

## Rural reality, Southern style

by Jay Brown

*Restless Rednecks; Gay Tales of a Changing South.*, by Roy F. Wood. Grey Fox Press, San Francisco. \$7.95.

Growing up gay in a rural area is common to many people. Some of us endured the isolation and the privation from kindred spirits only as long as we were forced to. I hated it and have vowed never to subject myself to more than a minimal amount of time to the bucolic. So it was with some trepidation that I began reading *Restless Rednecks*.

Here was a gay man, in his preface no less, actually professing to like rural Georgia. And then there was, of course, the "rednecks" in the title. But I read Wood's book of short stories in one sitting, (well, I did skip one story I had already read in *Manifest*) and I was captivated by the range and depth of Wood's work.

As is the wont of gay men everywhere, Wood's protagonists are involved in a sex-hunt in one form or other, but not all the sexhunts come to satisfactory conclusions. And that's the beauty of these stories. Wood has managed to make his sexhunters real people; people to whom the sexhunt is just another part of their lives. They are introspective people firmly based in reality.

In the opening story, *Next Time*... reality's meeting the hunk of a lifetime in a small town tavern, have him follow you home, and then not being able to make a move.

"Next time he would overcome the uneasiness, the apprehensions that others forced on his consciousness. Next time he would seize the initiative and seek happiness no matter what came of it. Oh yes, next time the ending would be different he promised himself as he entered the empty house. Next time..."

In a number of stories reality is stultifying fundamentalist religion. A young evangelist beats a hasty retreat when the man he hopes to convert turns the table on him in *The Visitation*. Henry Taylor's act of desecration brings unexpected results in *The Shrine*.

"Henry wanted to commit an act which would show his utter contempt for the narrow-minded community and its unreasonable religion which cloaked the village in a shroud of respectability. Like the dead, of whom only good was ever spoken, religion, with its syruplike sweetness was held to be above reason. It gradually turned into a molasses-style flypaper, catching and holding every unfortunate soul who touched it."

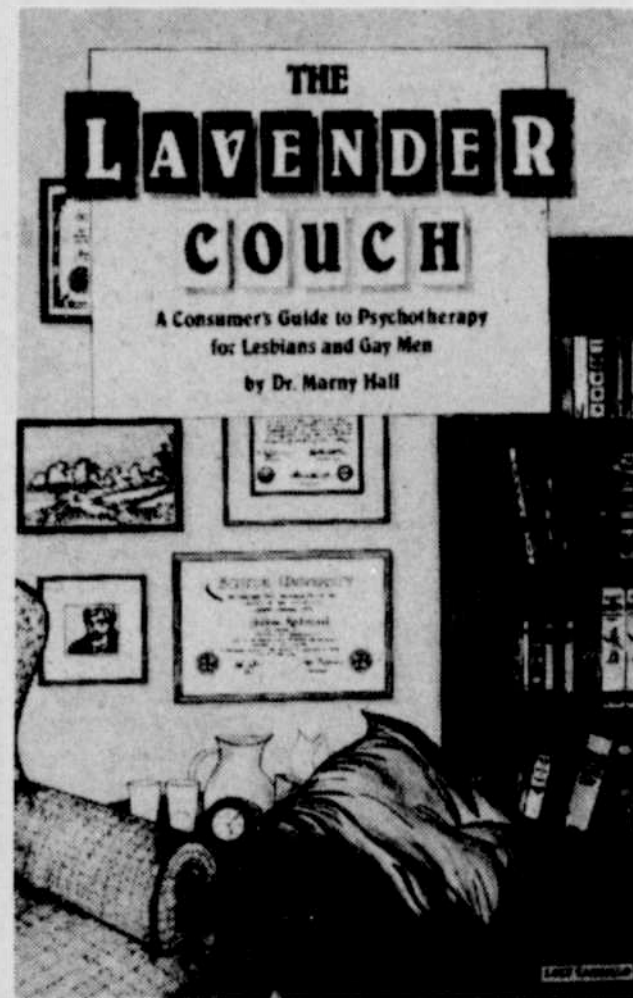
Some of the stories come to very satisfactory ends, for they are as Wood says, "Stories designed to be read with one hand." In *A Picture of Rex*, an ex-prisoner, meets the only man to have answered his letters. A loser

becomes a winner in *Nursing Papa*. The orgy in *Masters of the Ceremony* is probably the devout fantasy of many a rural loner. For that's reality, too. Our fantasies do come true sometimes.

Wood's one-handed stories are not overblown descriptions of various acts of penetration, etc., although the situations do get pretty intense at times. Woods has created well-developed and complicated characters and he takes the reader into his characters' minds. We know these people and we also know that Wood cares for them.

