

## CHAPTER 7

### THE *DRUMMER* SALON

#### ON THE 69<sup>TH</sup> DAY, GOD CREATED QUEERS AND THE QUEERS REBELLED

- **Declaring Homosexuality a Religion Protected by the Constitution**
- **The Manic-Depressive 1970s: Gay Saints; Gay Civil War; the Printer as Censor**
- **Blasphemy: The Outer Limit of the Radical *Avant Garde*; *Jesus Christ Superstar*; Kenneth Anger; the Satanic Mapplethorpe; and “Jesus D’Pressed”**
- ***Man2Man Quarterly*: “Virtual *Drummer*”**
- **East Coast-West Coast Literary Rivalry: New Yorkers Try to “Manhattanize” San Francisco**
- **Allegedly: Kramer, Picano, White, and the Violet Quill; Sasha Alyson; Elizabeth Gershman, and Knights Press**
- **Erotica: The Essence of Gay Literature**
- **Despite Feminist Fantasy, Anne Rice Never Wrote for *Drummer***

“Erotic writing begins with one stroke of the pen  
and ends with many strokes of the penis.”

—Jack Fritscher

I confess after eleven years studying for the Catholic priesthood, I have a certain apostolic quality that is outlaw and hard to institutionalize because I think homosexuality is the natural and intuitive Old Religion predating revealed religions such as Druidism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In this *carpe diem* concept lies the liberation of homosexuality through Constitutional freedom of religion. Why not? Joseph Smith did it in the 1820s conjuring up the Mormons with his doctrine of polygamy to justify to his screaming wife why their pretty young maid was his mistress. British

witch Gerald Gardner did it in the 1950s declaring in Britain that wicca was in fact the Old Religion thereby ending all the UK laws against witchcraft and the women and gay men who practice it. Patrick Califia, that immortal changeling, mentioned me in one of his books as a “prophet of homomascularity” which seems, although I am not a prophet of anything, a cool poetic metaphor in an age when gender identity and queer spirit are hot topics in gay theology.

Pioneer leather author William Carney shocked the 1960s when he advanced the idea of spiritual orders of gay men in his epistolary novel *The Real Thing* (1968) whose mystic leather rituals I analyzed in *Popular Witchcraft* (1972). Then, funny enough, I was censored. I was not allowed to mention the charismatic Carney during my editorial run at *Drummer* because John Embry from LA, wary of anything transcendental, had grown wary of the successful and challenging Bill Carney of San Francisco—which, Embry implied, was not a big enough town for the two of them. Just as Embry had damned his Los Angeles rival Larry Townsend with a scathing review of his novel *Chains* in the very first issue of *Drummer*, Embry also blacklisted Carney and his esoteric book, especially after long-time *Drummer* reviewer Ed Franklin had given *The Real Thing* an absolutely glowing review in *Drummer* 7 which made novelist Embry jealous. Characteristic of his Imperial Majesty, Embry famously neglected to read copy we writers gave him, and as editor I took positive advantage of that freedom to shape what I wanted *Drummer* to say. Even so, Embry’s pique kept certain authors and a certain mysticism out of *Drummer*. I lamented that. I was a Catholic until history caught up with me and I evolved like a sensible human from the revealed religion of Catholicism to a more natural, intuitive religion free of institutional hierarchy and especially free of terrorizing children with threats of hell. (In August 1989, after Embry sold *Drummer* to Anthony DeBlase, William Carney was finally cited in the pages of *Drummer* 132.)

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### The Square Root of Embry

John Embry was a stocky, red-faced, belligerent man, a Protestant always looking for a fight. When he was frustrated by not being able to get political traction in Los Angeles from the Slave Auction arrests or any literary credential in San Francisco with his own novels, he took his aggressions out on his friends and associates in the arts in both cities. Hardly any employee, freelance writer, artist, or photographer escaped his jealous meanness in his *Drummer* soap opera

of alienated souls. If a *Drummer* reunion were held, there would be enough angry people to fill the Cow Palace.

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If one thinks sex is God and God is sex, and sometimes as Tennessee Williams' Blanche DuBois says about sex partners, "Sometimes there's God so quickly," Embry seemed cowed, not only by the LAPD, but by the fundamentalist South San Francisco printer who agreed to feed *Drummer* through his presses on the very "cheap" but only after midnight when no one, including his God, was looking. That right-wing hypocrite Christian printer was San Francisco *Drummer's* first gratuitous censor. If the printer might balk and cause Embry to have to seek out a more expensive printing service, Embry would self-censor and yank any offending article or photo. To me, this was nothing new, because I remembered that it was their printers' refusal that stopped Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press from publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

In the then new culture war, Embry cowered even on cover photography when various bookstores across the nation refused to sell select issues in communities where the local onward-marching Christian soldiers judged magazines by their covers. When the *Drummer* covers were too gay, they were censored in Wichita, Peoria, and Knob Noster, Missouri. As both editor-in-chief and photographer, the more I coded the cover art to look like 1970s men's pulp adventure magazines, such as the popular *Soldier of Fortune* and *Easy Rider* magazines, they were safe from censors: e.g., my prison cover of *Drummer* 21, the Mapplethorpe cover of *Drummer* 24, and my arm-wrestling cover of *Drummer* 30 whose vivid subtext to the keen eye is fistfucking not arm-wrestling.

That religious censorship of *Drummer* was such bull that just as Embry had started *The Alternate* as rival sibling to his own *Drummer*, I ginned up the *riposte* of *Man2Man Quarterly* as a little magazine so low budget that printing costs were not an issue and could not impact the contents that I purposed to be grittier and more aggressive than Embry would allow in *Drummer*. In late 1979, as I was preparing to resign my job at *Drummer*, I inserted an announcement for *Man2Man* as a "Trojan Horse" advertisement inside *Drummer* 30, page 18, and began publication as "the first 'zine of the 1980s" with Mark Henry as publisher in January, 1980.

*Man2Man* was, essentially "Virtual *Drummer*." Embry, the constant plagiarist, knew it, and he immediately stole its title for his existing "Leather Fraternity" personals to add the new tag line: "Man-to-Man Personals." And then, after he sold *Drummer*, he trashed *Man2Man* in his furious "letter to

the editor” in *Drummer* 108. Much of my writing in dozens of magazines during the 1980s was very specifically *Drummer* material diverted from *Drummer* and published by an array of LA and NY editors wanting to inject a bit of the *Drummer* cultural mystique into their own gay magazines. Ironically, the notoriety of my exiting *Drummer* identified me even more with *Drummer*, and in a clean way distanced me from Embry.

Much to Embry’s chagrin, readers often weren’t sure who owned *Drummer*. For more than ten years after I stopped editing *Drummer*, my home phone would ring, and some reader would ask me, “When is the next issue of *Drummer* coming out,” or worse, “I sent in my money and you guys screwed up my subscription.” In the way that Larry Townsend had to tell his confused mail-order clients that he was not Embry, so did I.

## GAY SAINTS ALEISTER CROWLEY, ANDY WARHOL, KENNETH ANGER, ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE; & THE NEW YORK GAY LITERATI

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In reviewing my anthology of *Drummer* writing, *Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley and Other Stories*, fiction editor Steven Saylor minced no words in his review in *Drummer* 81 (February 1984). A true-born Texan, he was not afraid to declare that in *Corporal*, “There’s enough ghettoized angst to keep the Manhattan literati wired for months.” He exposed the polarity between East Coast attitude and West Coast authors. His review held special interest in that his essay was in a sense the first review of *Drummer* itself because *Corporal in Charge* was the first collection in book form of original *Drummer* writing.

Saylor, who went on to become a *New York Times* best-selling author, proved too big for *Drummer*. For twenty issues (68-87), he was Embry’s most professional fiction/department editor (1983-85), and, like guest editor Bert Herman (issue 93), he edited only one issue (87), and then immediately quit, writing he was “underpaid” and “disrespected [by Embry] on a daily basis.”

—*Steam* magazine, 2 #1

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To Embry, censorship and cost-consciousness meant that religious “blasphemy” was out. That was an odd line in the sand for a purposely provocative publisher who started up his magazine with necrophilia, bestiality, a touch of pedophilia, missing only cannibalism and a couple other topics, like blasphemy, that existed on famous Satanist Aleister Crowley’s list of

favorite Black Magic things. The Marquis de Sade, the dirty master behind *Drummer*, wrote: “There is a kind of pleasure which comes from sacrilege or the profanation of the objects offered to us for worship.” In fact, blasphemy was the outer limit of the radical avant garde which scared Embry who refused in 1978 to publish my 1967 poem, “Jesus D’Pressed,” to illustrate a photograph shot by Rimbaud-influenced blasphemer, Mapplethorpe, who was known to say to people, including Embry, “If you don’t like these photographs, you’re not as avant garde as you think.”

Embry dismissed my American pop-culture argument when I pointed out that *The National Lampoon*, months before in June 1977 had queered Malcolm Boyd’s book *Are You Running with Me, Jesus?* publishing the article “Are You Cruising with Me, Lord?” Certainly, the *Lampoon* was a suitable measure of changing “community standards.” And if it weren’t, then the soft-core blasphemy of *Jesus Christ Superstar* was.

