third cowboy they dragged to the feedlot....A boot on the back of his neck shoved his face into a fresh steaming horse-pie. They pulled the shit-covered outsider to a railroad X-sign. Arrow watched them lift the drunken cowboy in his filthy satin shirt and torn jeans up against the railroad cross. They spreadeagled him to the four heavy-beamed wooden arms. He was roped tight and secure. The men passed around a bottle of whiskey. Arrow’s dad handed the bottle to his son. Arrow raised the bottle to his lips and pulled a long burning swig. He could never forget that moment: looking at his father

**Excerpt source:** ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

who had led these men, tasting his first whiskey, feeling the pressure of his hardon in his jeans, seeing the crucified cowboy hanging on the railroad cross, helpless and drunk and howling at the full Wyoming moon low on the horizon behind him.

—Third-person omniscient point-of-view, scene from novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)*, written 1968, published 1972, and then partially published as a “*Drummer* novel” in *Son of Drummer*, 1978; serialized in whole under the title, *Leather Blues*, in *MAN2MAN Quarterly*, 1980-81; published as the novel, *Leather Blues* by Winston Leyland, Gay Sunshine Press, 1984.

Actually, critic John F. Karr, in the *Bay Area Reporter*, wrote, June 27, 1985, that beginning in 1972 with the first publication of my novella *Leather Blues* through my creating *Drummer* culture’s heart, image, and style as *Drummer*’s founding San Francisco editor-in-chief: “Jack Fritscher is the man who invented the South-of-Market prose style (as well as its magazines which would never be the same without him).”

In the 1970s hardly anyone was writing, photographing, drawing erotica because they were all fucking. In the right place at the right time, I had twenty years of magazine and journalism experience in writing and photography, as well as ten years in leather and S&M, when I became editor of *Drummer*. Supply and demand. A nasty job, but somebody had to do it.

It was the dawn of gay culture. The times cast me as the hot boy editor...and, luckily, like “A Whiter Shade of Pale,” the crowd called out for more. To put content, ethos, and style in those pages with everyone else out fucking and dancing, I had to fill that magazine cover to cover out of my own dick and brain inventing the first articles on cigars, tits, daddies, all the hot tickets that have become the usual “themes.”

At one time in 1979, I had edited half the *Drummer* issues in existence.

In truth, I wrote two-year’s worth of *Drummer*, a dozen issues (*Drummer* 19 through *Drummer* 33) — the thickest, juiciest, most original issues *Drummer* ever had — mostly at the baths, with pencil on yellow legal pads in small rooms painted black under a naked red light bulb.

Arriving at 8 PM, hard with anticipation of how the Barracks/the Slot/the Everard/the St. Mark’s/wherever, would pick up by midnight, I mainlined (metaphor only) the anticipation of the action into the veins of my stories, feature articles, and interviews. I channeled the high energy of the sexual revolution at the baths into my erotic art (which is the other side of my “legit” literary writing).

My porno I write with my dick in one hand. Like the reader later falling into the story, I, the writer, must fall into the story while creating it. I must believe the fiction or the feature article (“Prison Blues,” “Pumping Roger”) to the degree my dick stays hard driving the words, just as the words ultimately must drive the dick of the reader into hardening, and cuming, in what I feel is the most interactive art in the world.

The ultimate porno review is a reader shooting his load.

Others may deny that, because they’re gay Puritan Fundamentalists who swing “politically correct.” I’m as fucking nice a BoBo (bourgeois bohemian) as you can get, but no one fucks with me—who successfully escaped the censorship of the Catholic Church and Vatican politics—when it comes to writing, photography, and videography. I am an indie artist.

What you read is what you get: no agenda; all entertainment. It’s sexual truth, personal and raw, the kind you can’t write if you suck off publishers, editors, workshops, museums, archives, or, worse, write for the failed Marxists in “politically-correct focus groups.” Fuck ’em all. As Sondheim writes, and Streisand sings, in “Putting It Together,” it’s all about the work.

Porno is an act of aggression that tops the reader, making him go nucking futz making a party in his pants.

Erotic writing is so Fritscher-Rechy “outlaw,” so much like shooting an “indie film” outside the studio system that the “proper” academic gay rags have yet to acknowledge the literary merits of the only real gay writing there is—erotica—in reviews or awards.

But God spare us from gay erotica becoming academically institutionalized. Teaching novels as assignments for class ruined the reading of fiction. College film courses assigning movies for term-paper critique destroyed the enjoyment of film.

The irony is that twenty years after erotic “outlaw writing” is written, the mainstream begins to suck it up into respectability. It’s hard to be edgy; it’s harder to remain edgy. For a good time, give me a heaven with wild fucking saints who aren’t canonized.

Too bad the future of an art form lies in the prejudices of its audience. The straight press thinks I’m “gay.” The gay press thinks I’m “erotic.” (The San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival thinks my videos about homomascuine men are “not gay enough.” Go figure.)