In his preface Wood says, "(The stories) Should, all in all, make you feel good about being a gay man!" I say he achieved his goal.

## The lavender couch



*The Lavender Couch: A consumer's guide to psychotherapy for lesbians and gay men*, by Mary Hall. Alyson Publications, Inc. 1985. \$7.95.

Reviewed by Carol S. Becker, Ph.D. Licensed Psychologist, Berkeley, CA Associate Professor of Human Development, California State University, Hayward

Marny Hall's new book is a model of clear and thorough information, given in a compassionate manner, to lesbians and gay men looking for a psychotherapist. Her presentation combines the best of two worlds: 1) the world of the experienced therapist who can

provide a balanced view of the diverse approaches, methods and issues involved in the psychotherapy process; 2) the world of diverse lesbians and gay men who are seeking to affirm their identities and growth processes by entering therapy.

Through the use of vignettes, Hall stands with lesbians and gay men at each choice point in the search for a therapist, and walks through a variety of problems and solutions with them. Together we explore "Why would I go to a psychotherapist?" "What kind of a therapist am I looking for?" "How do I negotiate my needs with my therapist?" and "What happens if I become angry at or attracted to my therapist?" Rather than giving prescriptions for action, the author thinks through the issues that are important in each of these matters. The result is a guide which empowers lesbians and gay men to test the therapeutic relationship and to risk being themselves within it. An important strength of this book is Hall's belief that we can find psychotherapists who will help us affirm our unique identities as lesbians and gay men and also provide us with excellent psychotherapeutic assistance with our life problems.

## Moll Cutpurse, Her True History

*Moll Cutpurse, Her True History*, by Ellen Galford. Firebrand Books, 1985. \$7.95. 219Pp.

Reviewed by Lee Lynch

Firebrand Books has done American lesbian literature a service by issuing *Moll Cutpurse* on this side of the Atlantic. It's a novel full of tradition, both literary and lesbian. But lest that sound too somber, let me quickly agree with the back cover blurb which describes the book as a "delightful lesbian romp." That it is.

Moll was a real person. The novel is narrated by her fictional lover, Bridget, to correct misinformation per.need by a male who also wrote Moll's life. In the tradition of the historical novel, real as well as fictional characters mingle in the book. The playwrights Middleton and Dekker, for example, whose comedy "The Roaring Girl" (1611) was based on Moll Cutpurse, appear by name in a tale about the opening of that play.

Moll Cutpurse is a rogue, the picaroon of picaresque tradition. Though she fits that description: "a conspicuous dissenter from established moral and social codes," she does not exclusively indulge in the satire usually associated with the picaresque novel. She's an honest (in her own way), outrageous (in the way of many dykes today), and lovable lesbian, more intent on surviving the society that seeks to limit her to female roles than on intellectual game-playing.

In following the novel's episodic structure,

we witness Moll coming out, mating and living merrily through adventure after Robin Hood adventure. As in today's lesbian literary tradition, she, Bridget, and a host of female cronies, war against the stereotypically (satirically?) drawn men. Bridget is an apothecary dealing in herbs and her aunt is a gatherer and grower. In a typical episode, the neighboring farmer attempts to oust the elderly aunt with accusations of witchcraft in order to take over her land. One's sense of the times is enhanced when Moll, unable to champion the woman, at least aids her escape in a ploy that not only uses the farmer's own horse and cart against him, but turns his fears around to her own god use in part payment for passage on a ship whose captain begs the "witch" to provide a good sailing wind.

At some point I found myself missing the emotional impact I've come to expect of the lesbian novel (even if it's only despair) and I began to fault Galford. Then I realized that very lack is an element of this traditional writing. The picaroon is a "flat character," not "all round," who does not develop through her romps, but is an instrument, instead, of description and commentary, a travel guide through her society.

Moll, though, is much more than that. She's a strong model who I found validating. I may not have been a cutpurse growing up, or boisterous, or streetwise, but I sure as hell wore boys' clothes every chance I got and swaggered like Moll. To watch that swagger take its course three hundred years ago and to feel the strength of Moll, her gall, her staying power, is to recognize my own ancestor, at least, my own tradition.

Nor was Moll the first of the line. There was at least one picaresque female cross-dresser before her, an ex-nun named Catalina de Erauso who lived from 1592 until approximately 1624 and inspired an earlier work.

Literate, lively, true-to-life, Galford's *Moll Cutpurse* was fun to read, and an important work, both extending and exploring a lesbian literary tradition unacknowledged, but as lively as that rogue Moll herself.



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