

REVIEWS

BUYING DAD: ONE WOMAN'S SEARCH FOR THE PERFECT SPERM DONOR

by Harlyn Aizley; Alyson Publications, 2003; \$14.95 softcover

Ten minutes after we have slowly inserted and retracted both vials I think I feel something moving inside me.... Then I get anxious. The incredible hugeness of what we're doing hits and surprised me like all along I had thought we were buying a car.... It's perhaps the biggest, most life-altering, irreversible thing you can do."

In *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm*

Donor, Harlyn Aizley moves through the process of a lesbian couple getting pregnant as smooth as a baby through the birth canal. Up and down the roller coaster of "sexual science," the ride is as unexpected as it is intimate as Aizley and her partner, aptly named Faith, take baby steps toward motherhood.

As it starts off with the basics, I felt like I was in sitting on a facing couch with Ellen DeGeneres and Sharon Stone. But as Aizley moves into private anecdotes and details, it becomes more like you've been let in on a big secret. "Part of me wishes there had been candles, more ritual, not Faith leaving me splayed with a syringe poking out of my vagina while she flossed and brushed her teeth."

Not only is Aizley candid in a way only hormones could induce, but she lets it all hang out. From revealing her fears of motherhood, uncontrollable gas and seeing friends fight over idyllic sperm donors, to letting the reader see the human side of her relationship, Aizley is first honest, then informative.

Beyond the entertaining, neurotic madness of the narrator's voice, this book is a bit of a learning journey for those of us who've always wondered how two vaginas can create a baby. An interesting nugget culled from the book: There are two ways for lesbian couples to get pregnant—ICI (intra-cervical) and IUI (intrauterine). Translation: ICI=turkey baster, IUI=doctor inserted. Who knew?

To complement the dry humor and blunt honesty about buying a dad is the other painfully ironic parallel story of Aizley's mother dying of cancer, which adds a rich element to the book.

It's no surprise that Aizley does, indeed, get pregnant. (She probably would've had a harder time selling her we-threw-in-the-towel manuscript.) But fortunately for her (and for eager-mother readers) the baby not only turned out great, so did *Buying Dad*.

—Gina Daggett

LOVE IN A DARK TIME: AND OTHER EXPLORATIONS OF GAY LIVES AND LITERATURE

by Colm Tóibín; McClelland & Stewart, 2002; \$24.99 softcover

The best thing about Irish novelist Colm Tóibín's collection of essays, *Love in a Dark Time*, is the way his knowledgeable, opinionated and insatiably engaged prose reveals he wrote the book for the same reason most of its audience is reading

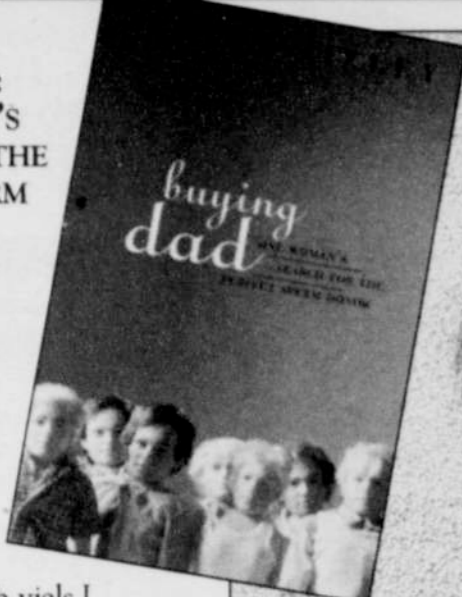


PHOTO BY FAITH SOLOWAY

Harlyn Aizley reads from *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor* 7 p.m. July 23 at In Other Words, 3734 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

it: We want to know if, how, why and to what extent the sexual orientation of artists has a bearing, inherent or otherwise, upon the creation of their work.

There is no final, all-encompassing answer to that query, but Tóibín uses it as a springboard to delve into various lives and ideas. The reader indifference to the homosexuality present in the personal experiences and published works of Oscar Wilde, Thomas Mann, James Baldwin, Francis Bacon or Elizabeth Bishop may not be so certain after reading the author's well-reasoned explorations, while those who pick up the book exclusively for its gay interest will be treated to a fresh, informative reminder that no one easily generalized gay experience has ever existed.

"Soon in the Western world being gay will no longer involve difficulty and discrimination," Tóibín writes in the introductory piece. "Therefore, how we read the past, and read into the past, and judge the past are likely to become matters of more open debate. The temptation to make anachronistic judgments and ask anachronistic questions is hard to avoid."

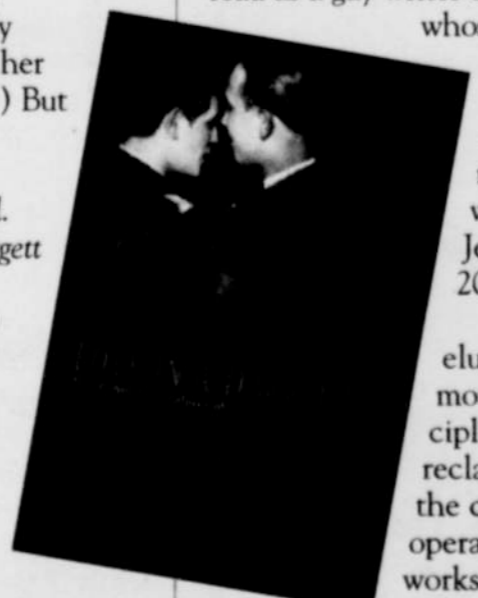
Tóibín manages it; in fact, his meaty commentaries on the forbearing Baldwin, the near-masochistic Wilde and the detached Mann are more interesting than his worthy treatments of painter Francis Bacon, filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar and poet Mark Doty—more contemporary gay artists for whom there was little to no need for double lives or creative solutions.

Tóibín writes of Franz Kafka, "This is not to suggest that gay readers want Kafka to be read as a gay writer only...but as a figure

whose work was sufficiently affected by his homosexuality...to be read as a parable about a gay man in a hostile city, as well as a nonbelieving Jewish man, as well as a 20th century man."

These contradictory, elusive artists require the most thoroughness and discipline from queer would-be reclaimers, and Tóibín sees the complex and delicate operation of reading their works as "gay literature" not as a sticky chore, but a provocation to increased subtlety and deeper understanding.

—Christopher McQuain



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