I’m professionally trained in literature. I know writing. Most gay writers who wannabe on the straight best-seller list are perpetually angry because the straight mainstream literary world judges “Gay” and “Lesbian” writing as just another genre like “Westerns,” “Mysteries,” and “Romances.”

I witnessed the shameless 1997 Key West Writers conference when the President of the Writers association abruptly and indignantly ended the conference sending all of us—including the other writers in attendance, Tony Kushner, Edmund White, David Leavitt, Michael Bronski, agent Michael Denny, and that sweet writer whose pseudonym is Andrew Holleran—out into the street. The topic was “Literature in the Age of AIDS.”

We were kicked out and given the bum’s rush not so much because the banshee Larry Kramer as usual went ballistic and ran screaming down the theater aisle and onto the stage, but because the readings and panel discussions had started to turn in the tropical heat from “lit’rature” to “erotica.” Key West wanted us to talk about “AIDS as a Literary Genre.” Instead, steamy, sweaty, promiscuous gay writing and culture got too icky to deal with when heretofore literary writers like David Bergman began to read their hidden erotica to the audience! And Michael Bronski and White confessed to masturbating to memories of sex with dead lovers! It was also not pretty when the gay writers turned on straight writer Ann Beattie who judged herself, perhaps aptly, saying she could not write about people with AIDS because she was not a person with AIDS. A fight broke out—“liberal gay New York Jews” versus “conservative straight Florida WASPs”—ostensibly over advocacy literature and politics; Sarah Shulman, Frank Rich, Kramer, and Kushner took on the straights and in a shocking move the straights closed down the uppity conference.

As a veteran of the attack on Mapplethorpe, I immediately assessed the writers’ smackdown as one more skirmish in the culture war.

Face it. We’ll always be driven into the streets like hated queers until the exclusionary gay literary establishment owns up to the reality that gay writing is quintessentially erotic, and therefore legitimate, because eros drives human nature—particularly gay human nature—the same way that erotica drives new technology: VCRs, DVDs, the Internet.

So much goes on behind the scenes of porno I could write a backstage musical.

Back in the 70s, I advertised my tutorial services in the pages of *Drummer* with a display ad called “Writer’s Aid.” Having been an associate professor teaching university journalism and literature for ten years, and needing other writers’ work to fill *Drummer*, I took on, during those first years of gay lib, aspiring writers to tutor them in both creative writing and journalism of the erotic kind.

Two of my writing students were “Jack Prescott” and Anthony F. DeBlase. I counseled Prescott to take back to his real name, John Preston; and then, as editor of *Drummer*, I did the final rewrite on his raw manuscript, and published, *Mr. Benson*, from which draft Preston finally

polished up the “unedited version” which was a mix of the two. Tony DeBlase, years later, actually paid money to buy the ailing *Drummer* and became its publisher.

Other 70s graduates of Writer’s Aid include some wonderful current erotic writers who can reveal her/his/their own names *ad libitum*. So, actually, John F. Karr in the *Bay Area Reporter* (BAR) was right about my conscious nurturing of the South of Market leather fetish porn style.

Lesbigay conferences, hosted by historical-revisionist groupies, are full of certain gay authors of a certain age claiming they and their exclusive circles invented gay writing while all living in the same apartment building in Manhattan.

Fucking weird, man.

No one invented gay literature anymore than someone invented Irish literature or African-American literature or women’s literature.

Yet we all participate. In 1999, helping gay literature come out of the closet, I contributed the title story to *Chasing Danny Boy* which was the first anthology of gay male Irish writing. Having immersed myself repeatedly in Dublin culture, I combined two ancient Irish myths collected by Lady Gregory with a stream-of-consciousness style that suits lives lived with orgasmic intensity. Style sample:

In Dublin, the Banshee queen himself could well imagine the four lads from the punk band rolling in the fast-forward, slow-motion, and freeze-frame of the porno videos shelved in his rental shop. The hot wet mouths of those handsome handsome handsome swanlike boys lipping down slow then eager on jutting cocks spit wet tongued fucking pink butt yes like dogs taking every shape cum spurting on lips nose eye lashes stripped naked in the shed barn woods no no no yes linen sheets stained with shit dewlaps hot young sweat browning each other those four drip cum into me into you fuck into you fuck me oh yes wipe it on me eat it eat it swallow more more more fucking yes you and you and you those four lads ah ah ah.

— Stream-of-consciousness orgy scene from “Chasing Danny Boy,” the title story in the 1999 fiction anthology, *Chasing Danny Boy: Powerful Stories of Celtic Eros*, Finalist Best Gay and Lesbian Fiction, collected and edited by Mark Henry.

Erotic content for me spins out of specific characters in a specific place at a specific time, so that the convergence of the quite “specific” nails a certain “universality” of human truth.

Some people think my Robert Mapplethorpe was a photographer when he was actually first an artist who was second a photographer. Never take this writer-editor-photographer-videographer, who was a founding member of the American Popular Culture Association in 1968, for anything less.

That pop-culture sensitivity and my education (which I earned, thanks to my working-class parents) trained me with a PhD in American literature and criticism, so that I was formally prepared, with my homework done, to take on gay culture's ignition at Stonewall and blast-off into the Titanic 70s for the cruise altitude of *Drummer*.

