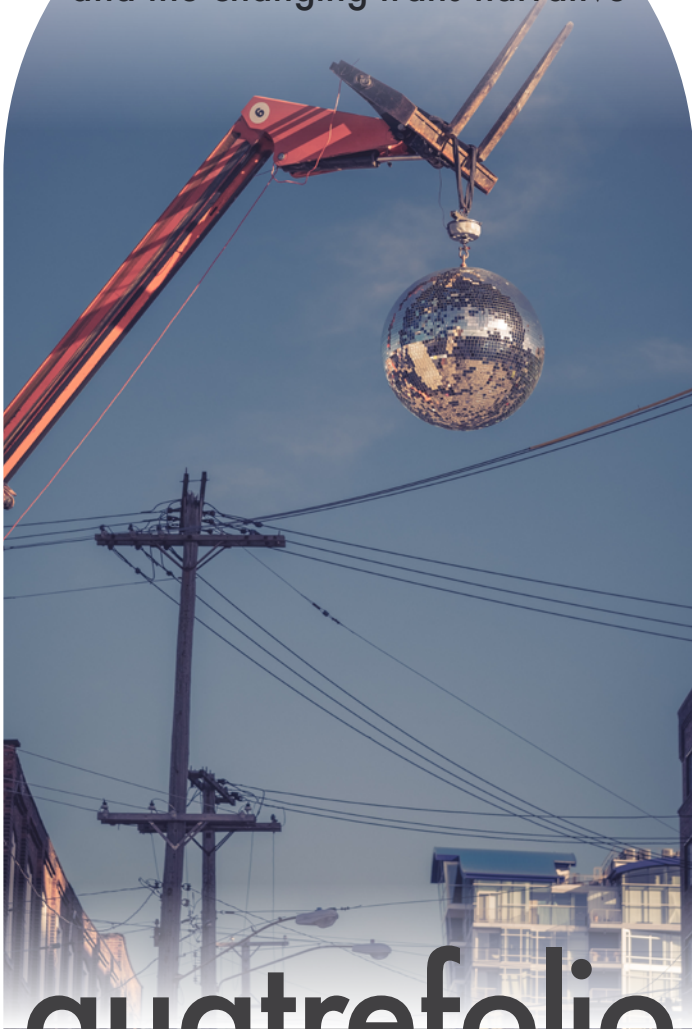


The Quatrefoil Newsletter • Spring 2022

Keeping Butch Weird

Ty Bo Yule on dyke bars, divinity
and the changing trans narrative



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Queer St. Paul in the 1940s • Seven great books of 2021

University of Minnesota Psychology major wins Quatrefoil Scholarship

Queery:

Does Quatrefoil have books about LGBTQ life in the Twin Cities in the early (pre-Stonewall) days?

Very few, sadly. One of the best is “The Evening Crowd at Kirmser’s: A Gay Life in the 1940s,” by Ricardo J. Brown (University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Brown, a journalist who died in 1999, left behind a memoir that Allan Spear, in his introduction to the book, calls “a remarkable document of this transitional moment in gay and lesbian history.”

Set in 1945-46, Brown’s story centers on a dive bar on Wabasha Street in downtown St. Paul. Run by a straight German couple, Kirmser’s by day was a working-class tavern, but at night it became an unofficial gathering place and a second home for gays and lesbians.

“Drab, utilitarian and uncomfortable, Kirmser’s was the only place we had,” Brown recalls of the long, narrow and nearly windowless bar.

Brown’s gift for straightforward, unfussy storytelling shines through on every page of the remarkable book. He includes romances begun there, and friendships forged. “To us, it was a refuge, a fort in the midst of a savage and hostile population.”

Brown is wonderfully frank about love and sex. He doesn’t shy away from the difficulties faced by him and his circle. He himself had been dishonorably discharged from the Navy for revealing his sexuality to a commanding officer. Secrecy was a key component of being gay in those years, when jobs and housing were at risk if someone outed you.