The best-selling *Superstar* album was released in 1970, three years before the hit stage musical. Its popular title track, “Jesus Christ Superstar,” played incessantly in post-Stonewall gay bars along with Andrew Lloyd Webber’s poem about Jesus, “I Don’t Know How to Love Him,” which couldn’t have been a more gay anthem if it had been sung by Judy Garland. The *Superstar* plot was Hollywood S&M, but I couldn’t get Embry, the Protestant, to put the stripping or whipping photographs from *Superstar* into *Drummer*. He had no problem with publishing stripping and whipping stills from any other movie, including the race-baiting *Mandingo*, in our monthly “Movie Mayhem” pictorial feature.

In the 1970s, for a gay generation skilled on interpreting the subtext of 1950s-1960s popular culture, the *Superstar* signifiers were absolutely clear that the gay but troubled lovers were Jesus and Judas. They lived rough with bearded workingmen in a hippie commune where Mary Magdalene was the “beard” who sang the other songs that Jesus and Judas should have sung to each other: “Everything’s Alright” and “Can We Start Again, Please?”

The gay pop-culture phenomenon of *Superstar* was such that in LA, I witnessed that the outdoor Universal Studios Amphitheater was packed with pre-ironic leather gays cheering the live stage musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, with the nearly naked Christ crucified high on a cross with all of LA laid out below in the night-grid of street lights like a dark and weeping Jerusalem. San Francisco gays lined up for the 1973 premiere of the film at the Regency 1 Theater on Van Ness. In those days before VCRs with their *rewind* and *freeze* features, the leather custom was to pay one admission and arrive near the end of one screening to catch the whipping and crucifixion, and then sit through the whole film to watch the whipping and crucifixion again.

What gays won't do in the search for the transcendent erotic experiences that have come to be known as "gay spirituality"! This was before Marxist queers and right-wing Christians attacked the gay village, sucked eros out of Hellenic Christianity, and created a far-left backlash against Christianity within the gay culture of feeling and intellect. Soon enough in the 1980s, gay culture itself, brought to its knees by AIDS, grew virulently anti-Christian with the rise of the radical gender Marxism imported with the politically correct fundamentalism and separatist feminism that tried to whip the disease-stricken gay male culture into politically correct subservience. The Marxist coup in the gay community allowed Christianity to be trashed in a way that Judaism couldn't be, and that Islam, popular with cross-dressing whirling dervishes performing afternoons on carpets in front of the Hibernia Bank at 18<sup>th</sup> and Castro Street, dared not be.

I'm no Catholic apologist, and I had no problem skewering Christianity in my 1965 novel *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy* or satirizing the New Testament in my 1960s activist poetry. My little "Jesus D'Pressed" poem was a double homage: First, to the Catholic Andy Warhol as the publisher of *Interview* magazine as well as for his Velvet Underground with their "shiny boots of leather, whiplash girl child," and, second, to Satanic Magus Kenneth Anger who created the first gay leather-biker-piss-orgy blasphemy film, *Scorpio Rising* (1964). Anger's iconic film marked me forever the night I attended the 1966 Chicago premiere at the Illinois Institute of Technology in the company of pioneer leathermen: Chuck Renslow, Dom Orejudos, Sam Steward, Cliff Raven, Bob Maddox, and a gang from the Gold Coast. In his consistency, Embry, scoffing at the zero degrees of connection and loyalty within the *Drummer* Salon, also refused to allow me to review or feature the leather films and photographs of the magus blasphemer, Kenneth Anger, who was a friend of my friend, Sam Steward. Embry also interdicted my publishing anything Satanic, including the reprint of my juicy 1971 interview of my friend, Anton LaVey, the founding High Priest of the Church of Satan in San Francisco.

Because since 1969, as a literature professor traveling to London, I had become a longtime, and—sometimes intimate—friend with the British leather poet, Thom Gunn, I was well aware that in England in 1976, his friend, the gay poet James Kirkup had seen his publisher prosecuted and fined for blasphemy for printing Kirkup's tender and infamous poem, "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name." Kirkup wrote of a "still-warm" dead Jesus taken down from the cross by a Roman centurion who strips off his uniform to hold the dead God in his strong arms, "the tip of that great cock, the instrument of our salvation," concluding that Jesus' crucifixion

is the same crucifixion all “same-sex lovers suffer, patiently and gladly.”

Mapplethorpe and I, both saturated Catholics, matching his photographs to my poem, were reading Rimbaud and Verlaine, and somehow the artful metaphor of blasphemy had become my litmus test for the Protestant literalist Embry. Apropos that, in 1986 with eight dust-grain photographs, Mapplethorpe illustrated a luxurious bilingual quarto edition of Rimbaud’s poems, *A Season in Hell*, whose crimson goatskin cover featured Mapplethorpe’s portrait of himself as the horned Devil, Pan. In a less elite version, those beautiful pictures could have democratically graced *Drummer* seven years earlier than the Limited Editions Club press run of one thousand signed copies. But Embry refused, earning Mapplethorpe’s haughty disdain.

Embry, never avant garde, grew more conservative after his 1976 arrest and slap-down by the LAPD, after his 1977 exile from LA, and after his 1978-1979 cancer nearly killed him. A child born and raised during the Great Depression, Embry was a tightwad businessman who could squeeze a nickel till the buffalo screamed. Applying some of the profits from *Drummer*, he could have been a champion in that Stonewall decade when the emerging gay press was nothing but magazines—and gay book publishers still had to be invented. Diverting *Drummer* profits away from editorial development and into his personal real estate empire that he began when he moved to San Francisco, he had no fight in his millionaire’s heart to push the art-envelope of *Drummer* and risk profiting a penny less. *Drummer* achieved its worldwide editorial identity despite him.

In short, Embry who was a Methodist refused to publish “Jesus D’Pressed” which was, for all its little satirical and sexy silliness, meant to be nothing more than an iconoclastic 1960s pop-art poem about a God who is crucified out of human jealousy because, with his divinely double-jointed back, he can fellate himself. The poem, part of my juvenilia and pertinent in its impertinent time, may or may not travel into any literary canon. However, Embry never said he didn’t like the poem. He simply could not bring himself to publish it after his run-ins with the law over various infractions like his bits of blasphemy in the early Los Angeles *Drummer*.

As editor, I wanted the poem to scare him because I enjoyed double-daring him. He was easy to bait and switch. And tricking him was one way to get what needed to be gotten into *Drummer*. If he turned down a manuscript as too extreme, he would feel that he “won,” and, blinded by that pyrrhic victory, would then accept another manuscript that would have seemed “far out” if he had not had to pass judgment on the first document. That was one of the ways art director Al Shapiro and I practiced our intricate choreography so we could insert our homomasculine version of *Drummer*



inside Embry's camp version of *Drummer*, changing the core magazine from Los Angeles *Drummer* to the San Francisco *Drummer* that became an international best seller. Robert Mapplethorpe, who disliked Embry, told me that our editorial maneuvering around Embry was the same tactic that editors Fred Hughes and Glenn O'Brien used to maneuver their creation of "Andy Warhol's *Interview Magazine*," minus Andy, who was as much a headache at *Interview* as Embry was at *Drummer* where Embry was no Warhol.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN:

CAN WHAT IS WHISPERED BE WRITTEN DOWN?

Sometimes iconoclasm is a good thing.  
 Sometimes a memoir is a portrait  
 in a fun house mirror.  
 Sometimes it pays to investigate  
 where truth lies.  
 Sometimes it's wise to dare  
 to wear one's trousers rolled, and  
 to eat a peach,  
 because in the empty rooms  
 the queers come and go  
 speaking of Michael and Angelo.

THE BIAS BETWEEN EAST COAST AND  
 WEST COAST CULTURE

The Geography of *Drummer*  
 Imagine *Drummer* as a New York magazine?  
 It couldn't make it as a Los Angeles magazine.  
 San Francisco was its spot.

During the first ten issues of *Drummer*, my friend James Purdy, author of the S&M literary classic, *Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (1967), sent a short story to Jeanne Barney. Like his longtime friend, Sam Steward, the genius Purdy, though lionized by Edith Sitwell and Gore Vidal, was always rather the redheaded stepchild sniffed at by the East Coast literary establishment. As with Sam Steward, I told James Purdy that *Drummer* might be a suitable way to reach his underground fan club—that is, until the day James Purdy telephoned editor Jeanne Barney with the bad news, he said, that his New York agent thought publication in the *outré Drummer* would be a



mistake. *Eustace Chisholm*, however, did influence *Drummer* because James Purdy's book, which should be read universally in leather culture, was one of my seminal texts as I was coming out as an erotic and literary writer in the 1960s.