When the love that dare not speak its name began to scream, Golden Age writers' duty and necessity was to name those unspoken acts, facts, and people. Erotic writers are endlessly inventive creating infinite synonyms for sex organs and sex acts.

Actually, I had to determine for the 70s "Gay Culture Style Guide" that *cum* would be spelled "c-u-m" to match the Anglo-Saxon "f-u-c-k." and that *hardon* had no hyphen.

My name being "Jack" tuned my familiarity with the word *manjack*, as in "every manjack for himself." So I wrote a *portmanteau* word by planting the word *man* as a prefix as in "mancock." Oi and vay! Every imitator on the block has prefixed everything but the "mankitchen sink" into what is now a total cliché of "manporn." (Nothing's worse than jerking off to some writer's story and realizing he's imitating your style. Bummer.)

Pioneer writers had to create new vocabulary to spin/spin/spin queers from hated stereotype to heroic archetype.

Stereotypes can be down and dirty shorthand to create a quick villain; but heroes need to be archetypes.

I admit I write as a Platonist. Plato said that out there somewhere exists the Perfect Lover.

Quentin Crisp, who was not a Platonist, told me there was no such thing as the perfect tall, dark, and handsome Platonic Ideal.

I told Quentin, "Of course, there isn't. He's blond." Style sample:

That first night when I first saw Kick, I recognized one of life's long shots at the Perfect Affirmation. He was a man. He had a man's strength and fragility, a man's grace and intensity, a man's joy, and a man's passion. He seemed my chance to celebrate the changes in me as growth. He was so fully a man, he was an Angel of Light. To him I could say nothing but *Yes*. One thing, you see, I know for sure: Nature very rarely puts it all together: looks, bearing, voice, appeal, smile, intelligence, artfulness, accomplishment, strength, kindness. That's what I

looked for all my life: the chance to say *Yes* to a man like that. I look in men for nothing more than that affirmative something that grabs you and won't let you look away. Maintaining my full self, to have some plenty to offer back in balance, I've looked for some man who fills in the appropriate existential blanks, for some man to be the way a man is supposed to be, for some man to keep on keeping on with, in all the evolving variations of friendship and fraternity, beyond the first night's encounter. I've looked for that to happen: to be able to say *Yes* inside myself when a good, clean glow of absolute trust settles over the world. Honest manliness is never half-revealed. When it's there, it's all right there in front of you. The hardest thing to be in the world today is a man.... When Ryan first saw Kick, I dare say, his fantasy spanned a million years.

—Aria, “Archetype,” from the novel, *Some Dance to Remember*, published by Elizabeth Gershman, Knight's Press, 1990; The Haworth Press, 2005.

Erotica is storytelling.

Erotica is pillow-talk.

Erotica is what you whisper into an ear to seduce.

Erotica is what you say in bed to bend your partner into three more inches.

Erotica is what you promise afterwards to make sure you get sex again.

If I may make a comment as one of the first and longest living gay writers/editors, lesbigay authors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to get their storytelling shit together. Lesbigay writing should be as good as straight writing, or better—especially if the *Queer Eye* minstrel fantasy is true that lesbigays have better taste than straights.

Look at the lesbigay magazines!

Most of the illustrations look like the drawings of mental patients.

Most of the models, pro or amateur, have dead faces.

Much lesbigay writing reads the same: mental and dead. Humorless.

Lesbigay erotic narrative is largely unimaginative: “I went to a bar, met a god who took me off on his bike, fucked me, and left me, but I'll never forget him, because he was my first time.”

GLBT writers need to develop titles, story arcs, character back stories, dialog, points-of-view other than the “first person narrator,” and certainly not one more “sensitive soul coming-of-age story” which deserves the “No More Wire Hangers Award”!

**Excerpt source:** ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008

Just because writers' laptops print out instant-gratification columns—formatted to look like writing on a book page or a magazine page—doesn't mean that the writers need not go back over the first draft to polish it twenty times.

I started writing the 562 final pages of *Some Dance to Remember* in 1968 and finished it in 1982, with final edit in 1984, and publication in 1990. Be patient, but always keep focused. I could only write that novel as fast as history happened.

I knew this *Some Dance* diary of gay culture was a three-way love story told against the epic rise of gay lib, but I had no idea in 1978 that HIV would enter the novel the way the burning of Atlanta entered *Gone with the Wind* to which *Some Dance* has been compared, by, among others, *The Advocate*, as “the gay *Gone with the Wind*.”

(Originally in 1979, my whimsey was to title my gay *Gone with the Wind*: *Blown with the Wind*; but that was too satirical and precious.)

