

BOOKS

OUTLAW: THE LIVES AND CAREERS OF JOHN RECHY

by Charles Casillo; Alyson Publications, 2002; \$14.95 softcover

Is it wrong to acknowledge that the pain and oppression the queer community has traditionally experienced seems, like sand in an oyster, to have led to exquisitely perceptive, sensitive pearls of art, literature, music and film?

Of course, there's no question of ever willingly returning to those furtive, desperate times, but after reading Charles Casillo's *Outlaw: The Lives and Careers of John Rechy*—a biography of the legendary and/or notorious novelist, whose 1963 autobiographical novel, *City of Night*, is considered a classic of gay literature and 20th century literature in general—it's hard not to feel at least a little guilty nostalgia.

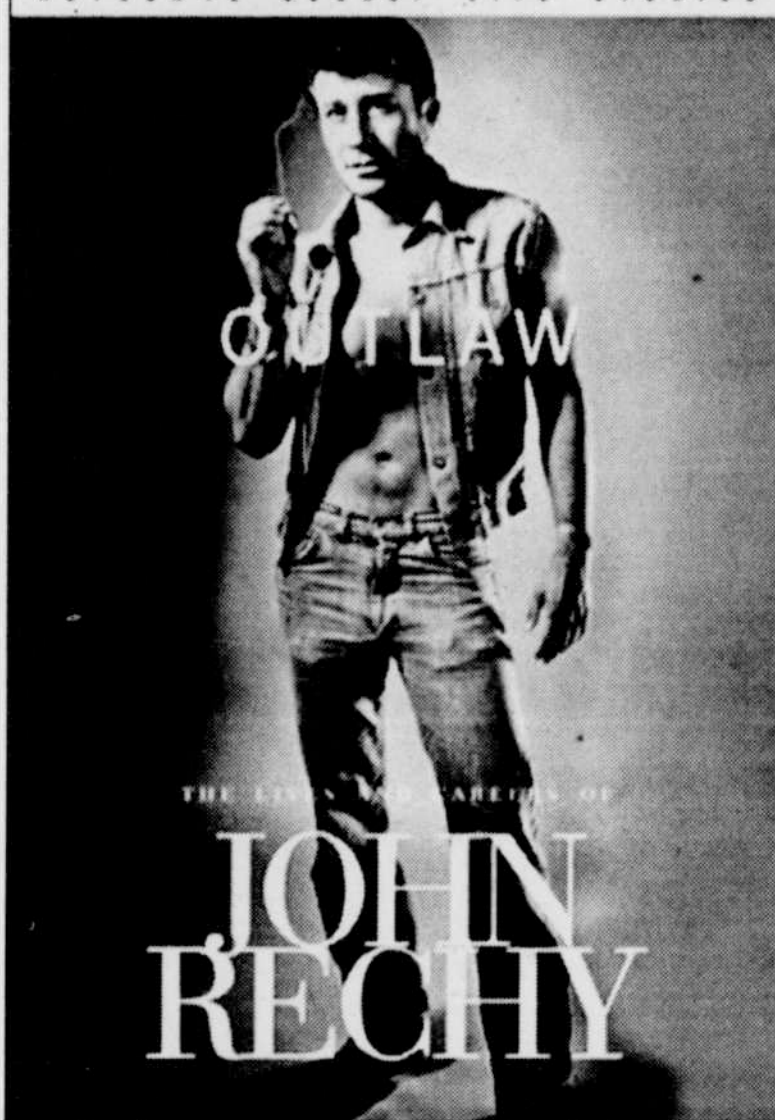
Outlaw affords the reader a unique, striking illustration of a gay man whose time and place hardly offered him the array of labels and outlets for his identity that he would've had today. Rather, Rechy's homosexual life experience was, by default, one of emotional pain, extreme identity confusion and the covert, shadowy discovery of (and psychological denial surrounding) physical experience with same-sex lovers.

It was Rechy's genius to parlay his extreme, exaggerated version of the common gay male experiences of his time into an extraordinary literary career that placed him in the league of Henry Miller and William S. Burroughs, earned praise from Gore Vidal and Norman Mailer and inspired modern-day queer provocateurs like Dennis Cooper and Gus Van Sant.

Casillo more or less unfolds Rechy's evolution chronologically, from 1931 (born Juan Francisco Rechy, youngest in a large family of first-generation Mexican Americans in El Paso, Texas) to the present day.

Young Rechy's troubled relationships with his lonely, needy mother and angry, frustrated father, as well as the alienation of being neither white nor the athletic, gregarious boy his father wanted and his peers expected, drove him into a private world. Through reading, writing, drawing and filmgoing, he developed a studiously detached view of the outside world and a narcissistic, preening devotion toward himself—the only person who could be a stable

ADVOCATE BOOKS: LIFE STORIES



source of unconditional love.

Rechy's protective self-aggrandizing eventually turned outward. After a stint in the Army to escape El Paso, he landed in New York City, where he began a hustling career—pursued off and on well into middle age.

