

# Read me

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a fear and loathing of men who behave "less manly than desired."

Bergling spent more than a year interviewing hundreds of men. He scoured personal ads and message boards for input and even devised online personae "with a definite femme bent" to sign into various chat rooms and experience reactions. Sadly, he finds many of the most sissyphobic attitudes come from within our own community.

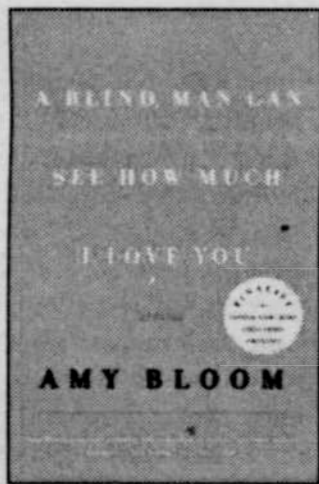
The discoveries he makes are not surprising but are disturbing and thought-provoking nonetheless. For instance, he explores the correlation between sissyphobia and misogyny and finds that men's attitudes toward femmes mirror their attitudes toward women.

While reading the book I found myself angry at our community's lack of acceptance despite our calls for equality. At other times I was moved to tears by heart-wrenching stories of verbal abuse. I even found myself examining my own feelings and behaviors and questioning whether I am part of the problem or part of the solution.

*Sissyphobia* is a short book that takes us on a long journey—from prejudice to understanding to acceptance. A writer to look out for, Bergling is working on another book about ageism within the gay community.

—Floyd Sklover

**A BLIND MAN CAN SEE HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU**  
by Amy Bloom.  
Vintage Books, 2001;  
\$12 softcover.



Reading Amy Bloom feels like peering through the kaleidoscope of the human heart. In the critically acclaimed *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You*, eight short stories unveil a wealth of human connections.

Bloom zooms in on the organic gamut of love surpassing multiple colors, classes, genders and varieties (gay, straight, sibling to sibling, parent to child, stepmother to stepchild, stranger to stranger). These are not conventional, comfortable love stories. Boundaries are casually pushed, taboos sharply mapped,

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Sitting beside a lake in the French Alps 19 years ago, Annie Dawid made the decision to devote her life to writing fiction.

She was reading the comments of a professor at San Francisco State University on one of her short story submissions. "Michael Rubin, a gay man who would later die of AIDS, wrote...powerfully of the great sacrifices and hardships in the life of a writer," Dawid remembers. "I decided I wanted that life."

Now a professor of English literature at Lewis & Clark College as well as its creative writing program director, the author has published two books. Her latest, *Lily in the Desert*, a collection of 12 stories, offers a glimpse into the lives of myriad characters. With stories ranging from a Holocaust refugee to a family struggling to survive the murder of their daughter to a gay man and a lesbian exploring their identities, *Lily* covers a broad spectrum of themes. Dawid paints vivid pictures of the young and the old, male and female, gay and straight, Jewish, Palestinian, Episcopalian and Catholic.

All the stories, she says, are inspired by recently acquired notions of faith and spirituality.

The daughter of a Holocaust survivor who fled to China, Dawid inherited a staunch atheism from her father. "Between my father and [Elie Wiesel's *Night*], I was pretty much sold on atheism as the only way you could live in the world," she says.

But in 1996, the teacher rediscovered her own spirituality while on sabbatical in Colorado's Sangre de Cristo mountains, where she spends her summers writing. During a time of great personal struggle, she felt solace and power there. Finding herself moving away from atheism, she began work on *Lily*.

The birth of her son, Isaiah, in 1999 also inspired Dawid's sense of faith and hope. "I think of faith as any kind of belief system that keeps you alive," she asserts. "When I had Isaiah, life further changed because I became a hopeful person."

Although readers tend to assume differently, only three of the 12 stories have a direct autobiographical connection. Other than this "autobiographical triad," she says she can't claim personal experience has informed the work. "Of course," she muses, "all fiction has elements of the author's character, just as our dreams, as some would have it, contain our many facets in all their elements."

"Reasons to Live Through This Year," "The Man Who Remained Upright" and "Moses at St. Cloud" all involve her experiences as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor.

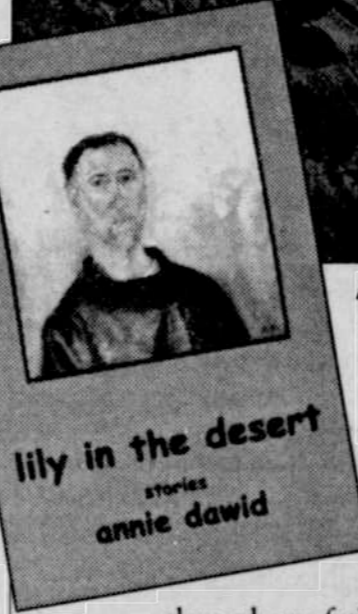
# Desert Heart

Annie Dawid's latest work redefines faith

by Sarah Leimert



Annie Dawid at home with son Isaiah



"My own experience as a Jew has been free and easy," she says, "but I've somehow been able to understand that horror translated

through my father." Her relationship with Dad plays a prevalent role in her writing. Her interpretations of his struggles—during and after the Holocaust—are quite moving.

"I define faith as a belief system which allows one to keep on living," Dawid says. "For some of the characters it is traditional religion; for others it is faith in family, in history, in love, in politics."

Faith is also explored through sexuality, especially in "Whatever You Two Call Yourself." In this story, a young lesbian and an

older gay man are introduced and begin to share an unlikely friendship.

"My own sexuality is flexible," Dawid notes. "I write about characters who inhabit all parts of the spectrum. Gay, straight and bisexual characters in the collection struggle with the expression of self through sexuality."

Most of the tales in *Lily* have appeared previously in journals, and several have earned awards. The opening story, "Faith," won the 1999 Raymond Carver Short Story Contest. Other honors include the 2000 Penmafrost prize for "Whatever You Two Call Yourselfs,"

the Writers-at-Work prize for "On Crete" and the American Fiction prize for "The Settlement," which also won the Northwest Andres Berger Award for Fiction.

Dawid's 1993 novel, *York Ferry*, which she dedicated to the professor who inspired her to write, follows a couple of decades in the life of a small-town family. She is finishing up a new book, *And Darkness Was Under His Feet*, a fiction based on her paternal family history, which will cover the entire 20th century—through Europe, China, Communist Romania, the United States and Israel.

Already, she's planned her next project: another collection of short stories, *Hippie Ruins*, based on her summertime commune in southern Colorado. [M]

SARAH LEIMERT is a Portland free-lance writer.

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