

The Ladies of the House of Love

The Rosenbach's Feminist & Queer Gothic Literature Book Club

Critical Reviews & Mentions of *Gaywyck* in the 1980's LGBTQIA+ Press

Duncan Mitchel, review of *Gaywyck*, *Gay Community News* vol. 8, no. 28 (February 14, 1981), Boston, Massachusetts.

The cover should tell you as much as you need to know about *Gaywyck*. In the background, a gloomy mansion crouches beneath lowering, foreboding skies; in the foreground, a darkly handsome man in formal dress rests one hand (the other grasps a walking-stick) on the shoulder of a fragile, apprehensive-looking blond youth while steel-gray waves crash on the rocks around them. "He was so innocent ... until he fell captive to the brooding master and sinister secrets of *Gaywyck*" - if that isn't enough to send you into paroxysms of laughter, you have my sympathy. Go on to the magazine rack, pick up the latest issue of *Honcho* or whatever, and do not reflect on experiences which are beyond your understanding.

[...] I should confess that the only Gothic romance I'd read hitherto was *Clara Reeve* by Leonie Hargrave (a nom de plume of Thomas M. Disch), which I also recommend for its gay-related content but which, like *Gaywyck*, is as much a joke on the genre as an example of the genre. But *Gaywyck*, like *Clara Reeve*, is more than a tour de force. Vincent Virga ... does more, it seems to me, than touch all the bases of a conventional genre of pulp romance (but that is for people who know the genre to say).

What I can say is that Mr. Virga writes pretty well - I did not, as I so often do, find myself mentally rewriting half his sentences for him - and he has written a novel about gay men which is fun to read, which is nice for a change. While I wouldn't go so far as to say that *Gaywyck* is "Politically Correct" (since our heroes are too good-looking and wealthy) it at least eschews misogyny and machismo. It even has a reasonably credible happy ending. That alone is enough to make me wish *Gaywyck* had been around when I was in high school. One could, I suppose, ask for more, but for now I'm counting my blessings.

BOOK REVIEW

GAYWYCK by Virpa

Despite the current lack of respect with which gothic novels are treated, the genre has a long - and occasionally illustrious - literary history. First appearing in the eighteenth century, the gothic novel greatly influenced many important writers of the romantic period. The gothic novel's use of eery situations and bizarre imagery appealed to the Romantics as an excellent means of exploring man's unconscious, emotional, dream world. It was during the Romantic period that the gothic novel reached its literary zenith in the works of Charlotte and Emily Bronte's Jane Eyre and Wathering Heights. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein also can be counted among Romantic gothic novels. As the nineteenth century grew older, however, the highly-charged emotional sensationalism of the gothic genre fell into disfavor.

Commonly, the gothic novel is considered to be for originality in this dying genre, Virja decided to add an unusual twist to the story: all the major characters and 90% of the minor characters in Gaywyck are - your guessed it - gay. Cornily enough, the lord of the manor is one Donough Gaylord.

Being very fond of the old gothic masterpieces, I found Gaywyck tedious and rather like a comic movie whose plot rests upon one funny gag that is repeated and repeated and repeated once again. The major problem with the novel is that its author seems so very serious about the "tragic" twists of fate his characters are victimized by, whereas the plot is riddled with cliches obvious to any experienced reader of the gothic genre. Still, if you don't expect great literature, you might find Virga's Gaywyck enjoyable fiction on a long rainy night.

Positive Alternative Lifestyles Newsletter vol. II, no. 8, Lynchburg, Virginia, April 24, 1981.
(PALS was an LGBT community support group based in Lynchburg.)

BOOKS

As lesbians and gaymen become more visible, the various aspects of our lives are exposed. Gay writers are exploring our history -- a history which has been completely ignored by society but which is full and vibrant. From the Christopher Street Best Seller List (February 1981), the #1 hardcover book is John Boswell's Christianity, Social Tolerance, and



John Boswell


Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (University of Chicago Press, 1980; \$27.50US, \$33.95CDN). As the title indicates, our relationship to the church is explored in great depth. A review in Newsweek also praised Boswell's extensive work. For an insight to our forefathers and foremothers, and how we were treated by societies in years past, read this book.

For some lighter fare, Gaywyck, by Vincent Virga (Avon Books, \$2.95 - paperback) is touted as "the first gay gothic novel". John Allec, writing in The Body Politic, said that he "enjoyed (it) because it's a fine and well-written novel." Gaywyck is #2 on CS's Best Seller Paperback List for February. So if gothic romance, lavender-style is your bag, you should enjoy this novel.

The Coming Out Stories, edited by Julia P. Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe, (Persephone Press, \$6.95) is a collection of 41 personal accounts of the experiences of lesbians from

Northern LAMBDA Nord Communiqué vol. II, no. 4 (April 15, 1981). (This publication seems to have been based in Halifax, Nova Scotia and covered LGBT happenings and issues in Canada and New England.)