One night, thugs entered Kirmser’s and severely beat a friend of Brown’s known as “Flaming Youth.” Calling the police about the gay bashing was not an option, as “we were the criminals,” Brown writes.

“To me the book seemed very important as queer history,” said St. Paul poet William Reichard in an interview. Reichard edited Brown’s manuscript for the U of M Press shortly after Brown died.

The book “was such a revelation to me, as it was such a part of my own history,” said Reichard. “It recorded a time and place that no one had ever looked at before. I loved being able to learn about it through the eyes of one person and his story.”

St. Paul is fortunate to have a poignant gay commentator in Ricardo Brown. One wishes there was a similar memoir about the only other gay-oriented 1940s bar in the Twin Cities, the Viking Room at the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis. Venturing across the river, Brown and his St. Paul pals found the Viking too elegant and pretentious, drawing a crowd of “ribbon clerks” who “worked for peanuts at Dayton’s next door.”

For anyone interested in how gays and lesbians in St. Paul adapted, lived and loved decades before what we think of as the modern gay-liberation advancements, “The Evening Crowd at Kirmser’s” is an eye-opening, evocative and thoroughly engaging remembrance.



And the winner is...

University of Minnesota Psychology major wins Quatrefoil Scholarship



Jay Thompson

The third annual Quatrefoil Scholarship winner is Jay Thompson, a University of Minnesota sophomore who is pursuing a double major in Psychology and Spanish Studies.

Robel Tedros, a U of M senior, received a runner-up award

Thompson emerged from among many impressive applicants because of his desire “to help LGBTQ+ youth struggling with mental disorders, in the same way that I have struggled.” He received \$1,000 to assist with tuition.

Growing up as a trans person in Minocqua, Wisc., Thompson experienced depression and gender dysphoria and sought help from a therapist. “It was such a good experience for me,” he says. That led him to declare his major in Psychology by the end of his freshman year at the U.

Thompson, an avid reader and gamer, hopes to study abroad as part of his Spanish major, and to attend graduate school.

He imagines a career that can help others. “Working with LGBTQ+ youth, particularly those who are transgender, I know that I will be able to create life-lasting connections that will benefit those who are struggling with their mental health,” Thompson said in his application. “No one should have to live in fear of being themselves. I can change that, and I will.”

Tedros is completing his degree in African-American and African Studies with double minors in political science and philosophy.

The free-lance pianist, singer and actor is passionate about social justice issues and says he believes that there is much work to be done to support African people who are neurodivergent and/or LGBTQ. He received an award of \$250.

The Quatrefoil Scholarship fund welcomes donations to support deserving students in future years. Please go to bit.ly/Qscholar and select Scholarship Fund to direct a tax-deductible gift in any amount to this ongoing effort. Thank you!



Robel Tedros

Keeping Butch Weird



Memorist Ty Bo Yule on baby dykes, divinity and the changing trans narrative.

Interview by Claude Peck

It was 2020 when, atop the ever-expanding pile of memoirs, came Ty Bo Yule's cherry-bomb of a debut, "Chemically Enhanced Butch." I did not know Ty, nor had I ever been to Pi, the legendary south Minneapolis dyke bar he opened in 2007.

The book blew me away. It had everything – honesty, humor, bravado, relationship trauma, high-school angst, San Francisco in the '90s, Minneapolis in the '00s, gender fluidity, family history, sex and drugs and rock and roll.

In Yule's story, toughness rides shotgun with vulnerability. It is revealing, not navel-gazing; introspective and inclusive. While cruising some dimly lit corners of the LGBTQ+ psyche, it never stops insisting on the transformational potential of queer magic.

Yule, who has a master's in theological studies from Harvard, has settled in Minneapolis, where he says he has found "an amazing community of people who like me, which is my proudest achievement of the last 20 years." He and his wife, Katrina, have a house they are remodeling, a dog and two cats. This interview took place by email.

Q: What's life been like since your terrific memoir came out? Talk shows? Red carpets? Fans? Signings? Angry ex-girlfriends? Chores?

