

BOOKS



LOVE SPEAKS ITS NAME: GAY AND LESBIAN LOVE POEMS
 Edited by J.D. McClatchy.
 Knopf, 2001; \$12.50
 hardcover.

What a treat this little gem of a book is. *Love Speaks Its*

Name: *Gay and Lesbian Love Poems* is small and portable yet packed with variety.

J.D. McClatchy's selections cover the entire range of heartfelt emotion. Arranged by subject, headings include Longing, Looking, Loving, Ecstasy, Anxiety and Aftermath. We all have been to most of these places.

McClatchy chose works from every possible source and age. The poems of ancient Sappho lie easily across the page from a piece by Paul Monette that surprisingly is followed by a Noel Coward lyric. It's an eclectic mix—and it works.

For such a small collection, selections are hard to choose. I started marking pages for examples and ended up with a book full of markers.

Under Longing, from "The Stars Don't Move" by Sandro Penna:

*The stars don't move in the sky,
 the summer hour is like any other summer.*

Poetic justice

Eclectic anthology focuses on same-sex love; camp creator credited

*But the boy walking ahead of you—
 If you don't speak up he'll never be the one...*

Under Anxiety, from "Afraid of Losing You" by Sappho:

*Afraid of losing you
 I ran fluttering
 like a little girl
 after her mother.*

"Funeral Blues" by W.H. Auden now forever will be included in any anthology of gay and lesbian poetry. It's too perfect and seems, somehow, intended just for us. One portion:

*He was my North, my South, my East, my West,
 My working week and my Sunday rest,
 My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
 I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

My only possible quibble is that the biographical information on the writers is scant and poorly organized at the end of the book. Other than that, I can't find much to fault in this small but dense anthology of poems any gay person would cherish. And even the price is right.

—Richard Bray

UNCLE MAME: THE LIFE OF PATRICK DENNIS
 by Eric Meyers.

St. Martin's Press, 2000; \$24.95 hardcover.

Any gay man who has squealed with delight when Rosalind Russell thrust her arms wide open and cried, "But darling, I'm your Auntie Mame!" will not be surprised to learn the character's creator, Patrick Dennis, not only was gay but practically invented camp.

For years readers have assumed that because Patrick Dennis is the name of both the author and narrator of *Auntie Mame*, the novel must be autobiographical. But according to Eric Meyers' book *Uncle Mame: The Life of Patrick Dennis*, it is Patrick Dennis who rightly could thrust his arms out and shout the immortal line.

Born Edward Everett Tanner III in 1921, he began his literary career writing skits as a Boy Scout, one of which had an 11-year-old boy announce to an audience full of parents, "I'd like to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Bates and their little son, Master Bates." Using the pseudonym Patrick Dennis (as well as Virginia Rowans) he went on to pen 16 comic novels, including the unjustly out-of-print *Little Me*, but *Auntie Mame* is what forever will secure him a place in gay camp culture.

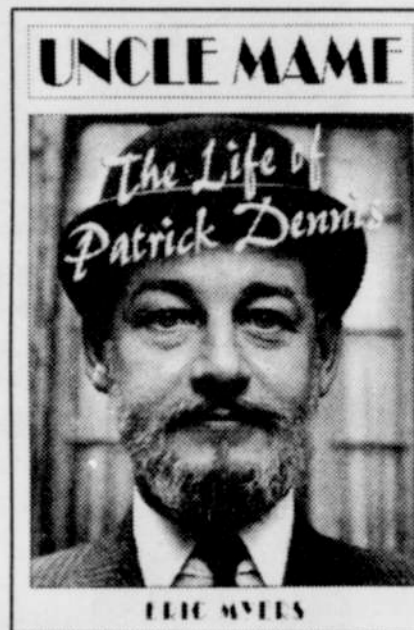
Meyers affectionately catalogs Dennis' many attempts to shock and delight his public, as in this *Auntie Mame* press release: "Darling, my unscrupulous nephew Patrick Dennis has written a scurrilous book about me. It's full of lies. It says I was caught nude in the dormitories of Princeton. It's not so! It was Yale!"

Beneath Dennis' bonhomie, however, lay a manic-depressive torment about his sexuality that eventually led to his institutionalization. The story grows increasingly bizarre after that, as he breaks all ties with his glittering society life and embarks on a second career as a butler to some of the country's wealthiest citizens, including McDonald's founder Ray Kroc.

Like Auntie Mame herself, though, Dennis' warm-hearted zaniness is what pervades Meyers' informal and immensely readable biography. *Uncle Mame* paints a richly detailed portrait of a lost time of wit and sophistication.

Be sure to pick up a copy of *Auntie Mame* itself as a companion. Even after half a century, her adventures make for the perfect light beach read, giving new meaning to the term "summer camp."

—Marc Acito



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