

BOOKS

COME HITHER: A COMMONSENSE GUIDE TO KINKY SEX
By Dr. Gloria G. Brame. Fireside, 2000; \$13 softcover.

This is not a leisurely, lazy Sunday kind of book. The playful clip art icons of whips, blindfolds and handcuffs on *Come Hither's* cover are certainly cute, but also quite deceiving. Once you crack into the text, you'll realize Dr. Gloria G. Brame is more about business than camp.

In a self-described confessional in the first chapter, Introductory Kink, Brame reminisces about writing her first kink directory, *Different Loving: The World of Sexual Dominance and Submission*. She says her goal in penning that book was to provide readers with a solid, factual source of SM information, an alternative to the flighty, confused writings of the past. *Come Hither* appears to be an extension of that idea.

The bulk of the book reads like an encyclopedia or a dictionary. Brame includes a catalog of fetishes, a list of top torture toys and techniques, and an intense 15-page chapter called Erotic Pain, among many other areas of study.

The information is interesting, if a little dry (for a kinky sex book), and Brame seems a little long-winded toward the end. Also, Brame admittedly does not know much or care to write about the lesbian SM experience. In a chapter called Sexual Dominants, she writes: "I don't feel it's fair for me, coming from a heterosexual experience of SM, to try to explore in any depth what it is like to be a lesbian SMer or to advise lesbians on concerns particular only to lesbians. Authors such as Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin have already done important work in this area, and should be considered primary sources. Anything I'd say here could only be a pale imitation of their incisive observations on the lesbian leather experience."

If you're a lesbian, you might want to take the author's advice. —Katy Davidson

PICTURES AND PASSIONS: A HISTORY OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS
By James M. Saslow. Viking, 1999. \$39.95 hardcover.

From the Stone Age to Stonewall, the development of material culture is, in part, revealed through the art of its people, the myriad physical objects through which individuals and societies symbolize and communicate feelings and values. The continuum of emotions between people of the same sex, from homosocial friendship to homoerotic intimacy in genital passion, has provided charged subject matter for artists across the globe and throughout history.

In *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts*, James M. Saslow takes the reader, and viewer, on a gay-themed art history journey. The subject matter is predominantly male, and the author indicates that



"the relative scarcity of art by or about lesbians reflects male domination of the cultural record."

Saslow provides images of Perso-Median eighth century B.C. seals depicting two men copulating, as well Turkish, Chinese, European and American examples of art depicting overt homosexual themes. Accompanying the images are intelligent commentaries on contemporary cultural influences and political forces that helped shape the particular artwork.

The first of its kind, this art history treatise is an important volume in the queer historical record. Through its study, we can appreciate the diversity through the ages and open ourselves to our diversity today. This is not the last word on our visual and symbolic queer history, but the first. —LP

BAR STORIES
Edited by Scott Brassert. Alyson Publications, 2000; \$12.95 softcover.

A publishing exec who lives in Los Angeles, Scott Brassert has put together an anthology that comes off like a Ripley's *Believe It or Not* quip.

Except that he's telling you it's all true. OK, the short works in *Bar Stories* are not all preposterous; some of them are rather boring in their believability. To be honest, most of them fall somewhere in the middle: a little exaggerated perhaps, but true enough.

Out of 32 stories in the collection, there's a goodly number that contain explicit sex, but far fewer than one might expect from gay men writing about their experiences in and around bars. (Maybe gay male culture only appears to be sex-obsessed after it's filtered through market research?)

There are at least two heart-wrenching tales of love lost, including Kevin Bentley's "Do You Believe I Love You?" and Gene Michael Higney's "Who Is Hansen Waiting For?" (No, it's not about the prepubescent boy band.) "One for the Road" by M. Christian, on the other hand, is just plain depressing.

Mark Macdonald's "No-Fun Club Kid Turns 30" is damn near incomprehensible; Ernest McLeod's "Post-Communist Bar Trilogy" is way too long; and Blaise Bulot's "Adventure at the Phoenix" is kinda disgusting.

And yet, this isn't a bad anthology—the majority of the stories are satisfactory—it's just that none of them really stand out. With one exception: "Five Nights" by Ian-Andrew McKenzie. The tale sticks out not so much because it's about an abusive relationship (there are others in *Bar Stories*) but because it's about cowboys. I don't usually go for the boots 'n' spurs scene, but it's just about the only scenario that hasn't been overdone to death in various erotic fiction anthologies. Refreshing, even if a little peculiar.

—Christopher D. Cuttone

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