TBY: Well, the book came out in September 2020. That seems like a really long time ago. I'm sure it does for everyone. I had so much energy when the book first came out to promote it. Quatrefoil was my first big event, and I was so grateful to you for that. I did a few more Zoom readings and a couple podcasts with friends and friends of friends. The book sold relatively well. Family and friends and exes who wanted to read what I wrote about them drove sales. I entered it into a few contests but didn't win any. Sales started dwindling after a few months. My friend Megan asked me about it one night. I said it might be

fun to travel to small town Prides all summer, to sell my book, but also to talk to small town queers and find out what they're up to. Megan suggested we do a podcast and call it "Country Roads, Take Me Homo." So that happened, except the podcast part because Megan pulled out. Instead, I wrote articles that appeared in Go Magazine. I think there are like eight installments. It was so much fun and I learned a bit about the new generation of queers. I also had a bunch of touching fucking moments of queer magic.

Q: Talk about the process of doing the book.

TBY: I started writing it because I wanted to tell the story of Pi. It was such an unbelievable, real-life fairy tale. I'd also just come back from Harvard and thought I was going to get

some fulfilling adult job. When that didn't happen, I started writing a blog, which is where the book started. It took me about two-and-a-half years to write. Some parts were much harder to write and took me longer. High school especially. It was both painful and I really did not have a lot of memory formation during those times.

So many of those stories were tales

I had told to friends and at parties a thousand times. Something changes about them when you have to tell them without hand gestures and comic delivery and when you have to imagine someone reading them. I tried to remember how I felt while the events were occurring so I could get the language right. In that process, something was healed in a way.

The editing process took another two years. That first round was painful. I was so impatient to put it out into the world. The book is much better, though.

Q: Gay men always say “lesbians don't go out.” True? What was the biggest lesson you learned in opening, running and then closing Pi Bar in Minneapolis? Have bars, whether gay or dyke, totally jumped the shark?



TBY: Gay men are always saying stuff about lesbians. It is true many lesbians don't go out. It's true lesbians shack up and stop going out. Lesbians have less money overall. There have been numerous theories as to why dyke bars have been disappearing. Apparently, we're down to around 20 nationwide. All those things were true about lesbians when lesbian bars were

plentiful, which hasn't been the case since about the late '80s or early '90s.

Queer has been mainstreamed, both in cultural and political life, as well as popular representation. Lesbians don't need their own private clubhouses the way they used to. There are always young queers who fantasize about them and old queers who rhapsodize with wistful nostalgia about them, but lesbian bars aren't the lifeline they used to be. You don't create what you don't need. That's more like scrapbooking. I think there's a chance for a trendy, retro revival of them, or something similar.

I also think “lesbian” or “dyke” bar is wholly inadequate for the new generation of queers. The designations leave themselves wide open to accusations of exclusion. The proliferation of new queer identities, even in the last five years, desires a new

incarnation. Maybe not even a bar? A shipping container-food truck court and brewery? I don't know. I'm too old.

I created Pi because I saw the gays and lesbians assimilating and I was trying to carve out a sanctuary for the weirdos. Weirdos can't agree on an aesthetic or music, so bars are hard. I think gay bars have gone through a similar evolution, but boys will always show up for cruising, right? Ironically, I wrote another article for Go when they were doing the Lesbian Bar Project. It was called something like, “I used to own a dyke bar and we must save them like the dying language of our people.” I meant it, but maybe 20 is enough? They can be like historical sites or travel destinations.

Q: You lived the rock and roll lesbian life in SF. How and why put up with boring old wintry Minneapolis? (Joking, kinda.)

TBY: Oh my goodness, don't we all miss the '90s? First, I can't do that many drugs anymore. None of us can. Even Joan Jett is clean. That kind of exquisite messiness is never going to make a comeback. It was a singular historical moment. It would be unintelligible now.