Rechy's misadventures, sometimes troubling and painful for him, were painstakingly retained. After publishing a brief autobiographical bit based on his hustling experiences in *Evergreen Review* (the house organ of Grove Press, avant-garde publishers of *Lolita* and *Jean Genet*), he was asked by his editors for a full-length novel, and the rest is literary history—juicy literary history.

Rechy's reputation for genius may not be unanimously confirmed (Gary Indiana and the late Alfred Chester are just two respected gay writers who've been dismissive), but there's no question he led a turbulent, fascinating life—one that lends itself well to Casillo's wise,

City of Rechy

A new biography of the celebrated hustler makes all the right moves

breathlessly adoring, yet never quite sycophantic way of describing it.

In addition to the title character's own familial, hustling and literary histories, many well-known people appear in Casillo's chronicle: Spencer Tracy, Christopher Isherwood, Liberace and Susan Sontag all crossed Rechy's path at one time or another, making for often humorous, sometimes moving, always gossipy-delicious reading.

Casillo deserves praise not only for undertaking this important project (too many worthwhile figures of all sexualities and races get washed away by the fast-motion turnstiles of popular culture) but for bringing it off in a way that serves its purpose—reintroducing Rechy to an unfamiliar generation—extremely well.

While obviously a tribute to John Rechy, the book allows for dissenting opinions and other sides; this is a complete picture, not a puff piece. Casillo displays passionate interest in and empathy toward the complex, cocky Rechy, inciting our curiosity with an expansive knowledge of his subject's life and work. *Outlaw* is a generously conceived, tightly executed, indispensable book.

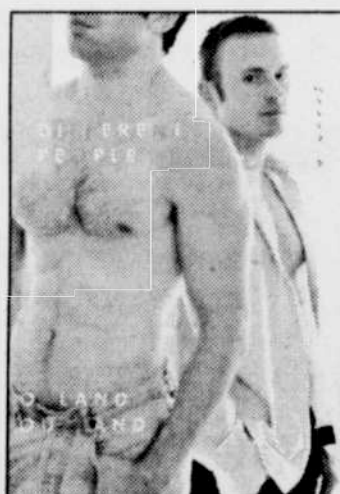
—Christopher McQuain

DIFFERENT PEOPLE
by Orland Outland;
Alyson Publications,
2002; \$23.95
hardcover

Different People by Orland Outland is an epic tale that tells the story of two men, Cal and Eric, as they make their way through gay life at the end of the 20th century.

Growing up across the street from each other—and yet worlds apart—they embark on divergent paths that take Eric through menial jobs, AIDS activism and loss, and Cal through financial success, drug addiction and redemption. Throughout their 12-year odysseys, they periodically encounter each other, yet their smoldering attraction remains hidden.

Cal's journey is the more interesting of the two, and the center section tracks his deteriora-



tion from financial wizard to stoned tweaker who slams his speed (injecting rather than smoking it). This is a fascinating portrait of the paranoia, hallucinations and delusions that accompany the descent into hellish addiction.

Unfortunately, the rest of the book doesn't match up to this gripping and insightful section. Instead, we plod through Outland's glossy, overblown prose and wait for the inevitable outcome. (Fans of the author's previous novel, *Every Man for Himself*, probably won't be bothered by the style.)

How I wish the rest of the characters had the immediacy and fully developed thoughts and emotions provided for Cal even as he verges on lunacy. Then this *Different People* would have been a different and more interesting book.

—Floyd Sklover

SEX TIPS
FOR GAY GUYS
by Dan Anderson;
Griffin, 2002;
\$12.95 softcover

Up, twist, over and down. Up, twist, over and down. No, this isn't a gymnastics floor routine but the proper technique for giving a satisfying hand job. At least according to *Sex Tips for Gay Guys*, recently released in paperback.

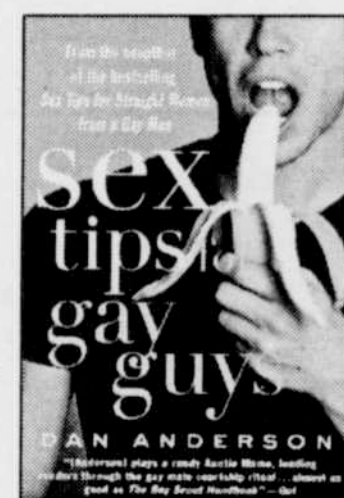
Dan Anderson, the co-author of *Sex Tips for Straight Women from a Gay Man*, has now turned his attention to gay dating, and the result is witty, catty and surprisingly informative.

You will learn about the most successful bar behavior, such as "taking a twirl" (doing laps around the bar to check out the newcomers) and where to position yourself for maximum exposure (front and center in the "good real estate"). You will learn to distinguish between the best lays (Leathermen and Bossy Bottoms) and the worst (Gym Bunnies and "Pierced Princes"). And you will master the techniques that will make you a master in the bedroom.

Breezily written, much of the book is downright hilarious, such as this thought about going down: "The best positions are those where you can tilt your head back a bit [which has] the added benefit of making your chin and neck look firm and flab-free."

Recently I found myself in a bar telling my friends all about *Sex Tips for Gay Guys*, and, although we laughed about it, I saw them following the suggestions and scoring. Read this book and learn to "sexplore" like a pro.

—FS



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