

toward himself, both as a person of Jewish descent and as a gay man, were unfortunate constants. His long succession of romances, disguised in his fiction, are detailed by White with even parts honesty, empathy and fascinating socio-historical perspective.

With this consummate minibiography, White offers an accessible volume on a subject he clearly understands well, exploring and explaining the subtle and complex connections between Proust's life and work. *Marcel Proust* is a read that's at once graceful, informative and gratifying.

—CM

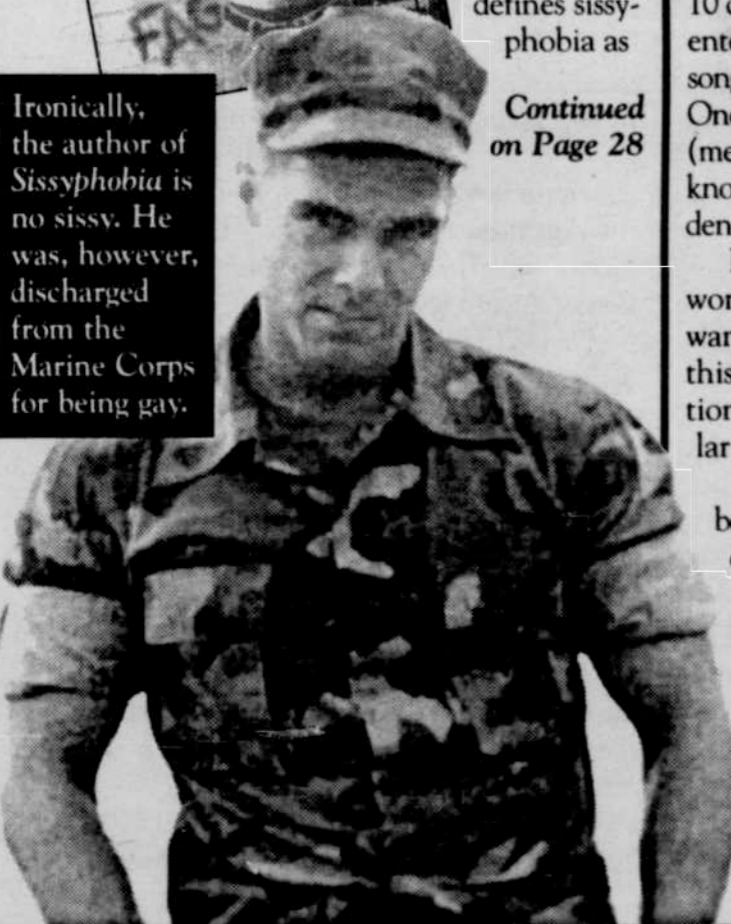
SISSYPHOBIA: GAY MEN AND EFFEMINATE BEHAVIOR
by Tim Bergling. Harrington Park Press, 2001; \$14.95 softcover.

Have you ever sneered at an effeminate man sashaying along Stark Street? Ever tried to butch up your act in order not to be thought of as gay? Ever wonder why only the "freaks" at Gay Pride are shown on TV? If so, then you suffer from "sissyphobia."

In his book, *Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior* Tim Bergling sets out to examine prevailing attitudes of both gay and straight men toward their effeminate brethren. He defines sissyphobia as

Continued on Page 28

Ironically, the author of *Sissyphobia* is no sissy. He was, however, discharged from the Marine Corps for being gay.



As an associate professor of music at Lewis & Clark College and as a writer, Nora Beck takes a practical approach to her interests in scholarship and art. "The idea behind my life is to have teaching be my source of income while allowing me to do what I want artistically."

The juggling act hasn't been easy. Beck notes that there are "different pulls between the scholarly and artistic world." But securing a tenured position allowed the lesbian author to take a sabbatical and finish her new novel, *Fiammetta*.

The book intersects the lives of a professor, Fiammetta, who is traveling to Italy to present a lecture, and Jennifer, an art dealer's young assistant, who is kidnapped after uncovering a hoax. Beck draws on her music background to create a text that is multilayered, with a structure that she hopes will allow readers to experience words in a musical way.

The storylines intertwine like various instruments in a musical score, and the main narrative is broken up with intermezzo chapters that include stories, poems and drawings. Characters converge and move apart as the plot follows the relationships between Fiammetta and her lovers, Jennifer and her husband, Fiammetta and Jennifer (who bond over foreign travel) and both women and their families.

Beck draws inspiration from the *Decameron*, a 14th century text by Giovanni Boccaccio, in which 10 acquaintances leave the plague-struck Florence to spend time away from the death and grief in their city. The group settles in a country home where, for 10 days, they dine on fine foods, entertain each other with music and song, and regale in personal stories. One of this group is called Fiammetta (meaning "little flame"), and she's known for her intelligence, independence and assertiveness.

Beck's nonlinear approach to her own work allows readers to jump in wherever they want. "I wanted to do something fun with this," she explains. "Readers can revisit sections, just like one might relisten to a particular passage in music."

Beck considers *Fiammetta* to be the second book in a trilogy. Its precursor, the lesbian coming-of-age story *Cauliflower Head*, is being held at Women's Work Press, which has yet to establish a publication date.

Beck decided to take matters into her own hands the second time around and started Carlton Street Press. "Lesbian presses have quietly gone by the wayside...I really wanted to create a press for 'honest' books."

Intersections

Dante has nothing on Portland writer Nora Beck

by Karen Kudej



Author, musician, teacher and activist Nora Beck

By that she means books that come from the heart. The new publisher plans to put out one or two books a year, giving a voice to lesbians who might not otherwise have the opportunity to get their words in print because of the nature of the work or a lack of mass market appeal.

Beck's expertise lies in medieval Italy, an area that incorporates her Italian heritage and attraction to interdisciplinary works. She observes that during medieval times, artists such as Dante and Hildegard von Bingen were respected as poets, scientists and scholars, whereas today, there is little crossover between academia and art.

The author strives to create this kind of interdisciplinary lifestyle. In addition to her writing—which also includes *Singing in the Garden: Music and Culture in Tuscan Trecento* and numerous short stories, poetry and music reviews—she co-founded Sexual Minorities in Athletics, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting homophobia in college sports.

Recalling her own closeted days as a basketball player at Barnard College, she wanted to

take steps to ensure the welfare of gay, lesbian, bi and trans student athletes. She and three students from schools around the country will address the issue at an upcoming meeting of NCAA representatives in Providence, R.I.

As a teacher, Beck encourages students to bring their whole selves to assignments, often taking a nontraditional approach that fosters creative expression. In the core curriculum class "Inventing America" she challenges students to write their own operas about history. In music appreciation, she encouraged them to do something with music they have always wanted to do but have never tried. Students composed music, wrote songs and even started bands. This innovative teaching style inspired students to name her Professor of the Year in 1998.

Fiammetta closes with the narrator confessing, "I've tried to make something as true to my heart as possible." That pretty much sums up what Nora Beck has done with her book—and with her life as well. **JK**

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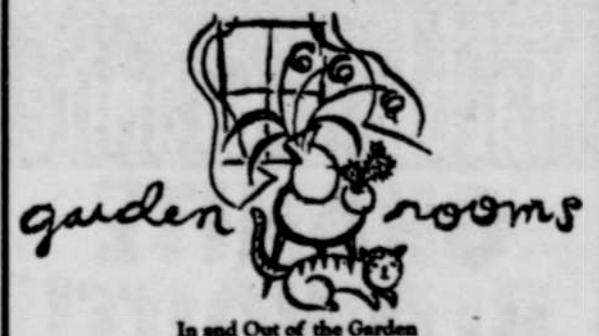
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