Second, I think Minneapolis is more rock and roll than SF now. I live a few blocks from George Floyd Square and I have been overwhelmed with Minneapolis Pride because of the activism and community building I've witnessed since May 2020. To be clear, I'm completely disappointed in most of the city leadership, but Minneapolis art, culture, and activism is exciting and heartwarming and unique. I know the

winters are terrible, but hardly anyone leaves. Also, we have lots of water. We're going to win the apocalypse. I'm also too old to go through another breakup, ever. They are so exhausting and unpleasant. I really like my wife, too. It's been more than 10 years. Longest ever.

Q: What do you like to read? What did you read in 2021? Besides “CEH,” what is the best single book out there dealing with the trans experience?

TBY: I love dystopian fiction and fantasy, especially in trilogies. I kept myself from reading fiction until I was done with grad school at age 42. It was some stoic stubbornness I don't understand about myself anymore. I thought I wasn't much of a reader at all until I started reading fantasy on my iPad on my treadmill. I used to call them my Harry Potter walks, which I don't anymore, obviously.

N. K. Jemisin stands out as a memorable writer. She has queer characters regularly and without making them seem gratuitously inserted.

I'm ashamed to admit I don't read queer fiction or memoir very often. I feel embarrassed by this. I also don't know if I understand a young person's current trans experience. Mine was such a mess. I feel most represented by Leslie Feinberg's “Stone Butch Blues.” But I think that story might be a little harsh for young transmasculine folks. That story and mine focus on institutional, cultural, and familial rejection and chaos as the driver of the narrative arc. I think younger trans narratives have more of an internal development.



Seven great books of 2021

I feel most seen by “Hedwig and the Angry Inch,” which is not a book, but is brilliant and complex, and should be required viewing. Also, I come back to “Geek Love” as a powerful outsider tale.

Q: Divinity school? At Harvard? You? Really?

TBY: I think Harvard Divinity School was the only logical conclusion to the tale. Queers always think they’re mystical wizard fairies. I started studying theology in the ‘80s so I could argue intelligently with conservative Christians. I was a nerd who ended up loving translating Ancient Greek. I was also a diversity badge because I owned a dyke bar. I did get really good grades when I managed to finish college. The main reason though was I needed to impress my mother after the bar failed. It worked for about six months.

Q: Your mom and dad are key players in “Chemically Enhanced Butch.” Any updates on them?

TBY: My parents are having a hard time with retirement. They are currently

selling their house and moving for the third time in a year. My dad thinks if he finds the perfect golf course with a couple of guys who like to drink and gamble, he’ll have the retirement he deserves. He’s disappointed with humanity, mostly. My mother enjoys decorating a new house every few months and wishes my father would just pick something. She is a little optimistic that if I didn’t become a famous writer, I’ll be forced to get a job that requires business casual. Neither of them has read the book. Which is fine.

Q: If a reader of this is a young trans person, what advice would you offer them?

TBY: It’s so cheesy, so I won’t say “things get better,” but you have to stay alive until your frontal cortex fully develops. Find your people. Don’t let your trauma turn you into an asshole. Channel your resilience into compassion. Remember, your existence is the only evidence that humans have the potential to evolve.



The Prophets, by Robert Jones, Jr.

A powerful debut novel that depicts the ruination caused by slavery on an 1830s Mississippi plantation. Jones’ unique perspective includes a passionate love between two male slaves. “Labeling The Prophets a gay slave story fails to fully describe its ambition and imaginative richness,” said a Star Tribune review of the novel. “Jones’ astounding achievement is to open a world where love somehow dares to speak its name alongside our greatest national shame.”



Carnival Lights, by Chris Stark

Stark’s novel mixes a teens-on-the-run tale with Native American history in Minnesota to build an impressive narrative that blends current-day adventure with accounts of the recent and historic past to get at injustice, displacement, genocide, kinship, dysfunction and identity. While Sher, the novel’s protagonist, is lesbian and “boyish,” that is not a major part of the story about her and her abused cousin, Kris, as they flee the reservation for Minneapolis. A terrific final sequence, and one that explains the book’s title, takes place at the Minnesota State Fair.