In the synergy of literature, magazines are one thing; book publication is another; and both need each other. In the parallel universes of magazine and books in the literary world of the 1970s, author Felice Picano, two years after *Drummer* debuted, pioneered two tiny and select book businesses: Seahorse Press, 1977, and Gay Presses of New York, 1980, which seemingly created a base for the Violet Quill fraternity to "self-publish" and review one another, beginning with and continuing after the Violet Quill's formal existence (1980-1981) when *Drummer* was riding high. At the same time, New Englander Sasha Alyson, who famously carried a Teddy Bear in the crook of his arm like Sebastian Flyte, entered book publishing when *Drummer* was five years old in 1980. In 1974, when Pop provocateur Andy Warhol had carried a Teddy Bear under his own arm, walking down Fifth Avenue, Bob Colacello in *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, wrote that Andy claimed he was consciously "just putting on airs," and he quit doing it. (Page 174). By 1990, Sasha Alyson seemed, observers gossiped, to be godfathering gay book publishing. At the 1990 national convention of American Booksellers Association (ABA) in Las Vegas, Alyson popped up what seemed like a good idea: a "Gay Publishers' Row." The "row" as in "a line" turned into a "row" as in "a fight."

Enmity arose because, as Elizabeth Gershman (1927-2000), the publisher of Knights Press, alleged, Sasha Alyson requested a thirty-dollar surcharge to the ABA fees to set up a booth in his privileged corral. She refused his blandishments because her small press budget was down to pennies and she thought that Alyson's apartheid gay ghetto row marginalized the gay books she was trying to sell crossover to the mainstream world, including my new West Coast novel *Some Dance to Remember: A Memoir-Novel of San Francisco 1970-1982*. When Gershman set up her Knights Press booth, I was required to be present as "the author" inside her display, and was trapped for three days in the struggle between these two East Coast publishers, Gershman and Alyson. In the tension of all that attitude stalking the aisles, I politely resisted being tarred with the same brush as the fiercely independent Gershman whom I barely knew before the book convention, and knew too well afterwards. There were no saints at that national ABA convention that some years later became the national Book Expo America (BEA). While Gershman was beloved in *The Advocate* in feature articles such as "Betty's Books," she as a straight woman was hardly equipped to fend off the gay

parrying and thrusting of her competition. In 1991, Knights Press went out of business which would have probably happened anyway when Gershman's daughter soon after married Teddy Kennedy, Jr., and Gershman became a Kennedy grandmother.

For an objective correlative about gay power struggles, see "Inside the Gay Mafia," a "true confession" credited only "As told to Kevin Blass" in the gay magazine, *Instinct*, November 2002.

Novelist Picano with his Violet Quill peers, and Alyson, were local colorist writers focused on a circle of East Coast gay authors—none of them "leather" and some of them academics—who found, perhaps, tribal solidarity in their own zero degrees of separation, onanistically publishing, promoting, and reviewing one another in the gay vanilla genres they understood. Years later, East Coaster David Bergman wrote the Manhattan *Rashomon* of the Violet Quill aka, in gay trash talk, the campy "Violent Quill" and the "Vile Quill": *The Violet Hour and the Making of Gay Culture* (2004). In his book *My Life as a Pornographer*, erstwhile *Drummer* author John Preston, himself a New Englander, complained bitterly about his playing second fiddle competing with "Ed White [Edmund White who] might have the crowd from the *New York Review of Books*..." See *Drummer* 188, page 20. The Violet Quill was rather like the Violet Crawley of Maggie Smith in *Downton Abbey*, politely exclusive, unlike the *Drummer* Salon which was extremely inclusive. At core, some of this literary clique acted as if they'd all sprung from the elite Radcliffe Publishing Program then at Harvard.

Charles Bukowski and other straight West Coast writers like John Steinbeck had long pointed out the difficulty of a publishing civil war between East Coast publishers as well as reviewers who tend to ignore West Coast writers.

In 1984, Steven Saylor, author of a prodigious series of mystery novels set in the ancient Rome of emperors and vestal virgins and gladiators, was writing for *Drummer* as "Aaron Travis." In *Drummer* 78, he penned a fine book review of *Urban Aboriginals: A Celebration of Leather Sexuality* authored by the professional biochemist and beloved West Coast leatherman Geoff Mains, PhD (1947-1989) for Winston Leyland's Gay Sunshine Press in San Francisco. Saylor's "thumbs-up" critique skirmished like a skilled gladiator. But, in the third last sentence of the last paragraph, the review spun its peplum, stumbled, and surrendered to the whiplash of bicoastal gay combat in which Saylor drew a gratuitous line in the arena sand by allowing an unnamed "New Yorker," made "down-to-earth" perhaps by little more than subletting a rent-controlled bedsit in Queens, to give his anonymous

“thumbs-down” dismissal of Mains’ progressive and California-inflected biochemistry, psychology, and vocabulary of leather spirituality as Hippy Woo Woo. Saylor thrust the short dagger of his *pugio* in his punch line: “As a down-to-earth New Yorker remarked to me after reading the book, ‘You West Coasters are *too* much.’” (Page 91)

In the 180 degrees of separation between gay leather literature and gay vanilla literature, between East Coast and West Coast, I first contacted Michael Denny at St. Martin’s Press in New York about my manuscript for my “San Francisco *Drummer* novel,” *Some Dance to Remember*, on November 21, 1984.

On January 16, 1986, I queried Denny again and he graciously requested my manuscript and replied on August 11, 1986, that the novel “impressed” him, although at the time, as Denny announced in a shocking revelation years later on the stage at the 1997 Key West Writers Conference, he was primarily pledged to publish young gay authors dying from AIDS. I was forty-seven and AIDS free.

Letters continued to cross in the mail.

Denny in that August, 1986, generously suggested I contact Felice Picano whom I had already queried three months previously on May 14, 1986. In his human dimension, Picano, whom I perceived seemed often short-sheeted by his more arch Violet Quill peers, had quickly responded on May 21, 1986. That was three months before Denny’s recommendation to contact Picano who very kindly wrote to me:

I am familiar with your writing. At this time, both my Seahorse line and the Gay Presses of New York imprints...are...for the next two years...currently behind in publishing our titles already under contract. In fact, I’m phasing out Seahorse Press as a separate entity. It has served its purpose, and has begun to seriously interfere with my own writing. Because of this overload, I have to decline even looking at new mss for at least a year. Good luck with your writing and your book. —Cordially, Felice Picano

Publishing a book is notoriously difficult and not for the faint of heart as told by Ellen Brown and John Wiley, Jr. in their book about a world-famous novel’s complicated development: *Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind: A Bestseller’s Odyssey from Atlanta to Hollywood*. By design, and out of respect for Margaret Mitchell’s embrace of her own culture and heritage, I purposely wrote *Some Dance to Remember* as a gay mid-century memetic jazz riff on the O’Hara clan of Miss Scarlett. Her “descendent” is Ryan O’Hara who,

shadowing Scarlett in San Francisco, courts his own Rhett (Kick Sorenson) while trying to save his home and to survive the turbulent civil war around gay identity during the 1970s decade which was doomed to be “gone with the virus.”

In 1984-1986, few straight book publishers were even vaguely interested in gay material. Gay book publishers, who first set up business in the mid-1980s were uncertain what to do about my 562-page San Francisco book with a frank approach to gay sexuality that was not politically correct and featured a subplot about *Drummer* magazine fictionalized as *Maneuvers* magazine.

The former Catholic priest, Winston Leyland, my publisher at Gay Sunshine Press, offered to publish *Some Dance* in 1984, but wanted to do so in two volumes to cover the costs of such a large book. I rejected that offer because two volumes seemed ludicrous esthetically, and because from my two books he had already published, I judged that his cover designs were stylishly dreadful, and because, when he took a phone call as I sat in his office in his home, he sounded callous as Embry telling the caller that he treated authors with agents differently from authors (like me) without agents.

Himself famous as an editor republishing classic gay literature that had fallen out of copyright, Winston Leyland was, nevertheless, that rare bird: a publisher who actually paid authors the royalties promised. Ultimately, he paid me an honor beyond money when he included my one-act play “Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O’Malley” in his Lammy-winning anthology of gay literature: *Gay Roots: Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine: An Anthology of Gay History, Sex, Politics, and Culture* (1991).

This inclusion and the Lammy award were indirect endorsements of the literary value of *Drummer*. “Corporal in Charge,” first published in *Drummer* issues 22 and 23 (May and July 1978), was the only play included in *Gay Roots*.

On September 4, 1985, Alyson Publications in Boston sent me a form letter saying it was not considering new manuscripts at that present time. Grove Press in New York wrote on September 28, 1985: “I read your book with interest and respect. It’s a big book—ambitious, complicated, and professionally done. Good luck.”

Meanwhile, on the West Coast, my fellow author friends looked for a subtext to the letters. Were Denneny and Picano and Grove Press being gracious? Was there a Manhattan message? Was the book too California, too San Francisco, too *Drummer*, too leather, too wild, too politically incorrect, and, as an investigation into gay masculinity, or homomascularity, was it the wrong kind of “gay”?

Even Elizabeth Gershman balked at first. In 1985, when I queried her at Knights Press in Stamford, Connecticut, she rejected the manuscript on February 3, 1986: “It is a bit more erotic than I like to do...You must make a fortune writing about sex, because you do it very well.” Two years later in 1988 when former *Drummer* editor Tim Barrus was hired by Gershman, he educated her about the esthetics of gay writing and handed her the very same manuscript which she then re-read. On February 14, 1989, she wrote to me: “I’d fucking kill to publish *Some Dance to Remember*.”

