

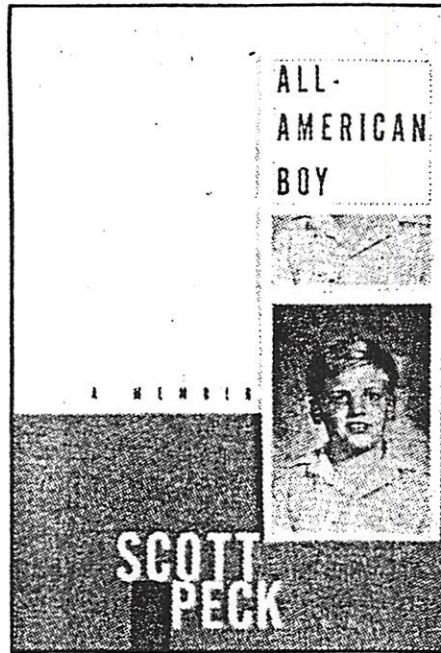
# American as apple pie

by Christopher Jones

In the 1970s, a Gay couple watched from a window of their Florida home while a small child crept up to their car and tossed handfuls of religious brochures into the half-open window as part of a 700 Club-style campaign orchestrated by his zealot mother and alcoholic stepfather. Now that boy, Scott Peck, has written a book about growing up in this obviously dysfunctional family.

Peck subtitles his narrative "A Memoir," but according to Webster's, a memoir is "objective and anecdotal in emphasis rather than inward and subjective" (like an autobiography). In *All-American Boy*, Peck has written two texts which would be better housed in separate bindings. The autobiography begins when young Peck retreats from his troubled family life into a testosterone-filled fantasy world of knights, barbarians, gods, and his estranged biological father, a Marine. After his mother dies, Peck struggles to confront his sexuality, his religiosity, and his unstable relationship with his real father. The only section of *All-American Boy* which truly qualifies as "memoir" is the final 10-page bit, which briefly covers the controversial 1993 testimony of Peck's father, Col. Fred Peck, during Senate hearings on Gays in the military.

As an author, Peck lacks restraint. He is prone to what Camille Paglia calls "diarrhea prose," and he tries to justify this



malady by packaging his refuse in italics. Italics are an effective tool, and Peck sometimes uses them to his advantage; in discussions with Sandy (Peck's lesbian school teacher who constantly encourages him to come out), conversations with his real father, and even, during his sermon at Bible college, italicized text reveals the paradox between what Peck says and feels — between the text and subtext.

But Peck fails readers when he hides behind nebulous emotions while neglecting narrative logistics. We're left with an italicized and impressionistic jabberwocky that costs \$22.

After miles of italics and three suspense-building attempts by Sandy to persuade Peck to come out, the one-sentence finale is less than thrilling: "Because she [Sandy] knows I am gay and she is proud, proud, proud of me." The reader experiences similar disappointment with Peck's one-line acknowledgment, after 225 pages of Kafkaesque foreboding, that he is "suddenly glad to be Gay." Furthermore, there is no closure of the psychic rift that separates Peck from his father, even though this is one of the driving elements of suspense.

This book would have been better had it focused solely on Peck's troubled relationship with Southern fundamentalist heritage, because this is the only issue which is clearly confronted and resolved by the text's *welcome end*. ▼