

# Vanguard

An Interview With Jack Fritscher

by Alexander Renault

for *Pornographic Pulsar*

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*“An artist does not reflect himself in his art  
as much as he provides a mirror  
for the readers and viewers to see themselves.”*

–Jack Fritscher

*Thumbnail:* Jack Fritscher is an enigma of grand proportions, and one of the most respected and controversial writers of his versatile generation which includes John Rechy, Edmund White, Anne Rice, William Carney, Felice Picano, Allan Gurganus, Dorothy Allison, Armistead Maupin, Larry Kramer, Rita Mae Brown, and Andrew Halloran.

You cultural “completists” who like reading lists and comparable books, check out these comps. In memoirs in the shape of novels, Edmund White’s *A Boy’s Own Story* and Felice Picano’s *Ambidextrous: The Secret Lives of Children* compare to Fritscher’s *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy*; additionally, White’s *Loss within Loss: Artists in the Age of Aids* compares to Fritscher’s *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*; Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* with his *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch’s Mouth*; John Rechy’s *Numbers* and William Carney’s *The Real Thing* with his *Leather Blues* plus his *Drummer* magazine writing which fills five separate volumes of books, including *Corporal in Charge* and *Rainbow County*; Armistead Maupin’s *Tales of the City*, Larry Kramer’s *Faggots*, and Andrew Halloran’s *Dancer from the Dance* with his *Some Dance to Remember: A Novel of Gay Liberation in San Francisco 1970-1982*; Allan Gurganus’ *Oldest Living Confederate Widow*, Dorothy Allison’s *Trash*, and Rita Mae Brown’s *Rubyfruit Jungle* with his *Geography of Women* as well as with his *Sweet Embraceable You: Coffee-House Stories*.

All these authors have lived interesting lives, but it is rare to find an artist who has lived a life so filled with operatic opposing forces, but then, San Francisco writer Fritscher, who shares a birthday with Lillian Hellman, is a Gemini, moon in Leo, with Scorpio Rising. From 1953-1963, he was schooled in the Latin, Greek, British, and American classics in the prestigious Vatican seminary, the Pontifical College Josephinum, and is actually an ordained exorcist possessing all the minor orders of the Catholic priesthood.

He received his doctorate in American Literature from Loyola University, Chicago, where with the cooperation of Tennessee Williams he wrote his dissertation, *Love and Death in Tennessee Williams*. Moving into academia, where he hung with the poet Thom Gunn, he became a tenured university professor while hanging out with the likes of Andy Warhol, Mario Amaya, Robert Mapplethorpe, George Dureau, Sam Steward (Phil Andros), Edward Lucie-Smith, as well as Picasso biographer, John Richardson, and the High Priest of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, whom he featured in his book, *Popular Witchcraft*.

From the mid-1960s, he combined the strange bedfellows of academic discourse,

mainstream literature, pop culture, sexual politics, witchcraft, erotic photography, and the world of gay male pornography on page and on screen. He is the founding San Francisco editor of the legendary *Drummer* magazine in which his work appeared for 25 years and which he used as background for his signature novel, *Some Dance to Remember*.

As author of a dozen books and writer-director of more than 150 gay documentary and erotic videos, he works and lives near the Golden Gate Bridge with his domestic lover of 25 years, Mark Hemry, where *Pornographic Pulsar* chased him down for a few gems to share with his readers, viewers, fans, and detractors, as well as LGBT studies mavens.

*Pornographic Pulsar*: During the interview Fritscher came across as sweet but unshakable, charismatic and full of opinions, but not opinionated, even though my job was to ask him to opine. I did not find myself experiencing my usual anxiety at interviewing brilliant academics. As anyone who knows me will attest, I have a love-hate relationship with the world of academia and it is interesting to note that Fritscher seems to be the exception to every rule of its jargon and pomposity.

One hates to trip on one's own clown shoes, but fools rush in! You cannot imagine my embarrassment when I realized I had been mispronouncing his former lover's name, "Mapplethorpe," through the first half of our chat. (The first syllable is pronounced like the tree, not like "grapple.") Oh, well. He never pointed it out. He simply pronounced it correctly. Actually, I was just glad I understood most of what he was talking about. There is simply nothing worse than being in over one's head without a life jacket during an interview with someone whose literary work has been explored by so many other journalists and critics (and men jerking off) who may have a far better insight into the interview subject than I do.