On the other hand in 1992 and 1993, dead-set-dedicated in more ways than one, I dared the psychic danger of writing my nonfiction memoir of my bicoastal lover, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, in ninety edgy days while over and over as loud as possible I played the soundtrack from *The Crying Game*. I wrote *Some Dance to Remember* listening to the Eagles' *Hotel California* (1976). This synthesis of music and writing received pop-culture confirmation in the “authors' circle of inspiration” when the playwright Tom Stoppard, screenwriter of *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), affirmed that he wrote his plays, *Arcadia* (1993), over the Rolling Stones' “You Can't Always Get What You Want,” and *The Coast of Utopia* (2006) between listening repeatedly to the 1979 Pink Floyd track from *The Wall*, “Comfortably Numb.” (*Vanity Fair*, November 2007, page 190-192)

Absolutely required reading for lesbigay writers: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* by Christopher Vogler.

A trained cultural analyst, I mention this huge problem in gay storytelling, because such process analysis reveals the construct of what my erotica attempts. I'm tempestuously Irish (romantically independent) and Austrian (romantically aggressive), a Gemini born during the brightest hour of the longest day: noon hour on the summer solstice.

My first nonfiction book was about media and criticism: *Television Today* (1971). My second nonfiction book was about the occult, sex, and leather: *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth* (1972). My third nonfiction was an erotic bio-memoir: *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera* (1994). Patricia Morrisroe, the writer who attempted the horrible biography, *Mapplethorpe* (1995), named me, based on my journalism in *Drummer*, “The King of Sleaze,” showing how shocking she—as a

straight interloper—found gay-culture *verite* to be. Was Patsy pissed that my frankly honest *Mapplethorpe* memoir beat her puritanical Catholic school-girl biography into stores, and was the first book on Mapplethorpe ever published? (And I didn't inbreed in the corporate "incest" between Random House and *The New Yorker*!)

Anyway, this King of Sleaze thanks Ms. P. M. for her straight rant which in the inverted gay world is wonderful endorsement, actually, for quoting on covers of books with an exclamation point: ...a new erotic novel by "The King of Sleaze"! Style sample:

#### READER DISCRETION ADVISORY

This pop culture memoir contains sex, lies, greed, perversion, murder, deceit, infidelity, drugs, sex, immorality, scatology, ambition, sex, equivocation, character assassination, slander, blasphemy, aspersion, sex, betrayal, distortion, racism, ungodliness, sodomy—and that's just the critics of Mapplethorpe!

— First page, before title page of the erotic bio-memoir, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*, published in hard cover by Hy Stierman, Hastings House, 1994

Educated in Catholic schools, I can't seem not to write "sexy." I try, but even my earliest stories, published in—believe it or not—Roman Catholic magazines—are erotic subliminally, written as they are about virgin-saints fighting impurity, martyrs suffering joyously under the sadistic hands in the Colosseum, and revolutionaries in Latin America nailed to the roofs of cars by the *policia* in my 1961 story, "The Untimely Death of J. Cristobal." (Get the coded name?)

My stories were "out" erotically before I was, in fact, before I knew that sex, or homosexuality even existed.

For a fictional memoir "take" on this, check out my first novel, the pre-quel to 1990's *Some Dance to Remember*, titled *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy* (1966). *Kid* is totally overheated eros told from *inside* "the closet," so it is a new kind of gay genre—a novel of the closet—that takes place before there is any coming-out story. *Kid* is, however, strictly in the tradition of mid-century novels such as Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*.

When straight people ask me what I write, I say, "Men's adventure stories."

All my stories are relationship stories disguised as adventure stories ("Wild Blue Yonder"), comedy stories ("By Blonds Obsessed"), revenge stories ("The Lords of Leather," very Edgar Allen Poe), fetish stories ("Cigar Sarge," "K-9 Dog Dik," "Foreskin Blues"), war stories ("The

Shadow Soldiers”), leather stories (“S&M Ranch”), bear stories (the one-sentence, 3500-word “Three Bears in a Tub”), gym stories (“Father and Son Tag Team”), muscle stories (“Buzz Spaulding’s Training Academy”), sci-fi stories (“Roughnight@sodom.cum” which won the Richard Labonté Different Light award for best title), and twinkie stories (“A Beach Boy Named Desire”).

I write stories of the future (“Earthorse”) and the past (“*Titanic*,” the gay version), as well as ethnic stories (the Irish “Chasing Danny Boy,” the Native-American and German “Buckskin Foreskin,” and the Latin “From Nada to Mañana”).

Hell, I even write sapphic stories for straight magazines and lesbian novels (*The Geography of Women: A Romantic Comedy*) that win awards, despite being told by one prestigious reviewer at the *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*: “I know how to review your gay male porno, but I don’t know how to review a man writing about women.”

Duh. Such anti-humanist bigotry! Could he review *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

I’m known for helping editors out at the last minute when other writers don’t meet the deadline. Editors beginning new magazines often invite me in to their first issue for good luck on the kickoff (*Skin, Just Men, Inches, Bear, Fetish Noir*, etc.).

To sustain a porno career, and a writing career, one must stretch, grow with the times, as in sometimes changing my byline to my web address “www.JackFritscher.com.”