My own West Coast *Drummer* editorial policy of dealing inclusively with authors coming out of closets anywhere indicated I would have welcomed any of those gay East Coast writers into the pages of *Drummer*—the way I gladly published Mapplethorpe—if only they had approached San Francisco gay culture the way so many other New Yorkers were shrewd enough to do. Harvey Milk went west to Castro Street to do what he could have never done on Christopher Street. Mapplethorpe flew directly to me at *Drummer* so I could, in his words, “nationalize his Manhattan reputation.” Wakefield Poole left Manhattan to shoot films in his studio on the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park where I interviewed him for *Drummer* in my feature “Dirty Poole” and gave sexy coverage of his movie stills inside and on the cover of *Drummer* 27 (February 1979). New York entrepreneur Michael Maletta, the mega-party producer, transplanted himself to the Castro and connected his startup, the San Francisco Creative Power Foundation, to the creative power of *Drummer* publicity while creating “Night Flight” and “Stars,” the parties from whose resultant frisson the White Party was invented. These “gypsies, tramps, and thieves,” all migrated east-to-west in what San Franciscans dubbed the “Manhattanization of San Francisco.” Manhattanization had as much to do with invasive East Coast cultural “attitudes” as it did with the shock of new high rises changing the City’s traditional skyline from horizontal to vertical.

After I exited *Drummer* on December 31, 1979, Felice Picano’s “Hunter” was published in *Drummer* 39 (August 1980). John Embry, wanting to widen sales to East Coast readers, generously promoted Picano with “name above the title” status. He heralded the short story in the cover copy as “Felice Picano’s ‘Hunter.’” That seemingly autobiographical story, based on an “author’s” summer-seminar experience at an East Coast literary colony, was, for all its genre merits as a mystery, not a particularly *Drummer* story because the sex was vanilla; there was no S&M in psychology or ritual; and two women characters—one suicidal—intruded into the sanctuary of male space that subscribers demanded of stories in *Drummer*. Inside on the *Drummer* masthead, the billing, plugging Picano’s literary pedigree,

read: “Hunter” by Felice Picano: The best-selling author of *The Lure*, *The Mesmerist*, and *The Eye* weaves a masterful tale of deadly obsessions and suspense.”

Proficient at using the flattery that had messed with the heads of Los Angeles writers in particular, Embry gambled that such publication and billing might induce the prolific Picano aka Christopher Hall aka Miss Bea Oblivious into helping fill the on-going serial-fiction section of *Drummer*. That never happened. Not with the canny Picano. But Embry’s tactic worked with another East Coast writer, John Preston, who fell for Embry’s blandishments, until he didn’t.

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ANDREW HOLLERAN’S NEW CLOTHES:  
DUDE CONDESCENDING A STAIRCASE

“Who’d a thunk it? Who’d a thunk that one day back issues of *Drummer* would be displayed in glass cases at a library like this? [The John Hay Library at Brown University]

—Eric Garber aka Andrew Holleran, an East Coast literary establishment author of *Dancer from the Dance*, and co-founder of the Violet Quill, snapping at *Drummer* in “Making Sex Public,” *Christopher Street*, Issue 231, November 1995, page 3

By 2016, *Drummer* was included internationally in gay archives as well as in the permanent collections of museums such as the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) which displayed *Drummer* in a glass case during the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit, *The Perfect Medium*.

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IS THERE A GAY LITERARY MAFIA? ARE LGBT CORPORATIONS  
DEPERSONALIZING GAY LITERATURE?

Is there reason to fear for the integrity of young gay writers seeking sanctuary in New York, the fortress of the publishing world? Do they change their voices to fit in? Is that why virtually no Manhattan gay literary “stars” break out of the received puritan paradigm of vanilla gay literature? Is that why they don’t or can’t write erotica? Because literary agents might balk as did James Purdy’s? Because some gay and straight readers need to be willing to stretch to accept gay literature and its patois, even when it is bourgeois vanilla, much less when it is overtly erotic? The New York lack of erotic writing by major authors dims their own starlight.

The East Coast establishment—even among the rival siblings on the Edmund White-Tony Kushner axis of authors like Larry Kramer lionized during the mid-twentieth century—has a right to its own strictures of gravitas and attitude, but perhaps the price of admission is too costly for a nonconforming writer and for what a human gets. Suffering for one's art is one thing; suffocating it, and censoring one's self, to be published at a big straight house is quite another. In the James Ivory film *The City of Your Last Destination*, screenwriter Ruth Praver Jhabvala, adapting gay author Peter Cameron's book, penned this exchange between characters to caution over-eager authors: "You don't choose literature. Literature chooses you." Hello, New York! Eros calling!

Sensing this pressurized danger in the 1960s when I was living in New York to sample whether I would move there permanently, I figured a human life in letters could be lived, for me, at least, better on the West Coast, and more so in human-sized San Francisco than in skyscraper New York or freeway-scaled Los Angeles.

A New Yorker living in three tiny rooms in a fifth-floor walk-up, as Mapplethorpe did at 24 Bond Street, writes differently and photographs differently than the same writer or photographer living in San Francisco. *What if the beautiful room is empty—in the Castro?* Unlike Manhattan's insular formality, California is the pop-culture platform that comes with a better chance to grow personally with one's art, and actually to own and live in—what Virginia Woolf said was absolutely essential—a room of one's own, in a house of one's own, in a State that is ten years ahead of the rest of American culture.

When Robert Mapplethorpe and I were bi-coastal lovers, I experienced what his New Yorker friends did not know. There was an essential difference between Robert's "being" in San Francisco *versus* how he "had to be" in New York. The psychic cost to him taxed him long before AIDS killed him.

As his career escalated in 1980s Manhattan, he seemed to become put off by New York faces staring back at him through his lens, and turned to shooting flowers and statues. Much of his best leather and S&M photography was shot in San Francisco out of the personalities in and around the *Drummer* Salon to whom I introduced him. Because *Variety* magazine labeled Mapplethorpe as a continuing "Cultural Bogeyman" in its "Culture War Redux" (March 21-27, 2011, page 4), I wonder if one day his safe New York flower prints will ever begin to outweigh his dangerous San Francisco fetish photographs? As Edward Lucie-Smith reminded me, "Robert's calla lily photograph hanging in an Upper East Side dining room gets its frisson from Robert's fisting photograph hanging in the bedroom."



Why wouldn't such frisson apply to writing as well?

We've all read the calla-lily literature penned by writers in the hot-house of New York. On September 10, 2015, *The New York Times Style Magazine* published a feature, "They Made New York," with a kind of "Sgt. Pepper cover" group photo of twenty-eight celebrities including Edmund White and Larry Kramer whose faces under the high-concept title rather much italicized their insular regionalism which is a bit different than San Francisco's peninsular regionalism because the San Francisco peninsula, unlike the margins of Manhattan Island, is actually connected to the rest of the continent. So, where is that island clique's erotica? Ed White is six months younger than I, and six years younger than Larry Kramer, but that self-titled *City Boy*, posing with cane in hand, has vaporized out loud that he is the last of his generation. In his *My Lives*, as Ed grows older and more Falstaff-ian, he might regret a certain Midwest Ohio self-censorship that kept his youthful Id from writing a porno masterwork after his soft-core striptease *The Joy of Gay Sex* which he worried, actually worried, would kill his reputation.

Crown, his publisher, took out a full-page ad in *Drummer* 18 (August 1977) to sell that book by the chummy-named "Ed White." White claims he rescued Foucault, but Foucault should have rescued him. Foucault, at least, sexed around at night in the bars and baths of *Drummer* territory on Folsom Street in San Francisco where we took turns sizing him up with our fists confirmed by our glove size. If it was good enough for DeSade and Pasolini, where is White's *120 Days of Sodom*? Why has no editor like New York anthologists Michael Denneny and John Preston ever gathered together a certain best-seller: a collection of erotic fiction written by Edmund White, Tony Kushner, Andrew Holleran, Felice Picano, and even Larry Kramer, the scourge and Scrooge of 1970s free love, as well as the other usual suspects who maybe wish they could unbutton themselves and cut to the radical masturbation heart of what makes gay literature gay: sex. Appreciating the talents of these writers, I hope that hidden novels by some of these cautious men will eventually be published posthumously like E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. Readers also hope that in a kind of "White 2.0" or "Kramer 2.0," some of their existing novels be republished in years to come with the sex passages restored as happened in 2011 with Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890) and James Jones' *From Here to Eternity* (1951). Both were republished in unexpurgated editions, with the censored sentences of Wilde inserted, and the four-letter words and gay sex of Jones's original manuscript restored.

There is no begrudging the dandy-in-aspic New York establishment their local color performing within their gay genre, which is like acting in

a scripted Hollywood film, such as *Casablanca*, as opposed to the outlaw literary genre, such as *Drummer*, which is akin to “being and becoming” in a passionate, spontaneous indie film that has the audience cuming in their brain and in their pants. Isn’t art about interaction? And shouldn’t erotic interaction be addressed now and again, especially in gay literature?

Well into his seventies, Edmund White, bragged he had “written some of the strangest pages anyone’s ever typed out about sex.” He told *The Guardian* newspaper (6 December 2012), that he judged “conventional sex writing” to be variously in his words: “comic,” “tacky,” “hackneyed,” “ludicrous,” “stale,” “lurid,” “bleak,” “seedy,” and “impossible to visualize.”

