

FEATURES

Features Editor:
Lisa Toth
lisatoth@dailymerald.com

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'Mildly Perverted' author offers candid tales


WHAT'S NOT TO LOVE?

The Adventures of a Mildly Perverted Young Writer

JONATHAN AMES

"Hilarious... Jonathan Ames has displayed an unusual ability to take crack-smoking, balding and Oedipal fixation and whip them up into an elegant, comic meringue."
—The New York Times Book Review





■ Jonathan Ames has made himself known with his dry humor and casual approach to telling his stories

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

"I had my first colonic the other day, and for me, it was a dream come true."

Writer Jonathan Ames does such an incredible job finding opening sentences that it seemed only appropriate to use one of his. His rare ability to write casually about having tubes stuck up his butt with the intent of washing out the bowels is captivatingly honest.

The above quote begins a story called "I Shit My Pants in the South of France," one of 33 vignettes in his latest book, "What's Not To Love? — The Adventures of a Mildly Perverted Young Writer" (Vintage Books, \$13). Like his opening sentences, Ames picks his titles (both of the book and the stories) with care. The book's title perfectly explains the inexplicable material it contains.

However, "Mildly Perverted" may be an understatement, depending on individual tolerance for filth. Ames writes about sleeping with transsexuals who

have had "the surgery," calling homosexual phone-sex lines, endorsing his friend's brand of prosthetic vaginas and engaging in more masturbation than a sailor could ever fathom.

If it were fiction, it would only take a mildly perverted person to imagine the material. But this book is not fiction. It is a memoir. These are his personal experiences and thoughts.

Somehow, Ames is able to take these events with which most people would not claim association and tell them openly and comfortably. And it is *fuh-nee!*

But this book is not entirely new material to the public. Many of the stories are columns he wrote for the New York Post. Still, the small vignettes can be read over and over without losing their punch. Ames's dry humor is covered up by the exotic nature of what he writes about.

The most enjoyable thing about his writing style is his frankness. That's why the leads are so good. He writes about topics in a simple way that instantly connects readers to his memories in a very personal way.

In the story "Roxanne of the Jersey Shore," he writes the following passage: "She was only sixteen and her shirt came off and her erect nipples were like extra-long rubber pencil erasers."

Ames was 18 years old when this happened, so it's not as perverted as it could be. Later in life, he tends to just *think* about ravaging 16-year-old girls. Still, his topics get much more graphic. Ames writes so well that his perversions don't seem perverted. Instead of isolating himself with his stories, he draws readers in and makes them feel empathy for him. Here we get back to the title question: "What's Not to Love?"

Even though Ames is only talking about himself, the book has a counseling quality. Ames' openness with his perversions by default makes it OK for other people to be perverted. It's like Kahlil Gibran's "The Prophet," only for perverts. Both books' chapters stand alone and can be turned to for guidance in times of need. Ames's chapter "An Erection is a Felony" could be called "On Voyeurism."

Ames is not condoning his actions — just telling a story. He tells of his negative consequences (such as venereal diseases and an illegitimate son) as much as his triumphs.

So, if anybody gets arrested for indecent exposure, don't say, "Jonathan Ames made me do it."

Mason West is the senior Pulse reporter at the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at masonwest@dailymerald.com.

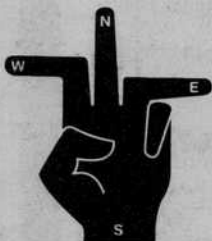
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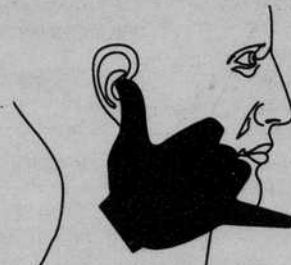
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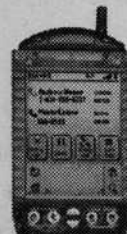
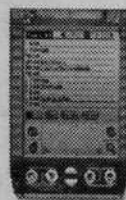
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