I’m famous for pastness, memoirs, but also hot on the latest novelty. I’m always trying to refresh the gray column inches of gay publishing, books and mags, with alternative erotic genres: plays (“Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley” which was the only gay play published in the Lammy Award canonical collection, *Gay Roots*) and screenplays (*Buck’s Bunkhouse*), and features written in Internet e-style (“The Genome of Bear” for *Bear Classic 2000*, “The Genome of Leather” for “The Leather Magazine of Record,” *Checkmate Magazine*).

I’ve written a ton of lesbian erotica for major straight publishers (Larry Flynt), because I’m a humanist, and not a slave to the failed Marxism of political correctness, and will defend to the death my pal Pat Califia’s right to advise gay men about their penises.

Camille Paglia and I not long ago appeared together on a BBC Channel 4 TV program titled *Priapus Unsheathed* defending the penis as erotica for both women and men. These female/male gender-liaisons occur because writers are thinkers, analysts, and, maybe cultural weather vanes, as well as storytellers.

I write literary erotica, as bipolar as Anne Rice who is A N Roquelaure (all forms of sex), because it plays to a double audience: those interested in literature, and those interested in intelligent sex.

“My porno starts in your head and works its way down.”

I like to be in America. Okay by me in America where box office maps pop culture. *Some Dance* has sold nearly 23,000 copies; *Mapplethorpe* in hard cover, 42,000; the other ten of my soft-to-hardcore books, 70,000. That’s approximately 130,000 book copies, coupled with more than 250,000 units of my 130 erotic videos. Plus well over 500,000 copies of my *Drummer* issues in the 1970s.

That’s major sales, and a rubdown with a velvet glove on the balls of a culture, especially when there’s from one to a dozen places to jerk-off in each of those 980,000 units of book, magazine, and video entertainment. (Masturbation is the sexual pun in the name “Palm Drive.”) That’s say, conservatively, 4 million masturbatory loads out there in the dark, which is something to a Catholic boy who was raised to believe that masturbation is a mortal sin that condemns the masturbator to hell for all eternity.

Is that why I write? Christ meets Dionysius? Or do I just get off knowing every night that out there someone is wacking himself into a moment of sublime pleasure, his only joy after a day of a shitty job or of taking care of his elderly parents?

Sometimes tiny Stanislavski quirks sneak into the writing method: sometimes I get naked; sometimes I dress up in leather or sex gear; once upon a time I sometimes smoked a cigar, or sniffed popper because nothing clarifies erotica like amyl nitrite which in its purple haze turns Godzilla into God and the brain comes down with some little mantra, three or four words of essence, as valid as Gertie Stein’s experimental writing, or Alice B’s brownies — or so Gertrude’s pal who became mine, Sam Steward, told me.

Art is a delicate balancing act: living in one’s brain waves at alpha (14 cycles per second) in a beta-driven world (18 cycles per second). No one sane ever “does” writing; sane people make money. No one without the discipline of a monk and a Marine can do it.

The secret of art, of the art of writing, of porno, of literature, or of the art of literary erotica, is putting your butt in the chair, with all the notes on pieces of paper to cue the next paragraph, the dialog, the feeling. I write three pages every day, five if it feels good, but no more.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is aged beef.

At five pages I begin to foreshorten. I stay hungry, eager, at three pages, so the next day the drive continues into the next three pages. Until

a book is actually bound, until an article or story is actually in the publisher's hands, the writing is never over: visions, polishing, re-visions.

A person has to be very brave to write porno, and very secure to publish under their own name, because sooner or later "everything you say can and will be used against you."

For better or for worse, critics often mention my style. "Fritscher is a stylist." On a scale of 10, they love it or hate it. Mason Powell, known to me only by reputation, is the author of many books including the S&M classic, *The Brig* (serialized in *Drummer*, 1984), and the romantic-crime novel, *For the Love of a Green-Eyed Piano Player*. He is a San Francisco literary critic who wrote an unsolicited review of my fiction anthology, *Rainbow County and Other Stories* (1999):

Book reviewers, almost as much as music critics, strive desperately for an original turn of phrase or image with which to imbue the prose which is their work and which, perforce, inevitably falls into a routine of tedium. One of the more overused descriptors which one encounters these days is that of "a unique voice." Yet with regard to Jack Fritscher I am forced to score and heat up that chestnut, for nobody, to the best of my knowledge, writes with anything closely approaching Fritscher's level of raw passion, poetry, and over the top sense of verbal drive.... Some writers fall naturally into either the medium of the novel or the short story, and I think perhaps Fritscher is at his best in the short story. That may be because of the white hot heat with which he sets word to paper. The novel requires some leisure, some pause to reflect; Fritscher is not contemplative, he is passionate, in your face, all over you. He is not Brahms, he is Edgar Varese, assaulting you with mind pictures and word stretches that may very well tear the membrane.

Or maybe it is just that nobody can sustain the levels he reaches for more than the duration of a short story. In this collection of twenty works, both short stories and narrative poems, he goes the limit. All the icons for which he is famous are on display: the musclemen, the soldiers, the cowboys, the prisoners; but his takes on the icons are more intense, more extreme, than I think any other writer would care to set out.