In an interview with the critic, John F. Karr, from *The Bay Area Reporter* in June 1989, Fritscher described himself as "an iconoclastic visual artist." He certainly began in a time of artistic frenzy, the 60's and 70's, standing in a crowd that included the Gay Golden Age of John Waters & Divine, the Cockettes, Sylvester, David Bowie, Lou Reed, and Andy Warhol. Yet he has never had to go out of his way to prove himself because his ideas and writing and photography are unique across the genres because they speak for themselves, and he has always stood out among his peers without effort—in fact, without trying to do so, as he is rather reticent and reclusive.

As Winnie the Pooh once said, it is best to start at the beginning.

Jack was born John Joseph Fritscher on June 20, 1939. A fellow Gemini, he entered the world during the noon hour on the summer solstice, the brightest light of the year's longest day. In high school, he was the senior-class reporter and author of the all-male musical comedy, *Continental Caper*, 1959. He translated religious texts from German between 1960 and 1966. More than twenty of his early short stories and features, many of them coded gay stories and articles, were published in unsuspecting Catholic magazines. Teaching university journalism and literature beginning in 1965, he was that generation of professors who introduced a fourth genre to literary interpretation, "film interpretation," which was added to fiction, drama, and poetry.

Fritscher received his B.A. in Philosophy and English (1961) followed by graduate work in Aquinian Theology (1963) at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio. During that conformist Catholic time, he started his school's first

student magazine, aggressively called *Pulse*, which had the priest in charge pounding on his desk in fury. He spent the very early civil-rights summers of 1961 and 1962 as a “worker priest” on Chicago’s South Side in the heart of the ghetto at 63rd and Cottage Grove where he worked directly in the African-American community with the legendary radical, Saul Alinsky.

In 1966, he received his master's degree in English from Loyola University with his thesis, *When Malory Met Arthur: Sex and Magic in Camelot*. In May 1967, he came out regretting he had the year before told Tennessee Williams that Williams could not, mmm, depend on his kindness. In February, 1968, he completed his doctorate in American Literature/Creative Writing and Journalism, and took off for swinging London’s Carnaby Street, as well as Paris, Madrid, and Amsterdam which all were in the throes of student revolution in the streets—from which he did not shy away.

In 1969, he signed a contract for his nonfiction book, *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch’s Mouth*, which he wrote in San Francisco in the Castro where coincidentally Anne Rice was also living. They both knew the same witches, ghouls, and vampires. Fritscher’s nonfiction interviews with gay witches and Satanists was published in 1971. Anne Rice’s fictional *Interview with the Vampire* came out in 1976. Both authors distilled the essence of that very psychic time in gay history.

In the 1970s, Fritscher received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to record audio interviews with his friend, the veteran writer, Sam Steward (aka Phil Andros) who told his life story including his times with Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, Thornton Wilder, and James Purdy for whose novel, *Narrow Rooms*, Fritscher shot the cover (GMP, London). In the mid-70’s, Fritscher became the founding San Francisco editor of *Drummer* magazine which he made infamous. He is the original “Mr Drummer” in the real sense of that title because by the time *Drummer* ceased publication at the end of 1999, his writing and photographs had appeared in 62 of *Drummer*’s 200 issues over twenty-five years, making him the author most published in *Drummer*.

He is currently working on *The Best of Drummer*, an anthology of writing from the international magazine's torrid history. Who knew that one day a men’s progressive gay skin magazine would become a historical document? Fritscher did. Actually, some of the *Drummer* material appears in *Jacked: The Best of Jack Fritscher*, published by Alyson Press (2002) and nominated by the Erotic Authors Association (2003) as the best anthology written by one author. He is also currently nominated by the Erotic Authors Association for a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Fritscher is dedicated to the preservation and continuation of gay cultural studies and the expansions of its horizons. He believes that there are some important facets of gay culture, including the "homomasculinist" subcultures of leather, muscle, fetish, daddies, and bears which need to be fully documented as part of gay history. In the mid-70's in *Drummer* he coined the word *homomasculine* to address the most neglected species in the gay zoo: the masculine-identified homosexual.