Feminist Bookstore News



The Feminist Bookstore News

GAY MEN'S LIT

for Feminist Bookstores

by Donna Szeker
Giovanni's Room

Stonewall Inn Editions from St. Martin's Press: We've just received the first four titles in this handsome, uniform series of contemporary gay classics...

Buddies, by Ethan Mordden, 1987, 240 pp. \$7.95 pb. The 14 stories in this popular gay author's most recent offering revolve around the idea that men crave the friendship of other men, the non-erotic affection you can have only for your best buddy. With insight and a wonderful wit, Mordden plots a course through both gay and straight buddy relationships, calling up memorable characters and situations.

who feel that their Church has kept them from their faith, with the odious admonition, "Tell a lie for Christ."

LITERATURE AND POETRY

Gaywyck, by Vincent Virga (GMP), 1987, (orig. pub. 1980), 375 pp., \$7.95 pb. How we remember when Virga's **Gaywyck** was published, the first ever gay men's gothic romance complete with all the sinister trappings, the overblown passion and larger-than-life characters. This story of young Robert Whyte, hired at 17 to catalog the vast library at baronial Gaywyck, provides an attractive alternative to today's literary realism. Good fun.

Feminist Bookstore News vol. 10, no. 3 (October 1987). Note that the author worked at Giovanni's Room here in Philadelphia!

A Thirsty Evil, short stories by Gore Vidal. Gay Sunshine Press. Softcover, \$7.95. (Available for \$7.95 plus 75¢ postage/handling from Gay Sunshine Press, P.O. Box 40397, San Francisco, CA 94140.)

In *Christopher Street* a few years ago Gore Vidal made a curious remark to the always unfunny critic Dennis Altman: "I have an allergy to fag novels," G.V. claimed, and for once a homophobic statement from one of American homosexuals' leading champions sounded right.

What I suspect Mr. Vidal was referring to is the recent line of gay-exploitation novels that mass-market publishers have pushed onto the book market. First there was *Tory's* (about a dumb hustler who strikes it rich in Philadelphia); then *Wingmen*, by one Ensan Case, on the glories of gay war during the '40s; *Vermilion*, a book better remembered for its title than plot; and, of course, *Gaywyck*, the world's first and hopefully last gay Gothic novel.

Fitzgerald once observed that the true sign of genius lay in one's ability to entertain two conflicting and opposite thoughts at the same time. While Mr. Vidal might not like the source of this fine advice, his own career bears witness to this judgment. Thirty years ago, his "gay book," *The City and the Pillar*, earned four positive reviews. Today he discusses his reservations on gay books; specifically, the Homosexual Novel irritates him.

Many gay books, indeed, are not worth a damn, but even the serious titles of this genre can't be

Between the Covers

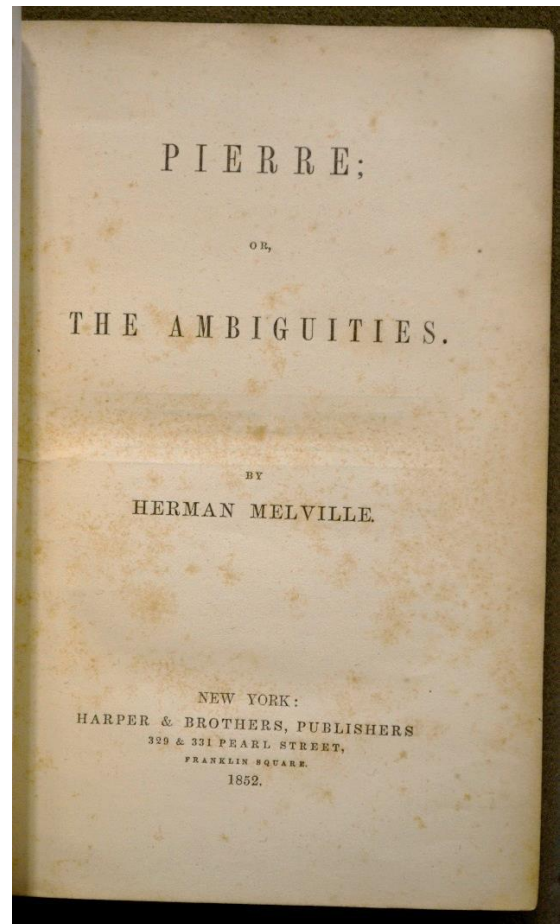
**Vidal's short
stories slake
reader's
thirst**

Philadelphia Gay News, February 19 - March 4, 1982.

Review of Herman Melville's *Pierre* in *The New York Day Book*, September 8, 1852

HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY.—A critical friend, who read Melville's last book, "Ambiguities," between two steamboat accidents, told us that it appeared to be composed of the ravings and reveries of a madman. We were somewhat startled at the remark; but still more at learning, a few days after, that Melville was really supposed to be deranged, and that his friends were taking measures to place him under treatment. We hope one of the earliest precautions will be to keep him stringently secluded from pen and ink.

Review of *Pierre* in *The New York Day Book*.



Melville, Herman. *Pierre; Or, the Ambiguities*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852. Rosenbach call no. AL1 .M531pi.