I am no novice when it comes to writing about sadomasochistic sex; it is a fascinating means of illuminating areas of human consciousness which cannot be lit with any other torch. But Fritscher goes way, way, beyond anything which I would seek to see. Be warned: there are stories in this book that are

**Excerpt source: ©[Jack Fritscher](#), *Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer*, San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008**

too intense for me, stories that not only extend the envelope but put it through a shredder and set fire to it. If you are not up to sweating; sometimes with desire, sometimes with horror; then don't even try it! Fritscher is not a light weight, either in terms of subject matter or literary style.

If, however, you can stand the heat — if you are willing to go places in literary mode that you would likely never want to go in person — then Jack Fritscher is an ideal tour guide. Part James Joyce, part William Faulkner, and a whole lot more than the Marquis de Sade, I am forced to repeat the cliché: Jack Fritscher is a unique voice, and one who, if you are up to it, you should hear. The songs are steamy and scary, but God! Can this man sing! — ©1999 Mason Powell.

<http://home.pon.net/rhinoceroslodge/reviews.htm>

Retrieved July 12, 2003. Used with permission.

(I really should meet Mason Powell and take him to lunch anywhere he wants.)

Style for me is strong word choice, rhythmic phrases, colorful metaphor, filmic editing of space and time and memory, distinct objective dialog as well as the streaming-consciousness, the convoluted monolog of thought and conscience which reveals characters seen by themselves in contrast to how other characters see them.

“How Buddy Left Me,” one of my favorite stories, is an example of strong word choice that turns a porno story into a love story. “Chasing Danny Boy” is full of rhythmic phrases born of the sex-rhythms of jerking off. “Titanic” spins on evergreen queer/queen metaphor: survival.

In the hold of *Titanic*, the second night of the ill-fated voyage, sex occurs. Style sample:

Edward and the Stoker, two different classes of men, were as perfect an odds-on match as *Titanic* was for the North Atlantic.

“When I beat you, young gentleman, sir....” the Stoker said. He appreciated Edward’s cock and cockiness. “...You will stay with me for 24 fucking hours below decks in the hold, in the boiler room, maybe even in chains in the brig, just so you see, young gentleman, how men like you make men like us live.”

Edward, ever the knightly aristocrat, picked up the gauntlet. He hated socialism and bolshevism....Edward either had to take the Stoker’s 14-fat-inches down his throat, and, mind you, up his ass, or he had to spend a day and a night in the hold getting up

to the Stoker's "focking" speed, outdistancing his old sculling records, the way *Titanic*, slicing through the still, cold waters was outdistancing herself and her sister ship, *Olympic*.

The Stoker stripped naked to his boots. Edward shucked his clothes and shoes. A sailor started rapping a rhythmic tattoo on the iron railing in time to the rods pistoning the huge engines. The Stoker was a stroker, wrapping both big hands around his cock, squeezing out a third handful, vein-popping the bulbous mushroom head, its piss-slit dripping translucent 4-weight lube webs. His was a savage cock, primitive, animal, evolved somehow, from the mountain giants of Eastern Europe into a steel-hard, mechanized piston. The way his ox-driving ancestors wielded their barbarian swords, the Stoker aimed his ram at Edward like some unstoppable industrial weapon.... The Stoker was the stuff of Edward's dreams.

—Orgy scene in the novella, *Titanic*, from the collection of 69 stories in 4 volumes, *Titanic: Forbidden Stories Hollywood Forgot*, 1999, first published in *Uncut Magazine*, September 1988, and *Mach Magazine* #35, March 1997.

Distinct objective dialog drives the two-man play or screenplay, "Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley," which first appeared in *Drummer 22* and *Drummer 23* (May and July 1978). How many porno writers bother to do dialog to catch the very rhythms of sex? This drama opens up the erotic back-story behind Walt Whitman's poem, "Oh, Captain, My Captain." Style sample:

Captain O'Malley: Stick your tongue out so you can take the Captain's cum that's cuming out of his big dick.

Corporal Powell: Ahhhgh! Yessir. Please, Sir.

O'Malley: You keep that fuckin' mouth open. You keep that fuckin' mouth open.

Powell: Ahhh.

O'Malley: Captain's gonna shoot a big load all over your fuckin' face...all over your fuckin' face. I'm gonna shoot a load all over your fuckin' face, Corporal. It's gettin' close...Big fuckin' load from the Captain's cock...I'm gonna shoot all over your fuckin' face.

Powell: Oh, please, Sir. My God! Yessir! (With feeling) *Yessir!*

O'Malley: Your legs are quivering, Corporal.

Powell: Ahhhgh...I want, Sir....Please, Sir. Hurry and cum, Sir. Please, I'm ready.

O'Malley: Awright! Shoot that load. Shoot your fuckin' load.

Powell: Yessir!

O'Malley: C'mon, Corporal, shoot your fuckin' load. Shoot your fuckin' load. Captain's close. Captain's close...Oh, look at that cum cuming out!

Powell: Ahhhgh! Yes, ahh, yessir.