He says he is not himself a masculinist or a feminist, because, inclusive of both terms, he is a humanist. (Some people, trapped in gender politics, he says, don’t rise to that concept.) He is also currently concerned about the political "repackaging" of the gay community, and how our culture and media have hi-jacked the “gay edge” only to sell it back to us in a new, corporate form. For years he has stood foursquare against the “politically correct” whom he terms fundamentalist Puritans who, born out of failed

Marxism, actually hate art, sex, and the transcendentalists of truth, beauty, and goodness.

A compelling and sexually unapologetic author, he once stated in *The Burning Pen*, "I confess. I breathe in experience. I exhale fiction. Feeling, emotion, is the oxygen of my fictive voice." You know an erotica writer has struck an intense stride by authoring a play called *Corporal In Charge of Taking Care of Captain O'Malley*. That story is such a *good* one that iconic publisher Winston Leyland included *Corporal in Charge* as the only play in his historic 1990 anthology, *Gay Roots*.

So powerful is Fritscher's fiction, critic Nancy Sundstrom wrote in *Independent Publisher* in 1998:

*Fritscher is undoubtedly a masterful writer of gay fiction, but he is first and foremost an extraordinary American writer. He deserves a broad-based audience because his powerful and original voice rings in one's head long after the book has been completed.*

Fritscher has written critically acclaimed novels including *Leather Blues* which first appeared as the pioneer gay novel, *I Am Curious (Leather)* in 1970; *Some Dance to Remember*, the epic novel which *The Advocate* called the "gay *Gone With the Wind*"; *The Geography of Women: A Romantic Lesbian Comedy*; and the novel which CNN noticed in its top 100 books, *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy* for which he won several literary awards including "Story Teller of the Year."

As in Hollywood, numbers often show how deep roots go in gay culture. In 30 years in adult entertainment, his books have sold more than 110,000 copies; his 150 videos, shot in the US and Europe for several companies including his own production company [www.PalmDriveVideo.com](http://www.PalmDriveVideo.com) have sold 250,000 copies; and his writing in thirty gay magazines (some like *Drummer* with a press run of 42,000 copies every month) have literally reached millions of readers. A thousand of his photographs have appeared in gay pop-culture magazines like *Honcho*, *Bear*, *Leather Man*, *Powerplay*, and *Thrust*, as well as in three upper-end art books from England such as *Adam: The Male Figure in Art* and *Ars Erotica: An Arousing History of Erotic Art*, as well as the coffee-table book, *Jack Fritscher's American Men*. His on-screen production credential comes from the Hollywood Film Institute. Two of his videos regarding the photographer, George Dureau, are in the permanent collection of the Maison Europeene de la Photographie, Paris.

In the earlier San Francisco days of what Fritscher named the "Titanic 1970s," Fritscher met Robert Mapplethorpe who later tragically died of AIDS in 1989, at age 42. Noting the brilliance of Mapplethorpe's photography, *Drummer* editor-in-chief Fritscher hired him to do a cover which was Mapplethorpe's first magazine cover assignment (*Drummer* 24, September 1978). They became lovers and Fritscher went on to write the biography, *Mapplethorpe: Assault With A Deadly Camera, A Pop Culture Memoir, An Outlaw Reminiscence*.

Fritscher's book was the first biography of the controversial artist and photographer ever published, beating out Patricia Morrisroe's "horrified straight-woman" Mapplethorpe biography. In the typical fever of a Gemini, Fritscher wrote the final version of his memoir of his ex-lover and confidante in only 90 days, because he included writing he had done about Mapplethorpe over the years. Adding other voices to make a chorus beyond his own voice keening, Fritscher included his interviews of other Mapplethorpe friends and heavy-weights such as Robert Opel, Camille O'Grady, George Dureau, Holly Solomon, Edward Lucie-Smith, and Joel-Peter Witkin. (Fritscher has

taken gorgeous photos of Robert Opel's muse, the singer and poet, Camille O'Grady.)

