

deal—to be gay in the alternative rock world. Jeff Heiskell of the Judybats talked about his love of men and horses, Josephine Wiggs of the Breeders and Kate Schellenbach from Luscious Jackson came out as a pair, and same-sex kisses cropped up in videos by Veruca Salt, Stone Temple Pilots, and the Juliana Hatfield Three. Ex-Curve guitarist Debbie Smith, a fierce black lesbian, joined Echobelly, one of the hottest new English groups in years. Blur brought back the homo-happy early-'80s sound with "Girls and Boys," a song about girls who want boys who like boys to be girls who do boys—or something like that. Morrissey finally explicitly addressed a love song to a man. Multiplatinum punks Green Day toured with the militant homosexuals of Pansy Division. Queer punks united in the *OutPunk Dance Party* compilation to mourn the death of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain.

The dance-pop set was just as active. The Pet Shop Boys sang the Noël Coward oldie "If Love Were All" on one of their import singles, not changing the gender of the phrase "the more you love a man." Erasure released *I Say I Say I Say*, an elegiac song cycle mourning a lover who dies of AIDS. Alison Moyet turned Jules Shear's "Whispering Your Name"—originally about a heterosexual love triangle—into a bisexual tangle. Holly Johnson, the former voice of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, enumerated gay heroes on his single "Legendary Children (All of Them Queer)" and appeared on the latest



Mould: openly surly

album by Grammy-winning Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto singing straightforwardly about hate and homophobia.

Although Madonna asserted her heterosexuality while courting the hip-hop set, Kylie Minogue, the Australian Madonna, turned up the gay-friendly heat. Casa-blanca, the gayest and most successful disco label of the '70s, released

a priceless boxed set of queer-intensive dance-floor classics. DeeJay Junior Vasquez set clubs on fire with "Get Your Hands Off My Man."

Old-school homosexuals experienced heaven on earth during the long-awaited, overpriced tours by Barbra Streisand, who spoke eloquently on acceptance for gays, and Bette Midler, who spoke her mind on just about everything. Kitsch connoisseurs sent the camp-heavy sound track for *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* up the charts and reveled in a Carpenters tribute album featuring Sonic Youth and Shonen Knife.

The '80s revival nearly overtook the '70s revival as tours by the Pretenders and the Go-Go's turned into massive gay and lesbian bonding rituals. The icon of '70s love, Barry White, was quoted in *Entertainment Weekly* as saying, "I don't give a fuck whether you're gay or straight." In 1994, being gay in the pop music world was less of an obstacle than ever before. Someday soon it may even be an advantage.

—Barry Walters



TONY RUSSELL

John: Lion's king

Books

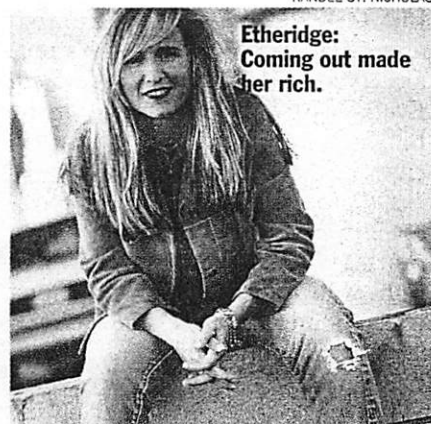
Dead poets society

People who follow gay lit will remember 1994 as the year the novel took a beating. Some of its most artful and dynamic practitioners died, including David Feinberg, Christopher Coe, and

Harry Kondoleon. Others, such as Sarah Schulman, Dorothy Allison, and Paul Monette, turned briefly to other forms, especially the essay. Well-known novelists like Felice Picano and Ethan Mordden were not ready in time to deliver their promising new manuscripts in 1994, while a few writers simply weren't in the mood to share. Dale Peck was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and ran away to France—or threatened to. David Leavitt got sideswiped by British writer Stephen Spender, whose remarks about Leavitt's allegedly plagiarized 1993 novel *While England Sleeps* may be the most famous words the nonagenarian poet and memoirist has ever published.

Finally, once and future novelist Larry Kramer attempted to drive a stake through the novel in the pages of *The Advocate*. Complaining in one of his columns that current gay novels aren't big enough, he wrote, "I can't tell you one novel by a gay man I've read in I can't remember how long that I can recall impressing me enough to say to myself, *Hey, this guy's big-time.*" Ever the literary size queen, Kramer seems to think that novel writing is strictly a man's job. Perhaps he missed Heather Lewis's *House Rules*, the year's most harrowing book. Lewis writes in a style so muscular and yet so supple that it makes a lot of self-consciously poetic work by "big-time" gay male novelists look merely pumped-up in comparison. Kramer may also have overlooked Dennis Cooper's astonishingly tender *Try* and Peter Cameron's affectionate and acerbic story of homosexuals in love and trouble, *The Weekend*.

Kramer waxes nostalgic for an era in which the novel was central to emerging gay culture and its writers were exclusively men whose vision of homosexuality comprised an aesthetic of male beauty and high European art. Yet the past year has proved that neither the novel nor the conscience of a group of oversexed Europhiles is central to the homosexual impulse—in life or in literature. Indispensable books by gays and lesbians published in the past year range from queer comic-strip artist Jennifer Camper's *Rude Girls and Dangerous Women* to editor Mark Thompson's *Gay Soul*, an alternately startling and



Etheridge:
Coming out made
her rich.