O'Malley: Look at that fuckin' cum. Ah, Corporal, cum's cuming out. (High cries of orgasm) Ohhhaaggh, there it comes. All over your fuckin' face, it's all over your fuckin' face, Corporal. It's in your fuckin' eyes.

Powell: I can't see. It's in my eyes.

O'Malley: Ow, your fuckin' mouth, your fuckin' chest, ahhh!

Powell: I can't see....It's burning my eyes...

O'Malley: The Captain shot a load. In your hair, Corporal.

Powell: Yessir.

O'Malley: You got cum in your hair.

Powell: Yessir. Ahhh.

O'Malley: The Captain wants to wipe your eyes, Corporal. (Post-orgasmic moans interspersed with dialogue) The Captain wants to hold you, Corporal.

Powell: Yessir.

O'Malley: The Captain want you to hold him.

Powell: Yessir. Ahhh. Captain. Ah, Captain. Just lay on top of me, Sir.

O'Malley: Big fuckin' Corporal to hold his Captain...

Powell: Yessir. Oh God. Layin' on top of me, Sir. This is really fine. Oh God. I needed that, Sir. This is really fine. Oh God. I had a rough day too, Sir...

O'Malley: Lick the rest of the cum out of the Captain's cock...

Powell: Yessir. Does the Captain have to piss, *Sir*?

Close shot: CAPTAIN O'MALLEY's face grinning. Medium shot: slow motion. CAPTAIN O'MALLEY's semi-hard dick pisses heavy and golden down on CORPORAL POWELL who drinks fast. Gulping.

Powell: OH, CAPTAIN! My Captain!

O'MALLEY rubs his tight hairy belly. The piss splashes in slow motion, catching the back light, golden. Both men are laughing.

—Final scene from “Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley” from the collection of 69 stories in 4 volumes, *Corporal in Charge and Other Stories*; first published in *Drummer*, May 1978; published in the canonical *Gay Roots: An Anthology of Gay History, Sex, Politics and Culture*, 1991

I used subjective streaming monolog plus carefully designed dialect spelling to tell the 3,500 word story, “Three Bears in a Tub,” in one sentence that never takes a breath, yet is rather perfectly punctuated. The dialect is the same as the dialect designed for my first-person narrator in my lesbian novel of the American South in the 1950s, *The Geography of Women: A Romantic Comedy*. Style sample:

Listen here, boy, there'll be no hibernatin till after I finish tellin you this bedtime story about Big Daddy when he was himself hardly more than a boy and he turned into a six-foot-five man and what he done to earn that reputation he got that famous summer on Bear Lake when the canoe overturned late around midnight and Big Daddy saw them two young hairy fishermen floppin like bears in the water next to drownin with their rubber boots suckin them down to the clear rock bottom and them able to stand just barely with their chin on the surface of the moonlit water...[omitting 5 pages]...and they was beggin Big Daddy to do with them what he wanted because he was their Big Daddy and they loved him so much and that's what Big Daddy wanted to hear so he saved them both by cuttin them out of their rubber waders so they floated to the surface of Bear Lake and Big Daddy took ahold of them by their hair and beards and nipples and dicks and buttholes and pulled both them boys into his rowboat where they sat the rest of the night laughin and drinkin and shoutin through their beards at the moon while stars glistened between them nipple to nipple with comets shootin flume tails from their dicks and they floated ever so happy on the still

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surface of the water while the real constellation of the Bear rose and set over their heads and their fudgey fingers sticky from their buttocks were all entwined in the fur on their chest and the hair of their bellies and the carpet on their shoulders and the bush of their crotches and the hugeness of their beards and the curly sweep of the hair on their heads and they were all three of them so satisfied that the summer night smiled and half-asleep in each other's big furry arms, Griz and Cub and Big Daddy drifted slow across the mirror of stars to their dock on Bear Lake as if the rowboat knew their way home.

—“Three Bears in a Tub” from 69 stories in 4 volumes, *Titanic: Forbidden Stories Hollywood Forgot*, first published in *Bear Magazine Classic Annual 1999*, and in *Best Gay Erotica 2001*, as well as in Susie Bright's *Best American Erotica 2003*.

In this filmic age, I attempt stories vivid enough to jump directly from page to performance.

*The Geography of Women* and “Rainbow County” are virtual plays/screenplays ready for performance.

Like it or not in our culture, literary pages are validated by the screen, which is why I enjoy the high concept of turning my written fiction into porno videos, and vice versa, as in *Buck's Bunkhouse Discipline*.

The final test of writing is reading the text out loud. If as a writer I stumble, stutter, when reading the lines, something is wrong with the lines. Re-write. Find the rhythm of the words, of the sex, of the scene, and write that rhythm.