His *Mapplethorpe* book went on to become a critically acclaimed piece of gay American history while Morrisroe's sophomoric, middle-American-esque attempt bombed. Morrisroe had interviewed Fritscher for five hours (recorded on the phone) and sent a note praising his information. When she found out years later that Fritscher was writing another kind of Mapplethorpe book that looked to her like insider competition, she denounced Fritscher as "The King of Sleaze" because he had then recently written a gay-culture historical piece in *Drummer* titled "Remembrance of Sleaze Past" to nail down historically what sex had actually been like before fluid exchange became problematical. Morrisroe so misread the "reverse code" of gay language she did not realize that "sleaze" is a sexual compliment.

A read of Morrisroe's prudish biography makes it painfully obvious that she does not understand—and actually seems to loathe—the gay subculture which she claims shocked her beyond comprehension while researching Mapplethorpe's life. I guess no one ever told Patty Morrisroe that the Number One Rule For Writers is *only write what you know*, babe. The poor bitch didn't understand that in the inversion of the gay world, *sleaze* is considered a good thing. She is the perfect example of what Fritscher means about the corporate "repackaging of the gay community." The corporate Random House published Morrisroe's book which was reviewed by the corporate *Vanity Fair* which is not surprising because the head of Random House at that time was married to the head of *Vanity Fair*. Where Morrisroe freaked over Mapplethorpe's Satanism, exorcist Fritscher, author of *Popular Witchcraft* and friend of Anton LaVey, truly understood and encouraged in his lover Mapplethorpe the heady mix of Catholicism and Satanism inherent in much very potent gay art; for instance, Mapplethorpe's most Satanic and scatological photos graced a new edition of the poet Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*.

Charles Winnic, Ph.D., Professor of sociology at City University of New York, writes of *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*:

*Jack Fritscher's memoir is a marvelous recreation of an epoch, an art, and a man. Mapplethorpe was a . . . romantic figure who did more to liberate popular taste than any other artist . . . . Fritscher is the perfect interpreter of Mapplethorpe, and his beautifully written book helps us to understand how an apolitical photographer became so politically potent a culture symbol.*

Like many great writers, Fritscher knows himself well and has clearly developed tremendous confidence. His knowledge of human sexuality runs deep, both from academic study and hands-on experience with the 13,000 veterans of the gay liberation wars to whom he dedicated *Some Dance to Remember*, which is an autobiographical novel that is also very much the autobiography of San Francisco, 1970-1982. Fritscher's tales of the City are a bit more realistic, and certainly more historical, than Armisted Maupin's *Tales of the City* for which Fritscher has an Irish storyteller's respect. Asked about his own dual role as author and historian, he writes,

*I am a unique hybrid: I am personally leather and a pioneer action figure in leather culture as well as a scholar-historian of gay male leather culture but not part of the establishment Leather Reich of "Mother-May-I S/M." In my Porno Manifesto, art for art's sake may go beyond the pale of consent.*

Fritscher is also a pop-culture scholar and expert on cinema and television, and has published numerous articles. In his 1974 media book, *Television Today*, a chapter

titled "Americanned Creativity" goes:

*For TV now, the Commercial Sell is the Frankenstein that creates our buffered, not-so-glad-wrapped, gotta-have-a-gimmick Americanned culture. Whenever business lays its hands on art, art suffers the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunehunters. If business exists to supply the demand, business must often create the demand. Advertisers tell us what they think we need; what they want us to demand, so they can supply it. In the following blank, enter your nominee for the most worthless product ever plugged as a necessity: \_\_\_\_\_.*

Upon seeing that blank line, I first thought of feminine deodorant spray, diet soda, Fox News, and the National Republican Convention.

