

1997

Berendt, John - *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

Entertaining [as is the film].

Berne, Suzanne - *A Crime in the Neighborhood*

Wonderful book. A boy is killed in wooded area near a mall in Maryland. A neighborhood girl keeps a journal of events. Concept of crime expands to include the little girl who falsely accuses a neighborhood man. Neighbors shun him, broadening her crime.

Best American Poetry 1996 - Adrienne Rich, editor

Some strong poems but not consistent throughout [it seems to me].

Busch, Frederick - *Girls*

A mystery, but not in the usual sense. The whodunit unfolds at many different levels.

Butler, Robert Olen - *Tabloid Dreams*

Great story collection, especially "Titanic Victim Speaks Through Waterbed," "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover," and "JFK Secretly Attends Jackie Auction."

Cameron, Peter - *The Half You Don't Know*

Excellent collection of stories, especially "Meeting and Greeting Area," and "Not the Point."

Capote, Truman - *The Grass Harp*

Clark, Robert - *In the Deep Midwinter*

Excellent "mystery," though not in the whodunit sense.

Dixon, Melvin - *Vanishing Rooms*

Good gay literary novel by African-American writer.

Edgerton, Clyde - *Where Trouble Sleeps*

Great storyteller.

Friedman, Steve - *The Gentleman's Guide to Life (GQ)*

Fluff, but I love fluff. I started subscribing to *GQ* in college at which time I would pore over photos of men in white linen suits I couldn't have afforded in a million years. Mostly read magazine and journals and short stories in December of 1997.

Hemingway, Ernest - *The Sun Also Rises*

Not the tour de force that *A Farewell to Arms* is, but one can see he's on his way. He has the same story to tell again and again

Ishiguro, Kazuo - *The Unconsoled*

Did not finish. Tried. I really tried. I had 80 pages to go and just couldn't spend the time. It read like the first draft of a very good high school writer. Written in real time. The first-person narrator hardly ever slept or went to the bathroom. Flat. Little character development. Not even close to the quality of *Remains of the Day*. [Later I read that I was not alone in thinking of the novel as inscrutable, but also a certain element is now reconsidering. My problems with it probably have more to do with my inability to grasp its many riches. Will try again some time.]

Jackson, Shirley - *Just an Ordinary Day*

Just some ordinary stories though some are above average [probably an ordinary observation made on an ordinary day when I could not perceive the extraordinary gifts of this writer].

Kanon, Joseph - *Los Alamos*

Good but doesn't live up to the hoopla in *PW*. Good as a whodunit but not much more. Fun to recognize the geography of the area I've visited so many times.

Kogawa, Joy - *Obasan*

Great novel about Japanese-Canadians who are interred in the interior part of Canada during WWII, losing all property, never to be retrieved. Lovely extended metaphor: "Like threads of old spider webs, still sticky and hovering, the past waits for us to submit, or depart. When I least expect it, a memory comes skittering out of the dark, spinning and netting the air, ready to snap me up and ensnare me in old and complex puzzles. Just a glimpse of a worn-out patchwork quilt and the old question comes thudding out of the night again like a great moth. Why did my mother not return? After all these years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response" (30-1).

Leavitt, David - *While England Sleeps*

I enjoyed the novel at many levels: the coming-of-age aspect, coming out in England in the 1930s, the history, the confessional tone of the narrator.

Quickly read Gary Glickman's story, "Spirit House," which is ostensibly about

David L. when he and Glickman were together. Funny, the characters seemed oddly similar, regardless of the author. Brian B. & “my friend” (unnamed) were both callous, self-absorbed, interested in superficial sex.

I believe Glickman may be the better writer though Leavitt may be more gifted in some ways. Who knows? Perhaps they are only different, each better in his own way. [Saved it, don't you think?]

[The reader must read Leavitt's introduction in which he tells all about the lawsuit that Stephen Spender filed against Leavitt for using certain material about his life without permission.]

McCauley, Stephen - *The Man of the House*

Well written but predictable. One feels there is a serious novelist just under the surface of this work [in my considered opinion].

Ondaatje, Michael - *The English Patient*

Second reading. Still holds up. Still fades, or defies the memory to recall the narrative, it is so evanescent. I say this as a compliment. This time I deliberately tried to trace the structure of the novel, and I couldn't do it, could not find the scaffolding. Ondaatje has created a marvelous novel, one that will last the ages.

Smiley, Jane - *Duplicate Keys*

Murder mystery but not in the conventional sense. Much more personal with regard to the characters who remain. Metaphor of “key” resonates in a number of ways throughout novel. There exists an “unlocking” of the characters' relationships. Again, a completely different voice, approach, etc. from the other two books of hers that I've read.

Smiley, Jane - *Moo*

A great send-up of the university system, the agricultural university, and the world as a whole. A great cast of characters who are thinly drawn without being too cardboard in nature. Smiley possesses a great control of the language. Completely different voice than *A Thousand Acres* as it should be. But many authors can't seem to manage such a shift or change.

Van Dantzig, Rudi - *For a Lost Soldier*

Finally got the English translation through the mail from Gay Men's Press (British). Loved the book as much if not more than the film. Plot is slightly different. The book portrays the sexual experiences as being brutal (as they naturally would be between a twelve year-old and a young man), but Jeroen is ambivalent in both: wants the attention in spite of the pain. Feels a deep sense of longing and loss when he cannot locate Walt near the end [perhaps a universal longing among pre-

homosexual boys].

Other differences: no liberation parties in Friesland, only in Amsterdam; no photo with Jeroen's "family" in Friesland; Jeroen's mother washes the small photo of Walt left in the shirt pocket, not Mem, his foster mother, in Friesland; the "luxurious" abandoned house of the film (Nazi officers' quarters) is much more primitively portrayed in the novel, a mere mattress on the floor, no shower, only a basin and pitcher.

I cried. The story evokes in me my own longing—perhaps universal among some gay men—for a beautiful strong young man who will love and protect the boy me.

Wells, Rebecca - *Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood*

Sequel to *Little Altars Everywhere*. Explores the WWII generation of the Ya Ya's (Sidda's mother, et. al.). Wells is so adept at creating a narrative with a variety of sources (letters, scrapbooks) and with POV. Powerful scenes: Viviane runs away from her children (and the preceding scene of baby shit and vomit from four sick children housed in one room); when the Ya Ya's recreate for Sidda the moment when Viviane goes "crazy" and beats all her children with a belt. Reader is so torn. Knows the mother's POV, but also the children's; and the scene when Viviane and Sidda are reunited as mother/daughter and exchange gifts. Very moving. I want to say it was sentimental, but no, just very moving.

"Well, I'm not a Goddamn frog, Sidda. You can't figure me out. It's *life*, Sidda. You don't figure it out. You just climb up on the beast and *ride*" (47).

Wells, Rebecca - *Little Altars Everywhere*

Each chapter is written in first person and narrated by a different member of a family. Author is able to create separate voices and thus create character and at the same time integrate them all into one narrative. Excellent. Better than her sequel, I believe (*Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood*).

Wolff, Tobias - *The Night In Question*

Another great set of stories: "Powder" - Very short. Boy's father takes him skiing against mother's wishes on Xmas eve. "Flyboys" - Coming of age. "The Other Miller" "The Chain." Title resonates throughout collection in several ways. "Firelight" Great sense of voice, a child's voice that is so adult, an adult's voice that still has a trace of the child's in it.