Faced with the huge difficulty of writing such a “confession” as this, I am tempted to retract the veracity of all these factual words, and turn fact into fiction, presented in a way that shows how reality is re-shaped by fiction, how autobiography turns to drama, how experience turns into entertainment. What follows is the erotic version of this preceding essay on writing. Style sample:

Not arrested, but picked up, questioned about what he did and how he did it, he told everything revealing nothing. On the table before him, the tips of his fingers, sensitive from years of typing, drummed the wood, impatient with the interrogation. From an ashtray, blue smoke from a half-twisted butt rose like incense at a seance toward the naked light bulb. *He breathed in experience*. He could feel the heat on his forehead. *He exhaled fiction*. Under the metal shade, the bulb hung like a burning

pear, a scrotum, on a cord. He sat in the intense circle of light. He studied the detectives' movement in the darkness beyond the shade. His cock hardened untouched. He looked for the faces out there in the dark.

Other hands, other intentions, shuffled the evidence spread across the table, turning pages, trying to sort fiction from non-fiction, examining photographs, advancing videos frame by frame. He smirked. Excitement tweaked his nipples. Someone had tampered with the evidence: cum had spurted across his thousand photographs of naked men; more cum glued together the pages of his sixty-nine stories in four volumes; cum, mixed with sweat and tears, curled the pages of his 562-page ransom note he couldn't even dance to remember. *Everything you say can be held...against...hard against...fill-in-the-blank*, he figured.

At fourteen he had bet he could get away with murder. At first, all he needed to pull off the job were yellow legal pads, then a manual typewriter, then a Selectric, and finally a laptop. He moved on to cameras, black-and-white print film, 35mm transparencies (*mmm*, that first willing lifeguard on the beach in Chicago!), 8mm, Super-8, 16mm, video, digital, high-definition. He was an analyst. He lived it up to write it down. He was a part of all he met and *vice-versa verite*, baby. He nailed a warning above his bed: "Enter here to become a story told at night around the world." He could have sold space in his books and stories so eager were the accomplices wanting to be mentioned in code or in reality, desperate for him to write, "When the hero came into the bar, he walked by X who stood by the pinball machine."

He could have admitted to none, some, much, most, or all of the fiction that was truth that was fiction, but he didn't. His pen was mighty. He was a rich man with a big dick driving a fast car. As they had when he played football, everyone patted his ass. He always knew exactly what he was doing, who he was doing, when, where, and how he was doing it. His brain was his ultimate hardon. He had the last laugh.

—“Excerpt,” unpublished work in progress

### III. Eyewitness Illustrations

Top: Fritscher's fifty-year writing career is a library stack of books documenting his work in the media of magazines, photography, and video. Bottom: With notice of his "Writer's Aid" running in *Drummer*, Jack Fritscher mentored many "Gay Writers" into the new genre of gay writing in the 1970s, the first decade after Stonewall, when magazines ruled gay culture ten years before the rise of GLBT book publishers in the mid-1980s. Among his clients was an unknown Chicago author named Anthony DeBlase who later purchased *Drummer* in 1986, became its publisher, and engaged Fritscher as an ongoing consultant on *Drummer*. Tutor Fritscher also counseled John Preston, and produced, edited, and serialized his *Mr. Benson for Drummer*.

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© Jack Fritscher

Top: Business card for *Words*, 1975-1982, Jack Fritscher's business connecting and promoting the talents of the *Drummer* salon. Bottom: Cover, *Key West Literary Seminar: Literature in a Time of AIDS*. In January 1997, the straight Key West hosts abruptly disbanded the conference after unruly behavior on the theater stage by a ranting Larry Kramer and by panelists Tony Kushner and Sarah Schulman who "ganged up" on the delicate Key West author Ann Beattie for being rather much a straight white woman capitalist who didn't write enough about AIDS. In addition to eyewitness Fritscher who had returned to his fourth-row seat by walking down the aisle with the fire-breathing Kramer he had found working up to a tantrum in the men's room, also in attendance were keynote speaker Edmund White, Frank Rich, Michael Denny, David Leavitt, and Michael Bronski.

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Becoming visible men: American photographer Lou Thomas (right, with Gary Stone), published a photograph of himself on the cover of his 'zine *Boys in Leather* #1 (1964) as a "trial balloon" three years before he co-founded Colt Studio (1967) and his own Target Studio (1974). Masculine-identified artists Lou Thomas, Chuck Renslow, Etienne, A. Jay, Fred Halsted, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Jack Fritscher led the real-time leather players who created the photographs, writing, magazines, films, and books of early leather identity of homomascularity emerging as a legitimate category from the revolving closet door set spinning by the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969. To strengthen and darken *Drummer* which was born blond in LA, Fritscher in San Francisco edited into *Drummer* a potent mix of Renslow and Etienne's Chicago leather values and Lou Thomas' New York leather scene. Lou Thomas shot many *Drummer* covers and centerfolds. *Boys in Leather* #1, featuring Lou Thomas as "Nick D'Arti," credited its photographs to Thomas' "Leather Photography, PO Box 352, New York," and was published by Elgin Products, Los Angeles, with the Elgin probably referencing the Elgin Marbles.

**Excerpt source:** ©[Jack Fritscher](#), [Gay San Francisco: Eyewitness Drummer](#), San Francisco: [Palm Drive Publishing](#), 2008