

books

Read All About It

Recent titles examine butch identity, family-of-origin disputes

Butch Is a Nounby S. Bear Burgman; *Suspect Thoughts Press*, 2006; \$16.95 softcover

Butch Is a Noun is a collection of short stories by butch author S. Bear Burgman. The book brings together a collection of stories and ruminations about hir life, experiences and identities as a butch. (Burgman prefers the gender-neutral pronouns "hir" and "ze.") Seamlessly weaving together accounts of hir history, family, sexuality, butch/femme dynamics and gender theory, Burgman carries readers along through pieces that challenge the definitions and boundaries of what it means to be butch. As a femme who loves butches,

I read this book with great excitement, and without a doubt I was not disappointed.

One of the most interesting and powerful aspects of *Butch Is a Noun* is the way in which Burgman bridges the theoretical divide between butch and trans communities, giving voice to the many transgender people who also maintain a tight hold on their butch identities. Driving this point home, ze

chose to refer to butches with gender-neutral pronouns unless ze knew the pronoun preference of a specific butch. My main critique of the text was that the same thing was not done for femmes, instead of the blanket assumption that all use female pronouns. Beyond that, Burgman humorously writes about everything from the awkwardness of buying hir first boxer briefs to the experience of filling out a bridal registry with hir now wife.

Burgman describes how *Butch Is a Noun* is intended to provide a voice for the butch community's diversity, and while I think ze falls short of this noble aspiration—the book more accurately could be considered a collection of stories about what it means to Burgman to have a butch identity, as opposed to some sort of universal butchness—there is larger cultural power and importance to the text. The author honestly brings readers into hir life, sharing with them the intimate details of what butchness means to hir. Furthermore, *Butch Is a Noun* joins a fine tradition of texts that provide visibility to those in butch/femme relationships, which are too frequently considered relics of the past by modern queer communities.

—Sassafras Lowrey

A Simple Distanceby K.E. Silva; *Akashic Books*, 2006; \$14.95 softcover

There is nothing simple about the distances described in K.E. Silva's debut novel. A young lesbian lawyer living in San Francisco, Silva's main character, Jean Sousa, is forced to traverse the distance between the United States and Baobique, her family's fictional island home. On the island, she faces the distance set by a homophobic ruling class and her personal struggles with love and acceptance. Back home, the distance between right and wrong is examined as

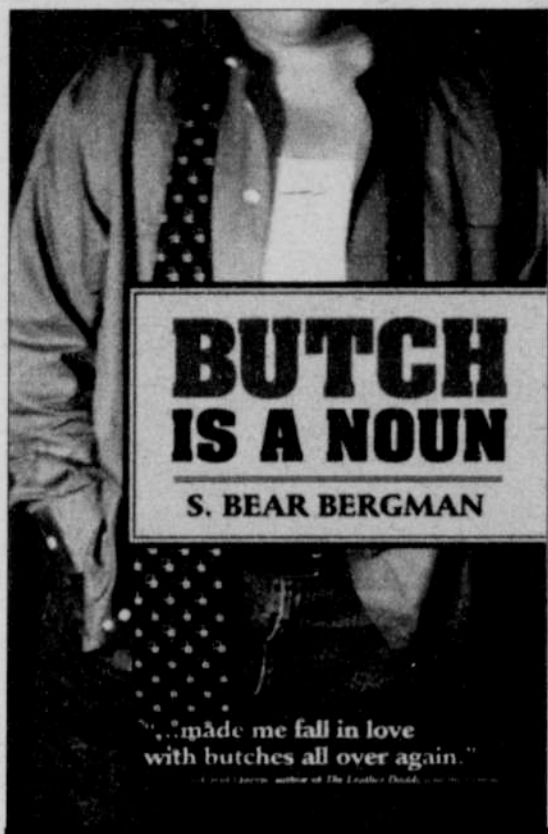
she works on the case of one lesbian mother's legal rights against another's.

In a slim paperback volume, Silva creates fully imaginable worlds that live all the more distinctive in their juxtaposition. The Bay Area details, including the loneliness of Sousa's spare studio apartment and neighborhood cafe, stand starkly against the ancestral connections of the vibrant Baobique. The sometimes uncomfortable distance between characters is best understood in terms of Sousa's inability to coalesce her identities: "When I left my uncle's house that trip, running back to my United States so the part of me that was gay could think straight, I left behind the part that was Baobiquen, as if removing one layer of myself to save another."

A tumultuous relationship between Sousa and the daughter of a family rival gives the novel a sexy edge—one of which readers, no doubt, would enjoy more. The constant movement of the characters, between the United States and the island and between different locales of family importance on the island, shows that coming out to your family is not a simple, one-time-only trip to make.

Silva has created a smart and heartfelt novel that speaks to pressing issues of race in the United States, family-of-origin disputes and fear of intimacy. Whether we read more about Sousa in the future or discover other worlds of Silva's imagination, we can look forward to another great read.

—Malka Geffen 10



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