The Magician, by Colm Tóibín

As he did in his award-winning 2004 book “The Master,” Irish writer Tóibín novelizes the life of a literary lion whose gay side was largely concealed from public view. Here, Henry James is replaced by Thomas Mann, the Nobel Prize-winner best known for “Death in Venice,” “Buddenbrooks” and “The Magic Mountain.” In a long life that traversed Europe, America and two world wars, Mann oversaw a fractious and brilliant family and achieved fame and fortune. Tóibín, himself a brilliant writer of fiction, is especially good at illuminating the mysterious process that leads from life to art.



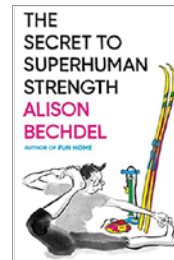
The Daring Life and Dangerous Times of Eve Adams, by Jonathan Ned Katz

Pioneering gay historian Katz (“Gay American History”) has unearthed a fascinating story almost entirely hidden from view for 100 years. Eve Adams emigrated from Poland to America in 1912 at the age of 20. She was a radical Jewish lesbian decades before that even seemed possible. She wrote a book of stories called “Lesbian Love” that she published in a tiny edition. It soon disappeared into obscurity. Katz does scholars a huge favor, reproducing the long-lost volume in this book. Further, and with scant research material at his disposal, he fashions Adams’ biography, from her radical friendships, girlfriends, censorship, court battle, jail term and eventual deportation to Europe, where she drifted and was later captured and executed by the Nazis. The book, said a review in The New Yorker, “is an animated biography, but it is also a kind of rescue mission, as queer histories often must be.”



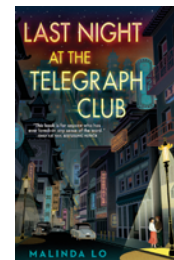
After Francesco, by Brian Malloy

The Minneapolis novelist follows his novel “The Year of Ice” with this sequel. It’s 10 years later and Kevin Doyle, now in his late twenties, has left Minnesota for New York, fallen in love with Francesco and cared for him through the height of the AIDS epidemic. After nearly hitting bottom following Francesco’s death, Kevin returns to Minneapolis to seek support and recovery. The novel reminds us of the horrors of AIDS and its devastating reverberations for those who survived it.



The Secret to Superhuman Strength, by Alison Bechdel

Celebrated writer/cartoonist Bechdel’s first book in nearly 10 years is a graphic memoir that chronicles her obsessive and sometimes complicated relationship with modern fitness and exercise trends. Critics raved about “Strength.” Bechdel uses her self-improvement theme to get at “the texture of thought and memory – their ambushes and heretical swerves,” said the New York Times.



Last Night at the Telegraph Club, by Malinda Lo

Lo’s YA novel, a National Book Award winner, is set in San Francisco in the Cold War era of the 1950s and features a Chinese lesbian named Lily Hu. In an interview for the Quatrefoil newsletter, Lo said, “I discovered with Telegraph Club that I loved writing historical fiction, and I anticipate writing more of it.” Stay tuned.



Q Cards

Still Free After All These Months

Remember to stop in at the library to fill out a form and receive a free Q Card that allows you to borrow any of the library's 15,000+ books and 5,000+ DVDs. The free cards were launched during Pride month in 2021 as a way to lower barriers to patronage and encourage more people to get involved in the library and its programs.



Help Quatrefoil Thrive

- 1) Go to qlibrary.org and view various ways to contribute—through an annual gift, a bequest, shopping at our regular book sales.
- 2) Buy books and DVDs from us anytime on Amazon, at amazon.com/shops/QuatrefoilLibrary
- 3) Volunteer: We rely on more than 80 volunteers to run the front desk and help with special events and library operations. Go to Quatrefoil's Facebook page and click "Volunteer."
- 4) Give us your used books and DVDs: Drop off LGBTQ+ books and DVDs during library hours, or contact us. New materials are added to the collection, and we sell duplicates to support operations.



1220 E. Lake St.
Minneapolis, MN 55407

qlibrary.org

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info@qlibrary.org

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Edited by Claude Peck
Design by Joshua Garvey
Cover Image by Lance Anderson