RANDEE ST. NICHOLAS

life-affirming collection of interviews on spirituality, to memoirist Lawrence D. Mass's *Confessions of a Jewish Wagnerite*, a funny and perceptive meditation on being American and Jewish and gay all at once.

The novel was never fashioned as a tool to render the whole landscape of gay and lesbian culture. Kramer should be grateful that in the past few years, historians and poets and humorists and biographers have emerged with talent enough to recreate entire epochs and to capture a single human exchange. Decades of gay male history were recovered by Yale University's George Chauncey in *Gay New York 1890-1940*, a book that manages to be both academic and sexy. According to Chauncey, drag queens were roaming the streets of Manhattan as early as the 1890s, while in 1910 immigrant men were having sex with each other in a Broadway bathhouse until they had enough money saved to send back home for their wives.

Chauncey covers half a century; poet Mark Doty conveys the yearning of a second half in his 1994 National Book Critics Circle Award-winning volume *My Alexandria*. Gay and lesbian poets tumbled out of their garrets this year fully formed, with breathtaking and diverse manuscripts in hand. In her new volume, *Winter Numbers*, and her *Selected Poems 1965-1993*, Marilyn Hacker's formalist poetry is flexible and fearless enough to address desire and death wisely and humorously. David Trinidad spins out postmodern lyrics and laments in his *Answer Song*, which addresses the nuances of loss, from Patty Duke's mad scene in *Valley of the Dolls* to poet Tim Dlugos's death from AIDS.

Life at the end of the 20th century is already so much like a bad novel that it hardly seems possible to squeeze a good novel out of it. Some of the most compelling gay and lesbian fiction writers published essay collections in 1994.



Dorothy Allison's *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class, and Literature*; Sarah Schulman's *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years*; Paul Monette's *Last*

Watch of the Night: Essays Too Personal and Otherwise; and David Feinberg's *Queer and Loathing: Rants and Raves of a Raging AIDS Queen* are books in which established novelists struggle poignantly to get the truth about their lives on paper without relying on the comforting conventions of fiction. Yet these writers bring all of their novelists' gifts to the essay form—a sense of story, an eye for detail, and an illumination of character that is missing from mere journalism.

Then there are writers like Paul Rudnick and David Sedaris who pick the essay form because it gives them an opportunity and an excuse to be funny. Rudnick may be the funniest man on the planet, especially when he is allowed to pose as film critic Libby Gelman-Waxner in *If You Ask Me*, a collection of pieces originally published in *Premiere* magazine. There is something delightfully subversive about Rudnick's finding a way to call Dennis Quaid "my spiritual fiancé" and make straight readers love him for it. But who couldn't love someone, man or woman, who notices that "Daniel Day-Lewis is Laurence Olivier with genitals"? Sedaris is more cerebral but no less delightful in his collection of stories and essays, *Barrel Fever*, in which when asked by a doctor whether he smokes, Sedaris drily replies, "Only cigarettes and pot."

However, for readers who still crave big novels, there is British author Alan Hollinghurst's second tome, *The Folding Star*. Hollinghurst has a reputation as a purveyor of high homosexual art, in part because his work, like much canonized male homosexual literature, involves sexually predatory white men on the prowl for dark-skinned boys to gratify them. A more authentic depiction of the



lives of black gay men shows up in James Earl Hardy's *B-Boy Blues*, which is about a couple of home boys who fall in love. There are still modestly sized but intensely pleasurable works of fiction available for readers searching not for volume but for truth. Poet and fiction writer Eileen Myles published a sublimely hectic, raucously casual collection of short stories, *Chelsea Girls*. Myles' stories of women in love with each other, high on booze and pills or down low in the streets of downtown Manhattan or working-class Boston, is simply the most perfect book of the year.

There you have it: Larry Kramer's reading list. To end at the beginning, this year in review is dedicated to David Feinberg, who died in November, a few weeks short of his 38th birthday. David has been eulogized in the straight and gay press as an AIDS martyr and HIV activist, but he thought of himself primarily as a novelist. The week before he died, he was taking notes for a viciously revealing family saga, his entry into the stakes for the most relentlessly self-aggrandizing faggot novel of the century. He called it *My Secret History*. He picked the title not because he liked it, he said, but because Larry Kramer had already taken for his latest play the most perfect name for every gay male novel ever written: *The Destiny of Me*. A novel, after all, is the record of a single voice. However loud, however eloquent, however timely, however heart-stoppingly short-lived: Clearly, a single voice is not enough for us now.

—John Weir

The reviewers...

- Jennie Livingston wrote and directed 1991's *Paris Is Burning*.
- Garrett Glaser covers entertainment, media, and popular culture for KNBC-TV in Los Angeles.
- Brendan Lemon is cultural editor at *The New Yorker*.
- Barry Walters is the pop-music critic for the *San Francisco Examiner*.
- John Weir is the author of *The Irreversible Decline of Eddie Socket*.