

improved, although the eye infection has reactivated itself. Still, we've saved the vision in my right eye. Actually, I was feeling much better until all this happened. The Foscarinate I take now for the eye means I can't take the amphotericin-B as an anti-fungal, since two and a half years ago. I'm on a once-a-week I.V., can't keep weight on—my stomach is meanwhile filled up with yeast. Plus the colitis caused by the antibiotics. I've learned that if the disease doesn't kill you, the medicine will."

And then he up and did a book tour for *Last Watch of the Night*. Can you imagine? Plus sitting for an interview with Charlie Rose on PBS. In addition, Monette attended graduation ceremonies at the City University of New York to accept an honorary degree, which will match the two other such degrees he's received from Wesleyan University and SUNY/Oswego. "Those were interesting in that I had to win the students over from their hostile reactions. I gave the graduation speech; I talked about what it means to live in a pluralistic society—and I spent only six minutes doing it—my shortest speech ever. I was very popular after that."

As there's no place to hide when you're up front and a leader, Monette takes as much as he gives in the gay political wars. His tirades against the Catholic Church's stance on lesbian and gay people and on AIDS, and his fury about the roadblocks the conservative Republican administrations of Reagan and Bush put in the way of HIV research, obviously fuel his will to live. That and his outrage at the "neo-cons"—what he calls the gay neo-conservatives who attack him—men such as Bruce Bower, who, in *A Place at the Table*, wrote a 10-page diatribe against Monette, and softies like Richard Rodriguez, for his constant defense of the pope, and others, who apologize for being gay. Monette insists, "They are the stereotypes who want so hard to be respectable that they ignore what we have achieved at the level of community—as opposed to the way they condemn us for the darkness of our subculture. While the debate is useful between lefties—like me, Larry Kramer and Randy Shilts—and these other conservative gay men, ad hominem attacks on people are unnecessary: They're mean."

Some of the attacks and the debates, of course, are honest differences of opinion between thinking adults; some are just plain envy. Monette, like Shilts did, is making some big bucks with his writing. Winning the National Book Award for *Becoming a Man*, helped propel sales, as well as his having been nominated for the same award for *Borrowed Time*. Unhappily, success can breed jealousy, fear and anger. "I was startled that I won the National Book Award [in 1992]. I don't even remember getting to the table and giving a speech. And doing the publicity at that time was exhausting because I'd had AIDS for a year. But it [*Becoming a Man*] has had more impact on our people as a whole than anything else, including *Borrowed Time*. *Becoming a Man* speaks to so many, including women and families. I get a lot of mail, especially from mothers who've become illuminated [by it]. I was very careful to use false names for many of the people in the book; I didn't want to out anybody in it. I really wanted it to be about outing oneself. I desperately wanted it to be the book I couldn't read at [school at] Andover or what wasn't in [books by] Kraft-Ebbing. As good as it is as a play, *Boys in the Band* was terribly upsetting to me at the time. Seeing the movie by myself was a mistake, because it reinforced the negativity of being gay for me. Now I'm glad I'm here to tell my story. And the new essays in the book are the most of me that I've been willing to reveal. I was concerned about where should I start, so I decided to open with the essay on the dog

[Puck] without sounding stupid and mawkish. I never knew until I finished one essay what the next one would be—these are stories I've been waiting all my life to tell. And now the straight press is discovering us, as if we had just showed up from Mars. Our own lesbian and gay press has been working since Stonewall to say something about AIDS; the straight press had said fuck-all."

Last year, during the March on Washington, Monette was chosen to give the National Book Week speech at the Library of Congress. "My speech went over well to the largest crowd they've ever had. Mind you, I was speaking to the converted, but I said things which put it into historical perspective, a history which has been stolen from us. About the fragility of the printed word, and how ignorant historians expunge things from the record. And before you know it, the Catholic Church burns all the pagan texts—this Nazi pope and his Council of Evils at the Vatican. But truly, the most evil of them all are the Protestant fundamentalists."

Angry though he may be at the thoughtlessness of the religious right and its persecutory zeal against gay men and lesbians, one of the essays, "My Priests," shows another side to him. "What was illuminating about that essay was that there are holy people about. As an atheist, I have a spiritual sense to me, and I can be moved by good people around me. The Starcross Community in Northern California, which takes in babies with AIDS, is a good example."

Monette has buried two lovers, Roger Horwitz and Stephen Kolzak, both dead from the side effects of AIDS. He's been in a stable relationship with Winston Wilde, 36, a Los Angeles native, since 1990. Wilde has begun working in the last year to complete a bachelor's degree at Antioch/L.A., on his way to becoming a clinical psychologist. Monette says, "I've pushed him to do this: I

didn't want him to sit around and just take care of me. It's wonderful for him to be in school with grown-ups, using his life's experience. In truth, I couldn't do these book tours without him. He keeps me going—takes care of arrangements and keeps me from getting overtired and overbooked. He's a gentle man, all grown and cute, with a heart of gold. He has such a

sense of excitement of the world and eagerness of life and experiences. He was so much fun to be with in Italy. It's wonderful to share the growth of gay cultures—we came out the same year, me at 27 and he at 16."

Monette just keeps on going. "I don't want to hide my HIV or AIDS from anyone. Self-hatred is so much a part of others who've died from it: [Rudolph] Nureyev died with a lie on his lips, like Liberace. Somehow they don't have to be upfront, even while dead. Nureyev's doctor wanted to tell the truth; but he [Nureyev] was in denial, and that makes a mockery of the loss of so many of our friends who died so early. His doctor decided he couldn't keep the lie going and has since talked about the truth of his death."

Monette just keeps writing, too. He has a major piece coming out in *The Los Angeles Times*, "Afterwards," an essay about the state of the gay and lesbian union after Stonewall. In addition, a new book of poems published by St. Martin's Press is coming in August, *West of Yesterday, East of Summer*.

As he says at the end of one of his essays, "Just remember. You are not alone." As simple a piece of sagacious advice as you could get. Monette emerges as an icon, a sage, a mentor to our homophile or queer community.

Last Watch of the Night, by Paul Monette. Harcourt Brace, 1994; \$22.

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