Fritscher is an uncanny swami—well, he is a witch!—whose instincts and life experiences have made him an extremely prophetic social critic. About the 1990's, he stated to John F. Karr in *The Bay Area Reporter* in 1989:

*I think in the 90s we're going to see a resurgence of gays in the media, especially as the AIDS cases explode, and we serve as the model for the world on how to deal with this . . . . So instead of Golden Girls dropping their gay butler, you'll see gay people returning to the tube. And I think that will allow gay erotica to grow on a level of above-ground commercial television and video.*

Fritscher also predicted that we would see a wider range of gay characters both on television and in films in the 1990s. *Philadelphia*, *The Bird Cage*, *Beautiful Thing*, *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls In Love*, and *In & Out* were each a box office success. Multiple gay characters hit the television scene and gave us *Will & Grace*, *Roseanne*, *Queer as Folk*, and HBO's *Six Feet Under*. His instincts for media analysis were right on. Gay culture has started to swim more toward the mainstream although only *Queer as Folk* and *Six Feet Under* avoid desaturation of gays and dare feature homosexual characters who actually have sex. *Queer as Folk* works the diversity of gay characters, while on *Six Feet Under* the characters lean more distinctly to homomascularity.

Fritscher was likewise correct about the incredible mobilization of the gay community in the 1990s to battle AIDS. Grossly and inhumanely over-inflated medication costs, and our abilities to adjust our sexual behaviors have been, for the most part, successful. Unfortunately, according to most recent reports, gay men are backsliding again in regard to safer sex practices but that is another dangerously spicy enchilada entirely. Fritscher was quoted in the magazine, *Continuum* (November 1996), by the Canadian author, Ian Young, who wrote an article titled "The AIDS Cult and Its Seroconverts." Fritscher said: "Purposely, some twenty-something boys, who have never known a sex life without AIDS, fatalistically expose themselves to HIV as a test of ritual manhood." That's not what Fritscher means about homomascularity.

Also, gay erotica has grown in slow fits and starts over the past 34 years since Stonewall in 1969. In the early 1980s, a long fifteen years after Stonewall, Gay Sunshine Press became the first real book publisher of gay literature. In the 1970s, gay publishing was not books, but was magazines—the kind where Fritscher drove the content and style. Multiple gay book publishers, magazines, and journals have since risen closer to the surface of the straight mainstream's bookstores and consciousness. Telling people you write erotica these days is not met with the sneers and patronizing derision of years past.

Gay porn, which took off in the 70s, also took off like a rocket in the 1990s. In a

time when gay people were streaming out of their closets and fears of HIV were keeping more people at home with their VCRs, baby oil, and remote control, both professional and amateur gay sex videos flourished. Fritscher waxes whimsical: "So many more people watch videos than read books that I have joked with some guys who buy my books: 'Don't try to stick this in your VCR.'"

Fritscher who shot the original video, *Gut Punchers*, rarely pulls punches. He told John F. Karr during an interview that AIDS has changed and challenged gay men's sexuality, resulting in an increase in nontraditional sex practices and its uses for increased sexual creativity. He notes that gay porn videos are increasingly made by individual artists who are directors casting real guys who may not be porn stars but are certainly no amateurs when it comes to having sex the way actual gay men do. These indie video companies, he says, excel over the larger West Hollywood companies that grind out videos that do not reflect the viewer the way that independent video does with indie artists like Old Reliable who was early on another Fritscher discovery in the pages of *Drummer*.

*Where's video going? It's going to be more fetish oriented, because sex is not only your dick and your butt. The point is to let them have a good time, and also diverge from just thinking about sucking dick and fucking ass. And censorship? That influence of the Meese Commission still rolls along under the principle that if somebody abuses something, you have to take it away. But the abuse of a thing doesn't take away the use of the thing. You can take that principle and put that on every adult video.*

*Prohibition doesn't work. So we're going to see more gay films from independent artists.*

Fritscher has predicted some sweeping changes in the face of the continuing AIDS crisis and its effect upon gay pornography. He grasps the extremely important psychology of the porn consumer and the need for producers of porn to adjust to the changes in demand. One of the most vibrant characters in *Some Dance to Remember* is the video-porn mogul Solly Blue who reveals what real gay sex on tape was like in the 70s. Fritscher—always the analyst connecting the dots—points out that in 1982, the VCR and HIV hit at the same time. Rather than cruising the bars, many gay men began staying home watching gay videos. He writes:

*And [a higher production of gay porn] will change the sexuality of gay men. I think art should primarily entertain; but if it's art, it will change you. Gayness gets you into places you wouldn't get into as just a [straight] person. And a lot of gay boys miss that point if they think the bar style is the only way to be. That sounds like I'm crusading, and I'm not at all. I'm just offering an alternative [to bars].*

Kicking shit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these days Fritscher voices his concerns about the genre of gay literature. As a trained cultural analyst, he is critical of the "gay writing genre" and all of its traps. He seems to be always pushing for something better from gay artists and writers. Fritscher comments in 2001's *The Burning Pen: Sex Writers On Sex Writing* (edited by M. Christian): "Look at the lesbigay magazines. Most of the illustrations look like the drawings of mental patients. Most of the models, pro or amateur, have dead faces. Much lesbigay writing reads the same: mental and dead. Humorless. Lesbigay narrative is largely unimaginative." He told me, "Gay writing has to be more than the 'coming-out novel' and the 'AIDS novel.' Lesbigay writing should begin to cover lesbigay people in terms of the great themes of the whole range of the

human condition, because–ta-DA–we are human first and lesbigay second.”

Chatting it up with Jack Fritscher on a Sunday afternoon was an enchanting experience that was, at times, both unsettling and delightful. I have been warned over and over again to write in the third person, to stick to relevant information only, and not to bring too much of my own personality, biases, and opinions to my writing. Apparently, this is especially true in regard to interviewing.

Of course, this is what many academics might tell you. In my case, that academic is my partner, Robert. He loves to point out any *faux pas* in my writing because he cannot help it—he is an academic. I usually just tell him to piss off.

The first Fritscher characteristic to strike me was his voice. With brilliance often comes an ostentatious air, those sometimes overly professional (read: defensive), articulate (read: I rule the planet), and aggressive (read: poor social skills) traits that make for a challenging interview. Anticipating the possibility of this combination makes my emergency Ativan supply beckon to me from the medicine cabinet. Take me, it says, and relax into the moment. It turned out that I needed no pharmaceutical kick whatsoever because Fritscher, who seems assertive but neither ostentatious or defensive, nearly charmed the pants (literally) off me.

This interview came at an unplanned moment when Fritscher and I connected between a ridiculous array of problems and obligations. Both of our mothers were ailing; our domestic partners needed special attention (Fritscher's is recovering from knee surgery); and I quite frankly grew afraid that Fritscher might change his mind before I dipped into the resources of his worldly mind with my ladle. Yes, Robert my love, you are right. That is a pretty hideous analogy but it stays.

To begin on a more carnal note (and why not, really?), Fritscher is a deadly combination of three alternate elements, opposing the three I had initially feared, all seemingly orchestrated by the Goddess to completely unnerve me. First, his physical appearance is strong in a sexual-authority-figure kind of way. (He finished at #11 on the San Francisco Sheriff's Exam in 1976.) And second, he has a voice that would be a perfect match for an old boyfriend of mine from Philly, still affectionately referred to as "Philadelphia Joe." It is almost like a deep purr, a melodic confidence rarely found except perhaps when you hit the jackpot calling a 900 line (not that I have done such as thing because, man, those expensive minutes add up so goddamn quickly). Fritscher knows pillow talk.

Last, I have never been a huge Marilyn Monroe fan, but I do share at least one trait with her. We are two Geminis wowed by the raw sexual power of intelligence. Marilyn went after writer Arthur Miller whose most famous play was about witchcraft . Hmmm. And Mapplethorpe liked Fritscher because, Mapplethorpe said, “We have intelligent sex.” Hmmm, again. This may not be the most professional statement I will ever make, but I am willing to admit that Fritscher warmed my cockles a degree or two. But enough about me.

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Alexander Renault: Okay, I'm a little nervous, but, nevertheless, here we go. I've always been fascinated by how gay men infuse humor into their sexuality and I think some good examples of this are some of your very amusing erotic story titles. “Mrs. Dalloway Went That-A-Way,” “Brideshead of Frankenstein Revisited,” “It Came Upon A Midnight, Dear,” and “Young Deputy: K-9 Cop.” Do you think gay men use humor within a sexual

context more than other people?

