

## books

## Rant and Rave

Chuck Palahniuk's latest is a pulpy pleasure;  
*Nobody Passes* is a must-read

## Rant

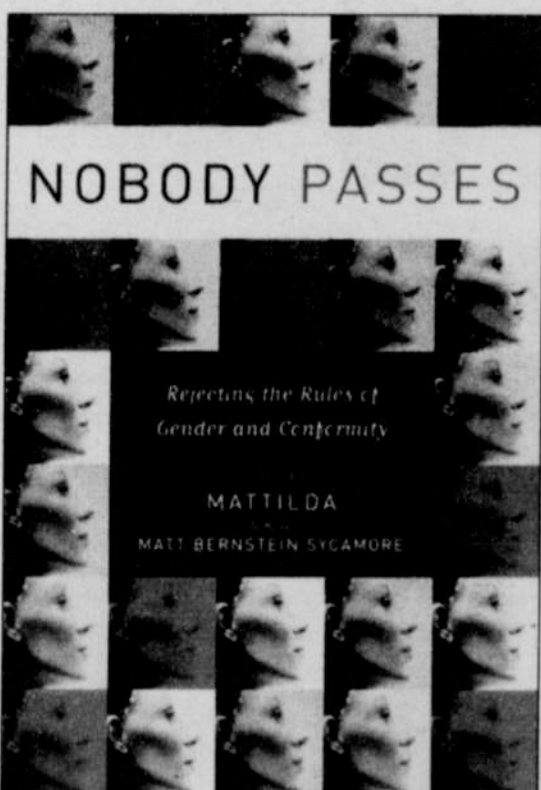
by Chuck Palahniuk;  
Doubleday, 2007;  
\$24.95 hardcover

The latest novel from *Fight Club* author, self-styled provocateur and queer Portlander Chuck Palahniuk, *Rant* is written in the style of an "oral biography"—an interview-based, sound byte-driven narrative technique popularized by George Plimpton in his biographies of Truman Capote and Edie Sedgwick. Palahniuk fictionalizes this documentarian approach to problematize the mystique of *Rant*'s primary character, Buster "Rant" Casey. Casey, whom we never hear from directly, is a character conjured through the testimony of friends, enemies, family and neighbors, with all the contradictions endemic to such a subjective mode of storytelling.

It's for the best that Palahniuk has chosen to go a less-typical route with the form of *Rant*, because the content is somewhat Palahniuk-predictable: The setting is a dystopian, vaguely familiar near-future, where Casey, the product of a squalorous, hypocritical small-town upbringing, escapes to the city and finds a surrogate family in a violent subculture. This time, instead of forming fight clubs, Palahniuk's sexually polymorphous disaffected-youth set allow themselves to feel something by "party crashing," an elaborately circumscribed game of cat-and-mouse using real cars and real roads. (One cannot help being reminded of J.G. Ballard's infinitely more serious *Crash*.) The party crashing is concurrent with other speculative-fiction plot elements with which *Rant* is packed: the division of the human population into "night-timers" and "daytimers," a rabies epidemic, widespread addiction to virtual-reality entertainment, time travel, etc.

Palahniuk is better at thrill-seeking than social commentary. Despite his quasi-iconic status, his gift is less a literary one (his prose is never really more than serviceable) than an instinct for the sensationalistic, pulpy and propulsive. But hostile hipsters and angry teens probably need their own Stephen King, and Palahniuk is the man for the job. *Rant*, with its campy, overstuffed quality and its generous helping of gallows humor, is best taken on guilty-pleasure terms. The less seriously you take it, the more page-turningly enjoyable it is.

—Christopher McQuain



**Nobody Passes:  
Rejecting the Rules  
of Gender and  
Conformity**

Edited by Matt Bernstein  
Sycamore; Seal Press, 2006;  
\$15.95 softcover

*Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity* is an incredible anthology that tackles the complex issues surrounding the ideas of passing and explores the impact that various forms of passing have on the lived experiences of its contributors. Editor Matt Bernstein Sycamore, aka Mattilda, has previously edited other books including *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*.

*Nobody Passes* is a collection of ruminations on the idea of passing. The book probes the complexities of queerness and seeks to analyze the ways in which race, class, gender, presentation, ability, etc. intersect with one another.

If you can get past the first few pages, you are in for an incredible and thought-provoking read. The introduction, however, is little

more than narcissistic ramblings by Mattilda where she rages against her publisher, publishing as an industry, academia and those who she refers to as assimilationists. Unfortunately, her valid critiques get lost in this less-than-lucid attack on anything and anyone she deems as being not radical enough.

However, once beyond her tirade, one can only marvel at the diversity of experiences represented in the contributors and the array of powerful, complex issues explored within these pages. The topics include an examination of what it means to pass as heterosexual when you and your partner are in reality very queer; femme as a genderqueer identity; and the politics of being disabled and passing as able-bodied.

*Nobody Passes* seemingly flows effortlessly from complex yet accessible academic analyses of passing as a social phenomenon to raw and emotional accounts of the effects of different forms of passing. The various contributors also challenge readers to look at their own internalized assumptions relating to other members of the queer community. This book forces readers to examine their own privileges and the impact those have on themselves and others. *Nobody Passes* is a must-read for anyone hoping to gain a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of who is part of the queer community.

—Sassafras Lowrey

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