Was he patronizing the reporter who happened to be female, when he added: “It seems to me that gay sex writing is a major test for the typical reader, who is a middle-aged woman [*sic*].” A middle-aged woman? Was he born on Planet Absurd? He seemed oblivious of the popular culture of the literary canon of gay male magazine writing written by gay men for gay men who, by the millions over the years, read a thousand gay male stories in *Drummer*. Finally, he grandly credited a few “great sex writers,” like D. H. Lawrence and Robert Gluck of the New Narrative movement, for “doing what the Russian formalists said was the secret of all good fiction—making the familiar strange....”

At *Drummer*, introducing stories of sadomasochism to the masses, we made the strange familiar. In this reverse-engineering, many of our authors, skilled participants in the “role of the author” within the New Journalism, could artfully thread the helix of the classic “familiar strange” and spin it to the alternative “strange familiar” for the total intellectual seduction and erotic success of sex stories that, like my own eyewitness New Narrative feature articles and fiction in *Drummer*, purposely started in the head and worked their way down.

Perhaps it’s time for this cap-a-pie crew of New York seniors to saddle up, pop a Viagra, and pay their erotic dues as responsible gay elders. The older dancer, Margot Fonteyn, was rejuvenated by the wildly sexy younger dancer from the dance, Rudolf Nureyev who extended her career. Perhaps, thus re-juiced, they’ll find themselves triumphantly censored in some fabulous obscenity trial ala Mapplethorpe who succeeded in being both epicurean and arousing.

After all, erotica is the fundamental element of beauty that makes gay literature gay. Otherwise, queer writing is just another polite niche genre. If writers cannot pen erotica, and by that I mean literary porn that indeed “starts in the head and works its way down,” those un-licentious writers should lose their license.

I know from Professor David Van Leer, author of *The Queening of America*, that there are cum-stained issues of *Drummer* hidden under certain New York authors' beds.

Tell me what you cum to and I'll tell you who you really are.

Provincial New York queens were chronicled extensively in *Some Dance to Remember*, Reel 4, Scene 2; this is but a sample:

It was a Ton of Attitude. The immigrant Manhattanite A-Group crashed San Francisco, intent on Manhattanizing "The City That Knows How." They hosted huge, super-produced bashes...It was SFO gays *versus* El Lay gays *versus* Manhattan gays. The Great Gay Triangle of three cities turned positively Bermuda.

Besides Scott McKenzie's 1967 invitation to come to San Francisco wearing flowers in your hair, Embry had from *Drummer's* earliest issues printed full-page open-call invitations to all writers, photographers, and artists: e.g., *Drummer* 2 (August 1975), page 16, and *Drummer* 6 (June 1976), inside back cover.

As editor-in-chief, I threw open the windows of *Drummer* even further and actively queried, chased, and recruited talent in that first gay decade after Stonewall, because I thought liberation freed us to dare to create emerging "gay erotic art" featuring males, objectified as Platonic Ideals, in the same way as "straight art" showcasing females, but without the sexism.

I meant for frank erotic writing to be regarded as a legitimate esthetic on the page the way the photographs of Mapplethorpe and George Dureau and the drawings of Rex and Tom of Finland are framed as legitimate gay art on the walls of galleries and museums.

On February 16, 1978, I personally wrote to the Manhattan artist, Rex, to request five specific drawings to build into my *Son of Drummer* (September 1978): "Bath House," "21 Tongues," "Mad Doctors," "Black Socks," and his "Andrew-Wyeth" drawing, "Jack Off."

In a letter dated February 21, 1978, Rex responded from Manhattan, airing his smouldering resentment of the New York establishment misunderstanding his art:

Dear Jack: Thank you for your letter of the 16<sup>th</sup>. I am most grateful for any coverage I might get from your publication, especially at this transitional stage of my career. I'm enclosing the drawings you requested [with Rex's inimitable comments about each]....I would very much like to see your viewpoint about my work, much

as you interpreted the Mineshaft poster [which he had drawn for the coming year, 1978, and I had reviewed in *Drummer* 19 (December 1977), pages 82-83: “The essence of the Mineshaft is found in page after page of Rex’s drawings in his limited-edition portfolios *Icons* and *Mannespielen*.”]. You’ll be more objective about the work and I would definitely want some critical points mentioned.... I’ve a great many critics.... A paragraph exploring my [New York] detractors would prove most interesting.... Many thanks for your help, Rex

Continuing in *Drummer* 23 (July 1978), I repeatedly published my full-page invitation to writers everywhere to “Submit to *Drummer*, The American Review of Gay Popular Culture.” With everyone in the wild 1970s preoccupied with sex, *Drummer* needed fresh, stylish, intelligent, masculine-identified erotica that would gladly have embraced the traditional and *avant-garde* voices of any of the mid-1970s New York gay literati from Larry Kramer, Felice Picano, Edmund White, and all the serious boys including comic Harvey Fierstein getting his “man” on in the fashion of the leather satires: “Gay Deteriorata” (*Drummer* 21, March 1978), “Castro Street Blues” (*Drummer* 24, September 1978), and “Noodles Romanov and the Golden Gloves” (*Drummer* 29, May 1979).

My grass-roots full-page outreach invitation to writers and artists expressed my goal of directing *Drummer* into the New Journalism so popular in the 1960s and 1970s. I wanted to create a masculine gay magazine reflecting the male gender reality of the 1970s, the first decade of gay liberation testing the New Reality, the New Normal, after Stonewall. In other magazines such as *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*, *Drummer* subscribers were reading New Journalists like Tom Wolfe, George Plimpton, and even Norman Mailer, who chased experience and exposure so as to include the reality of themselves in very credible, eyewitness, first-person narratives, such as Hunter Thompson’s book, which would have been very suitable for *Drummer*, *Hells Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (1966). In a pop-culture way, I was also invoking the lesson of the surprise hit, the 1971 PBS series, *An American Family: The Loud Family*, which was the first TV reality show. I wanted our loud leather family to reveal its emerging post-Stonewall identity in writing, photography, and art. I wanted to make *Drummer* the autobiographical journal of all of us. Besides, most magazine erotica is just naturally more powerful written in the first person voice of the New Journalism.

“SUBMIT TO *DRUMMER*”  
PHOTOGRAPHERS, WRITERS, ARTISTS

Want to go down in history? *Drummer* pays competitive rates for your photos, artwork, first-person articles, and fiction. Your submissions to “*Drummer*, The American Magazine of Gay Popular Culture,” are always welcome. Feature articles average 2,000 words up to 4,000. Short stories run around 2,000 words; longer book-length manuscripts are acceptable for serialization. Photography and/or artwork that illustrates your article or story is a definite plus. Always type and double space your manuscript.

*Drummer* especially encourages single photographs as well as photo spreads of up to 20 shots on matter of your choice. We prefer black-and-white prints, but color transparencies are acceptable and are reviewed for cover use.

*Drummer* will take prudent care of your submissions, but cannot be responsible for their loss. (Wise writers retain a Xerox of their materials.) Always [in bold] enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for prompt return of your unused work

For *Drummer*’s New “Readers’ Section” [my startup of “Tough Customers”] *Drummer* pays \$10 for each black-and-white photo accepted for publication from our readers. Submit whatever leather, western, uniform, jock, fetish, nude, fantasy, sports, etc. photos you like. For return of unused photos, include a sufficiently stamped self-addressed return envelope.

*Drummer* Pays Competitive Rates on Publication.

Send to *Drummer* editor. —Best Regards, Jack Fritscher

Including my special issue, *Son of Drummer* (September 1978), in which I featured “New York Art,” I did everything but send a singing telegram to Manhattan.

What was *Drummer*? Chopped liver?

If *Drummer* were not good enough for their tastes, why weren’t they clever enough to seize the opportunity, for themselves and for the gay community, to send in their own improving “better” fiction and features. I would have seriously considered publishing them.

As if in answer to my open invitation, Picano had sent that story, “Hunter,” which Embry published, after my exit, in *Drummer* 39 (October 1980). Picano’s 1978 poem, “The Deformity Lover,” a spin on Tennessee Williams’ disability-as-sex-fetish story, “One Arm,” was published in *Drummer* 93

(March 1986). In *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers on Sex Writing* (2001), editor M. Christian included fourteen writers, including himself, Pat Califia, Picano, and me. Picano, whom I single out for no reason other than that he was cool enough to seek publication in *Drummer*, seemed willing to be “one of the boys” among the hard corps. In *The Burning Pen*, his auto-bio explanation of his own sex writing went off-topic and was not about the why and how of writing erotica. His accompanying story “Expertise,” while about sex, was not sexy. As the editor of *Drummer*, I would have said his story was generically literary, but it was not the distinct genre of gay erotic literature that, like jazz and blues music in service to eros, has the requisite “Music of the Id” quotient required to make one-handed magazine readers hard.

Quintessential erotic literature is an act of aggression that gets readers off. That is a protean task. Most writers in the GLBT “literary world” are incapable of hauling readers’ ashes, and therefore are “above” writing gay “erotica” which is as essential to gay popular culture as “blues” and “rap” are to Black culture.

