

The Lost Library: Gay Fiction Rediscovered

Tom Cardamone

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The Lost Library is a celebratory and poetic collection written for passionate readers by some of today's emerging gay literati. In his own contribution, a reminiscence on Douglas Sadowick's 1994 novel, *Sacred Lips of the Bronx*, editor Tom Cardamone remarks, "I was thrilled by the temporary power we instill a 'secret' with—to better make it ours, to reverse shame from a noose to a whip."

This sentiment flows in and out of the twenty-eight short essays, which include academic analyses of the merits of particular works of gay literature, reviews, and near love-letters to books (avid readers are likely to understand). As a community of contributors, the writers here bridge a gap between the recent post-Stonewall generation and today's younger gay readers. The book acts as an archive of these men's reading lives and holds up to the light many lesser-known authors in a loving and reverent way, examining short stories and novels that collectively shaped experiences of coming out, finding love, the AIDS epidemic, and other cultural elements of gay life in (predominantly) the last decades of the twentieth century.

Autobiographical novels, stories of teenage confusion and first crushes, mature romances, mysteries, and assorted other genres are illuminated. *The Lost Library* is organized by author of the work—a tactic which, although it successfully places the individual voice of these predecessors in the foreground, seems to detract from the book's usefulness as a historical document. Placing the books in order of first publication, as an alternative example, might have provided curious bibliophiles with a methodical means of navigating this list of "essential reads." Still, libraries will benefit greatly by including this volume in their collections. *The Lost Library* leads the way through the stacks to numerous titles now regretfully out of print; it makes its home in the world of fiction, acting as a treasure map to yesterday's hidden gems. Though the essays compiled here would be excellent introductions to the stories in a larger anthology, the tone of this collection strongly emphasizes the process of finding and cherishing the individual texts. The attention paid to the detail of cover art, to the contrasts between the presentations of various editions and re-printings, and the authors' frequent references to libraries and bookstore bargain-bins, suggest that sometimes the journey to a book is as important as the resulting read.

PATTY COMEAU (January / February 2010)

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