There are all kinds of gay writing, but isn’t there something radical and true and authentic in gay writing that so affirms the reader’s sexual identity that it causes physical orgasm?

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Tim Barrus, the firebrand editor of *Drummer*, and the founder of the LeatherLit Movement (1997) in San Francisco, wrote scornfully about the schism in homosexuality between the East Coast and the West Coast, and between elitist gay writers and popular-culture gay writers. His clever tirade appeared in the same issue in which DeBlase’s partner in *Drummer*, Andy Charles, always the wealthy social climber, wrote an apologetic defense of Edmund White whose book, *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, Barrus had earlier punctured with a bad review. Barrus wrote in *Drummer* 120 (August 1988), page four:

...With our art and our message we are involved, here [at *Drummer*], in the process of creating our own cultural [leather, masculine, literary] mythology. Our own heroes. Our own sensibility around who and what matters.

I have often wondered just exactly what it is many of the (tasteful) writers in such gay publications as let’s say *Christopher Street* are trying to say. And I have often wondered if any of the “Lavender [Violet] Quill” boys could write anything that might actually get my dick hard. It’s somewhat interesting to lay down a gauntlet to them—hey, boys, have

any of you got what it takes to reach out to gay men in such a way as to turn them on and in the process—often—make them think.

Barrus, himself unable to get publication traction because of East Coast prejudices and politically correct dogma, assumed a new literary identity and began writing under the Navajo name “Nasdijj.” In 1998, he sent an unsolicited short feature article manuscript titled “The Blood Runs Like a River through My Dreams” to *Esquire* with a note saying, “In the entire history of *Esquire* magazine, you have never once published an American Indian writer.” “The Blood Runs” essay was published in the June 1999 issue of *Esquire* and was so famously well written it became a finalist for the National Magazine Award. Nasdijj wrote two more Nasdijj book memoirs after his first one, *The Blood Runs Like Rivers Through My Dreams* (2000), was selected as a “Notable Book of the Year” by *The New York Times*. The other two titles were *The Boy and the Dog Are Sleeping* (2003) and *Geronimo’s Bones: A Memoir of My Brother and Me* (2004).

Then in January 2006, investigative journalist Matthew Fleischer published an expose in *LA Weekly* titled “Navahoax” revealing that Barrus was “a middle-aged white male writer of gay pornography” who—as if it were a bad thing—had “for years, ...written gay leather porn and sadomasochistic novels.” When the scandal broke, *Esquire* writer Andrew Chaikivsky contacted me for his deeper query into the identity of Tim Barrus whose picture was to be published full page next to the article: “Nasdijj: Seven Years Ago, He Was Born in This Magazine.”

For that May 2006 *Esquire* (pages 138-143), Chaikivsky interviewed and then named me in his article as “one of the founding editors of *Drummer*, a now defunct gay leather magazine where Barrus edited and wrote stories in the 1980s.” My goal in responding to the empathetic Chaikivsky was to explain Barrus’ sense of frustration with publishing as well as his undeniable brilliance in creating identities and channeling other personas, a gift which was traditionally key to many female authors disguised pseudonymously as male, and to many gays who lived double lives to survive and succeed as straight authors. Barrus identifies as straight, but he learned plenty from the problem-solving stress of living inside gay publishing culture where dissembling is an art form almost of the kind perfected by drag queens.

It did not help Barrus that at the same time, media detectives also unmasked the memoir authors JT LeRoy and James Frey who had conned Oprah and her book club. Timothy Patrick Barrus’s shapeshifter story should one day be scripted and directed as an



independent film examining the creative process of an author desperate to catch a break when all the politically-correct odds seem against him. A good plot point would dramatize how all the eager magazine, newspaper, and book publishers wrote checks and bought travel tickets for “Timothy Nasdijj Barrus” who was what they wanted until they didn’t.

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Is there satire for parochial New Yorkers whose western horizon was the Hudson River? To us in California, those island queens lived on the cover of the March 29, 1976, *New Yorker*, skewered by Saul Steinberg’s classic insight, “A View of the World from 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue.” Is there any irony in Larry Kramer shouting out at the 2011 Tribeca Film Festival: “Our history has been taken away from us by straight historians who have no concept of who we are or will not let us be who we are.” Kramer is the dependably embarrassing Manhattanite who dramatizes himself as one of the keepers of the keys of gay literature. Stranded like swish Family Robinson on their island, they ignore the fact that they have little respect for or concept of other gay American voices. Their alpha and omega is New York. [http://www.tribecafilm.com/festival/features/film-coverage/Tribeca\\_Talks\\_Outrage.html](http://www.tribecafilm.com/festival/features/film-coverage/Tribeca_Talks_Outrage.html)

I cannot help but think of the shameless behavior of the incestuous East Coast gay “literary” crowd, including keynote speaker White and a screaming Kramer, whose snarling hubris destroyed, and closed down, the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Key West Literary Seminar in January 1997. But that’s another story told in Chapter 17.

In 2006, when the islander Picano moved to the peninsula of San Francisco, he announced with humorous self-satire on September 29:

When I arranged to do a reading at Books, Inc. this coming Thursday, October 5<sup>th</sup> on Market and 16<sup>th</sup> Street several months ago I had no idea I’d be living in San Francisco. But I am. So this is sort of a welcome party for me....I’ve been promised a possible “roast” [at this reading], although how this is possible with a sweet, kind, gentle, soft spoken soul as I am, I can’t imagine.

Picano stayed in San Francisco only a short time before moving to LA. His move was the reverse of Embry who brought his LA attitude to San Francisco where he was never thought of as a San Franciscan, but always as “John Embry from LA.” Northern Californians have always stood back

in amazement from both New York and LA attitude with their imperial court contempt of anyone who is not them. Five minutes with grandiose LA personalities like my longtime friend Larry Townsend, or John Embry, or *Drummer* writer John Rowberry would define this arch kweeniness whose fumes can overtake a room in seconds. Their hauteur was a contemptible attitude that San Franciscans joked about.

While in LA for the National Book Expo America in May 2008, I asked editor Jeanne Barney, that veteran of the *Drummer* wars, who at that time was on the “no-fault outs” with both her friends Larry Townsend and John Embry (who hated each other), what was the cause of all the LA gay infighting and attitude. She responded to Mark Hemry and me that I was the second person to ask her that in the past two weeks, but she had no answer. At that lunch at Canter’s Deli on Fairfax, no one knew Townsend would die two months later, estranged both from Barney as well as from Embry who himself died twenty-six months after Townsend. That left me, and this book, standing in the rubble of their bitter triangle. Regarding the LA “Attitude”—which I initial-capped to signify it as a “character” in *Some Dance to Remember*, someone else suggested that historically there was so little to be won in the homosexual world that gays continue to fight over every possible crumb. So, giving ultimate LA attitude, John Embry responded with a distancing email, cold as a telegram, when I told him Townsend was dying in hospital.

From: Jack Fritscher  
 To: John Embry  
 Sent: Wednesday, July 23, 2008 3:33 PM  
 Subject: Larry Townsend in ICU

Our friend Larry Townsend remains in ICU. Hopefully, he may rally, but the situation seems very distressed. If you want more info, let me know. If you don’t want to know, let me know. May our world of readers and writers keep Larry in our thoughts and give him good energy during the next few hours and days.

Jack Fritscher

From: supermr  
 To: Jack Fritscher  
 Sent: Wednesday, July 23, 2008 6:02 PM  
 Subject: Larry Townsend in ICU

[Embry responded in ALL CAPS] THANK YOU FOR NOTIFYING ME. ALTHOUGH LARRY'S AND MY RELATIONSHIP IS IN ABOUT THE SAME STATE AS HIS AND JEANNIE'S [Sic]. BE THAT AS IT MAY, I WISH HIM WELL AND WAS VERY DISMAYED AT FRED'S PASSING [Fred Yerkes, Townsend's partner of forty-four years], WHICH I AM SURE WAS VERY HARD ON HIM.

John Embry

I point out this rather unsavory tale of two-timing cities because the need to move *Drummer* from LA to San Francisco was not so much because of the Slave Auction arrests by the LAPD, but was more because the LA founding staff of *Drummer* were a circular firing squad of love and hate. In order to find its center, the young *Drummer* could not survive such bad gay behavior in LA. Luckily, fate, occasioned by the LAPD raid on the Drummer Slave Auction, caused the magazine to flee to San Francisco, not to New York, to continue finding its true identity, purpose, readership, and salon of contributors.

In perspective, back in the 1970s, to literary book mavens sniffy about high culture, gay magazines were a new and untried post-Stonewall invention in gay popular culture. What was this new genre lately sprung up on the West Coast? When *Drummer* debuted (June 1975) in LA, there were only two other considerable large-size slick gay mags on the racks: the new-ish self-identified *Queen's Quarterly* (1969) in Manhattan; and the pretty-boy *Blueboy* (1974) in Miami, founded by *TV Guide* advertising executive, Don Embinder, who was no Embry. Not until July 1976, did Michael Denny and Charles L. Ortleb found New York's glossy *Christopher Street* magazine.

*QQ*, *Blueboy*, and *Christopher Street* had sophisticated publishers and a well-paid class of professionals writing, photographing, and designing them for mainstream vanilla gays. One deceptive business quirk at *Queen's Quarterly*, where future *Drummer* art director A. Jay worked, was that to seem "up and running" in order to sell advertising, *QQ* began publishing with issue two; there was no issue number one.

*Drummer*, a wild orphan of the leather tribe, was run by the poor-man's Bill Sykes, Embry, who, I'm coloring up here, abused *Drummer* as if it were *Oliver Twist*. He may have known how to pick a pocket or two in his mail-order business, but he knew next to absolutely nothing about people or the finesse of publishing when *Drummer* fell into his lap in 1975 through his machinations (1972-1975) inside the struggling *H.E.L.P./Drummer* political

organization. He thought of the writing and photos in *Drummer* as little more than bait luring mail-order customers to buy the dildos, cockrings, and poppers he hawked in the center of the magazine.

Embry's reputation and cheap production values probably made *Drummer* unattractive to some hoity writers. Out of necessity, I tried to make *cheap* seem *attractive* and *underground* and *outlaw* and *exciting* to men who, like New Yorkers Robert Mapplethorpe and Rex, understood the romance of high-toned slumming at nights with bad boys and dangerous men in rundown piers, dark alleys, skid row hotels, sleazy baths, and rough leather bars—which I referenced when I published Rex's "T. S. Eliot 'Prufrock'" drawings of "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels and sawdust restaurants" in *Son of Drummer*.)

Because of my cover feature, "Remembrance of Sleaze Past," in *Drummer* 139 (May 1990), the Manhattan author and Catholic lady Patricia Morrisroe wrote in her *Mapplethorpe* biography, published nearly a year after my San Francisco *Mapplethorpe* memoir, that I was "the king of sleaze." She meant to be insulting, but she, who went on to write a book about her love of shoes, did not understand the inverted and ironic gay-culture definition of the word *sleaze* anymore than she understood the *mise en scene* of Mapplethorpe whose shoes she could not walk in, and seemed neither to understand, or like, in her judgmental book.

Apparently, Morrisroe was unaware that sleaze is a gay "good thing," and that director John Waters is the anointed "King of Sleaze" I am but a reporter reflecting the kind of sensuality that sweaty *Drummer* readers wanted to read about, especially after the advent of HIV that destroyed the baths, the sex clubs, and, in a way, promiscuity itself.

In his *The Golden Age of Promiscuity* (1996), New Yorker Brad Gooch used the word *sleaze* in his description of the music played at the Mineshaft in the Titanic 1970s.

The music...was trance music...that included Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and many of the other minimalist artists Sean and Annie [Gooch's two characters] had listened to at the Chelsea [Hotel], music that was labeled 'sleaze' by 'disco' adherents. By dawn there would always be full electronic Vangelis chords mixed with Mahler. (Pages 154-155)

Earlier, in search of eyewitness authenticity as to what were the drivers of the "sleaze" that I had written about in *Drummer*, I interviewed Wally Wallace, the manager of the Mineshaft, about the music in the Mineshaft.

He explained in the video shot in San Francisco, May 28, 1995, that, while the famously international sex inside the Mineshaft was sleaze, the masculine-inflected music, designed to discourage women and the New York disco crowd, was way more than sleaze:

People talk about the sex at the Mineshaft, but sex was not what it was all about. First of all, I had a policy that the music was never so loud that you couldn't hear the person next to you. I made the tapes myself. We played anything in the world, from western to classics. A lot of classics actually. At the beginning, it was electronic variations on classic themes. Ella Fitzgerald. Jazz. We tried to avoid basic disco, references to females, references to "let's dance," things like that. But the music became kind of famous because we didn't follow the mainstream. We had a somewhat older clientele.

For writers as for everyone else, dues must be paid. Six years after Stonewall, *Drummer* was a wonderful entry point for emerging writers keen to write erotica. Is penning porn a rite of passage? Is a gay writer really a gay writer *before* he makes readers cum?

Gay writing begins with one stroke of the pen and ends with many strokes of the penis.

Who has ever jerked off to the usual nominees in the gay East Coast literary follies? Have they paid their homage to Eros?

Perhaps Manhattanites had legitimate fears about approaching *Drummer* after East Coast writer John Preston and New York photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, a friend of Edmund White, reported back to New York warning how Embry had treated them. Or, perhaps, Manhattan gays themselves bought into the on-going anti-leather rants of the shameful Richard Goldstein at the *Village Voice*. In 1979, they certainly hit the summer streets of Greenwich Village protesting the location shoot of the leather film, *Cruising* (1980), directed by William Friedkin whom they still hated for directing Mart Crowley's *verite* transcription of Manhattan queens, *The Boys in the Band*. Perhaps the "professional" writers, who were fellow travelers with the bourgeois white-bread *Advocate*, thought *Drummer*, seemingly filled by passionately authentic "amateur" experts, was too erotic and *outré* when it was meant to be sexy, forward, and "far out."

These bicoastal pop-culture clashes are early examples of the never-ending civil wars in the gay community analyzed in many magazines and dramatized in *Some Dance to Remember*. As an eyewitness observer of gay folk, I have never met anywhere such a contentious group of people in my

life. Personally, I was never bullied or abused by anybody until I entered the killing fields of gay culture where verbal abuse and attitude are acceptable behavior, and visions of patricide dance in feminist heads. John Waters' halo slipped when he told *The Advocate* (11/2/2015) what it liked to hear:

I love radical feminists, even though I sometimes don't agree with them. I don't like women-hating gay men, but I don't mind women that hate men. They have more reason.

Shouldn't gays, always insisting how we demand tolerance from straight society, first tolerate each other and lip-synch to Joel Grey singing about tolerance in *Cabaret* (1972), "Leben und leben lassen/Live and let live."

The unspoken truism about homosexual psychology is that many gay people are "forced" to be "liberal" because—except for the wild card of homosexuality—they are likely as conservative, prejudiced, separatist, sexist, and racist as their pistol-packing relatives pigging out on fast food in Red States.

*Drummer* was designed to be erotic.

Eros is the heart of gay literature, pornographic or not.

Erotica is not "time out" from literature.

Erotica *is* gay literature.

#### ANNE RICE: DID SHE EVER WRITE FOR *DRUMMER*?

Once a San Francisco writer, Anne Rice, in her double-jointed literary career as the aka "erotic author, A. N. Roquelaure and/or Anne Rampling," knew eros was literature. At least she did before her late-in-life return to Catholicism which, after writing a Jesus novel, she seemed to renounce a second time. While it's true she wrote *Interview with the Vampire* in the Castro, and it was published in May 1976 when *Drummer* was a year old, a stake needs be driven through the urban legend about Anne Rice and *Drummer*. I was paying attention because years earlier I had written my occult book, the nonfiction *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth*, in the Castro in 1969-1971, for its first publication in 1972 by the Popular Press, an imprint of Bowling Green State University Press.

*Drummer* published two excerpts from Rice's novel, *Exit to Eden* (1982): "Beauty's Punishment" in *Drummer* 71 (February 1984) and "Beauty's Release" in *Drummer* 83 (March 1985). An "excerpt from the excerpt" of "Beauty's Punishment" was reprinted on pages 36-38 in *Drummer* 188 (September 1995) under the attribution by female editor Wickie Stamps that Rice herself had actually written for *Drummer* and was a representative

author, which she was not, despite any mythic revisionism of the unstoppable feminist fantasy that she was.

Arrangements for the first excerpts from her previously written work were seemingly made with her publishers by *Drummer* contributor, John Preston, who was her Manhattan acolyte. The publicity stunt of her insert into *Drummer* was a corporate publisher's marketing attempt to introduce her Roquelaure/Rambling books to leatherfolk.

One might as well name Thoreau as a *Drummer* author because he was quoted each issue on the masthead.

One might as well also name Maya Angelou as a *Drummer* author because her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" was published across two pages of the ill-fated *Drummer* 161. That issue, truth be told, was plagued with plagiarism and copyright problems so serious that most copies were shredded and never distributed. Nowhere did that *Drummer* issue note permission to reprint Angelou any more than did Embry when he failed to get permission to reprint a section from Peter Shaffer's *Equus* (1973) for my horse-fetish issue of *Drummer* 25 (December 1978). Shaffer was not amused.

Beware the mythomania around *Drummer*.

For politically correct reasons of "gender" as well as "commerce," the two excerpts by Rice/Roquelaure happened to be published incidentally in *Drummer*. Unless someone unearths documents or testimony to the contrary, it seems:

1. Anne Rice was never personally or professionally associated with *Drummer*.

2. Anne Rice never wrote for *Drummer*.

3. Anne Rice's connection to *Drummer* was vicarious through her colleague, John Preston, who specialized in collecting individual authors into anthologies which he packaged for publishers.

On October 17, 2006, John Embry told me on the phone:

Anne Rice? I never had any truck with Anne Rice. I was so disappointed when I finally got one of her books to read. It was *Beauty's Punishment* and it was kind of interesting, but then she did the thing they made the movie of—not *Vampire*. I never did like *Interview with the Vampire*. The one on the island: *Exit to Eden*.

The closed and cultish Preston was cooking Rice for *Drummer's* hungry pages. In the 1980s plague years as faithful contributors died, Embry sought even quicker free ways to fill those pages, and he hardly cared or noticed what that filler was. In fact, Embry, the convenient amnesiac who "had no



truck with Rice,” forgot he listed himself on the masthead as both publisher and editor of *Drummer* 71, which first excerpted her, and of *Drummer* 83 featuring her second excerpt. No one can remember everything, but it was his business responsibility to know that A. N. Roquelaure was Anne Rice. He was already growing his Alternate Publishing brand, and planning to sell *Drummer* off. From his first day to his last as publisher, he paid scant attention to what filled *Drummer*.

In the creative vacuum caused by panic over HIV, Preston himself became HIV positive and conscious of his legacy. With his dour vampire looks, he pursued the Eternal Life of Column Inches. In order to service both Rice’s publisher, and Embry (who was Preston’s *Mr. Benson* publisher), he went wide to score more coverage. He lobbied to get her *Exit to Eden* excerpts in *Drummer*. He repeated his PR tactic when he again published *Exit* excerpts to give both mainstream and female *gravitas* to his anthology, *Flesh and the Word* (1992). The brand name “Anne Rice” sold books, but it never sold *Drummer*. No disrespect, but Anne Rice has rarely been deemed a proper leather author any more than E. L. James who wrote the erotic BDSM romance novel, *Fifty Shades of Gray*.

Preston, driven to quickness by HIV, was noted for hitching his wagon to established stars whose collected reflected glory could make him seem like a literary powerhouse. He ingratiated himself with the sexual underground by packaging several anthologies, like *Flesh and the Word*, with eager and grateful genre authors he courted, including *Drummer* contributors Phil Andros, Larry Townsend, Aaron Travis, and Patrick Califia. They wrote the stories and he put his name on the cover. In late 1978, when Preston queried Embry seeking his own debut in *Drummer*, Embry tasked me to edit Preston’s draft of *Mr. Benson* for content, style, and serialization because it was a book-length manuscript whose chapters could be serialized monthly to keep subscribers coming back for more.

Preston is a case in point. *Drummer* was a magazine open to publishing sadomasochistic novels written by storytellers from New York to Timbuktu. While Preston was happy editing other authors, I experienced in 1979 that he had a less than happy attitude that he was being edited at *Drummer* even though he had agreed to the edit. His friend, Lars Eighner, the author of *Travels with Lizbeth*, wrote: “Preston often told (wrote to) me that he needed a lot of editing. I thought he was being modest until I was given the task of editing the introduction [to Eighner’s book *Lavender Blue*], which was the first time I had ever seen his raw copy.” —Lars Eighner, “John Preston Goes in Search of an Author’s Lost Manuscript,” [www.DuskPeterson.com](http://www.DuskPeterson.com) July 2, 2011

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SUMMARY OF THE URBAN LEGEND:  
ANNE RICE AND THE *DRUMMER* SALON

In the twentieth anniversary issue of *Drummer* 188, editor Wickie Stamps created a brouhaha among the surviving diversity of *Drummer* authors, heirs, and Salonistas who were actually associated for twenty years with the magazine. Wickie Stamps committed the editorial faux pas of re-reprinting seven columns, approximately two *Drummer* pages, from *Beauty's Punishment* as if Anne Rice were representative of *Drummer*.

As much as I respect both Stamps and Rice, one must note that Anne Rice's byline as "Anne Rice" never appeared in *Drummer*. Her excerpts were bylined at a distance as "A. N. Roquelaure."

It was only in the "Editor's Note" on page 38 of *Drummer* 188, that Stamps pulled back the curtain and attributed the excerpt to "Ann [sic] Rice." Misspelled. Properly disclosing some alleged commercial deal with Rice's publisher, Plume, Stamps also included a display ad "in trade" for *Beauty's Punishment*, page 12.

The bottom line of my search of the internal evidence inside *Drummer* pages is that, historically, Anne Rice never wrote for *Drummer*, but was excerpted twice, with one of those excerpted selections repeated.

According to lore, when Anne Rice was born into an Irish-Catholic family, her bohemian mother named her Howard Allen O'Brien. She chose to be called *Anne* before she married Stan Rice. In 1985, was she conjuring on the name of the stylish actress Charlotte Rampling, star of the iconic S&M film *The Night Porter* (1974), when she chose to write the adult fiction of *Exit to Eden* as "Anne Rampling"?

In *Drummer*, again, she never appeared under her brand name, "Anne Rice," but only under her S&M pseudonym from which she seemed to keep a certain polite distance. Did she rather much divorce "A. N. Roquelaure" before renouncing vampires themselves upon her return to the Catholic Church in 1998? As a requivering Catholic myself, I can understand Rice's hedging her bets at a certain age. Her book, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005), is told from the viewpoint of the resurrected Jesus, who has trumped Rice's vampires as the True Immortal. Perhaps conflating phony Christianists with legitimate Christianity, in 2009 she apparently returned from Catholicism to the gay fold escorted by her son, author Christopher Rice.

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UNDER THE SNAKE SKIN OF HUMANS:  
GAY SUNSHINE PRESS, THE CUTTING EDGE, AND ILLNESS

On the West Coast in San Francisco, *Drummer* literature suited the former Catholic priest Winston Leyland, the seminal publisher, who in 1975, the year of *Drummer*'s birth, founded his Gay Sunshine Press which is the "oldest continuously publishing book house" of diverse gay literature and gay popular culture in the United States. His mandarin literary tastes included rough trade. He printed many photographs by Old Reliable in his books. In 1984, he put me under contract and began publishing three books of my leather writing first published and proved by test-marketing in *Drummer: Leather Blues: A Novel of Leatherfolk; Corporal in Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley and Other Stories*, the first ever collection of *Drummer* stories; and *Stand by Your Man and Other Stories*.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, several West Coast gay authors and playwrights, such as Mason Powell and George Birimisa, judged the marketing rhythms of serial publication in monthly magazines to be a better connection to eager fans than one-time publication of a single book. They turned their hopes to *Drummer* special-edition magazine-sized "books." *Leather Blues* and *Corporal in Charge* (both 1984) were the first two crossover titles bridging from *Drummer* to Gay Sunshine, from Embry's "magazine format books" to Leyland's "trade paperback books."

On August 1, 2002, the E-Newsletter of Calamusbooks.com, Volume II, #38, nailed this centrality of *Drummer* when it identified my professional persona as "the founding San Francisco editor-in-chief of *Drummer* magazine which, in its early issues, back in the late 1970s [Fritscher at *Drummer*: March 1977-December 1979], was a terrific contribution to the erotic literature of gay men—it even featured photos by Robert Mapplethorpe."

While I wanted *Drummer* to be cutting edge, it was a measure of Embry's *je ne sais quoi* that neither of my formative heroes, the *avant-garde* Andy Warhol nor the iconic leather filmmaker, Kenneth Anger, were ever mentioned or duly honored in *Drummer*. In a nasty bit, Warhol's film, *Bad*, was trashed in one snotty column in *Drummer* 15, page 62.

In all good dramas, sex and medical story arcs and unrequited love writhe under the snake skin of humans. During the manic-depressive 1970s when most gay people were fixing their homophobically wounded and newly uncloseted selves with uppers and downers, we were under the discipline to produce *Drummer* one word, one photo, one drawing, one page, one issue at a time, every thirty days, twelve times a year.

During twenty-four years, the monthly *Drummer* averaged an

issue every six weeks. Each deadline was a triumph against all odds. For instance, during my eyewitness tenure as editor-in-chief and as a longtime contributor, I noticed that the huge subtext of gay gender politics—given grass-roots voice in the subscribers' Sex Personals ads—both informed and deformed *Drummer*. Embry, ignoring the GPS directions of his demographic audience, never bothered to develop cues from the juicy Personals ads into reader-reflexive editorial stories and articles that entertained and informed their concerns.

Embry sadly ignored even applying his own experience. He had the fundamentalist fortitude of a cancer survivor who bravely never complained publicly about what he suffered privately, but his near-death experience hardly educated him to rise up and publish anything on gay spirituality, psychology, or health, even when HIV appeared on his watch. *Drummer* never mentioned social diseases until, in the late 1970s, I noticed a rise in illness among leathermen, and persuaded him to publish my column on gay health, "Dr. Dick: *Drummer* Goes to the Doctor," beginning in *Drummer* 21 (March 1978).

He wanted *Drummer* to live in denial of death. He wanted *eros* not *thanatos*.

He slowed down the evolution of gay culture and the evolution of the magazine. He failed to read his readers. Instead of embracing their ideas and concerns, he kept leathermen at a distance with the kind of LA camp that had created his Cycle Sluts cover.

Nevertheless, we staff were all pleased when Embry returned to the office with a grin on his always reddish face. He had a second lease on life. He had beaten death. He came smiling through, but, as he stood akimbo in the doorway, waiting for applause, blocking our progress, I thought: "Uh-oh, he's back, with a head full of those campy 1950s dialog balloons that he can't resist pasting down on sex photos, and that I have to pull off the flats before they go to the printer."

# DRUMMER

the leather fraternity

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France 16 NF  
Israel 14.00 Israeli Pounds  
Italy 2500 Lire/Japan 13 Yen  
Nederland 12 Fl.  
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