Jack Fritscher: Generally use humor more? Richard LaBonte, you know, of *A Different Light*, the critic, said he thought the title of my story, "[RoughNight@Sodom.Cum](#)," was the funniest title of the year. You mean do gays use humor more in sex?

AR: Yes.

JF: There's a lot of humor in Susie Bright's *Best American Erotica* that comes out annually with stories ranging from gay to straight plus all the alphabet of sexual categories. Maybe in talking about sex, particularly in bar talk, but not in the sex act itself because nothing kills a hardon like camping. I had to stop publisher John Embry from pasting cartoon balloons of dialog over sex photos at *Drummer*, because the camp humor drained the sex from the pix. When you have a hardon, sex is fun but not funny; after you've cum, sex can seem very silly. Oh, yeah. I often think of back rooms back in the day where everyone was having sex and one pair would finish having sex and start camping it up, turning from brothers into sisters, about how they both went to Catholic school--

AR: (laughs loudly)

JF:--and some nun beat them with a ruler. They always really pissed off the guys having sex. Imagine a guy doing a monolog about nuns during the backroom scene at *Babylon on Queer as Folk*. But I do think that surrounding sex, and talking about sex, we always stay humorous because it's the duty of gay men, gay women, to introduce irony and humor into straight experience.

AR: That's excellent.

JF: That's why we exist.

AR: (laughs) You think so?

JF: To point out the irony of it all.

AR: You mentioned Catholicism. You were involved in Catholic education and seminary work. Your latest novel is *What They Did to the Kid: Confessions of an Altar Boy*. And you once pointed out that Robert Mapplethorpe and Andy Warhol were dramatically influenced by their Catholic upbringing. I was raised Greek Orthodox Byzantine Catholic and I was wondering what are some of the major effects you think that a Catholic upbringing has on the artistic sensibility or on artistic temperament.

JF: Transubstantiation, for openers, in that Catholics believe that the body and blood of Christ are conjured out of the bread and wine--not figuratively, not metaphorically, not symbolically, but *really*. So Catholic boys and girls are raised to believe that they can change the substance of things. That's what makes artists believe that things are possible, that things can change. That you can change things substantially.

AR: Art can really change people's perceptions of themselves, each other, and the world.

JF: That's why art exists. That why art is magic. That's why fundamentalists and Puritans hate it. Change is what happens to a receptive person facing art. When a person walks into an art museum, an indie theater, and sees something, or reads some book, something inside them changes. Art is about the artist, sometimes, but always it is mostly about the person looking at it, because through the filter of themselves is the only way they can receive it. So they see themselves reflected in the art. Sometimes they freak at what they see. Their little secret hanging there on the wall.

AR: That's also why we have so much vehement homophobia.

JF: Censors and haters always try to stamp out in others what they most fear in

themselves. Self-hatred leads to censorship and violence. Watch Alan Ball's *American Beauty* about the self-hating homo or *True Believer* about the anti-Semitic skinhead who was hot and Jewish.

AR: Exactly. "Me thinks the lady doth protest too much." Right on target. Dan White. I loved it in *Some Dance to Remember* when you were describing him boxing in the Golden Gloves and you said you thought he was a good gay Irish Catholic. (laughs)

JF: (laughs) Trying to beat down his own queerness by being the most macho man in the ring. When boxing gloves don't work, get a handgun. Ergo, anti-gay violence is mostly self-hatred. The perp hates his own inner fag.

AR: I always think the best writers are the ones that can sniff out motivation, to understand what's making people do what they're doing. If you can present their subtext with a certain artistic flair when you're writing, I think you're really—you *hit* people.

JF: Writing is very interactive, confessional, and working with the "back story" of characters. I usually write characters and let the plot flow from who they are. I thought maybe *Some Dance* didn't have any plot until a critic pointed out it had fifteen characters in eight story arcs. You're talking about writers who are writers of character rather than writers of plot.

AR: Yes, definitely. I've noticed a lot of Catholic people reach a kind of sexual epiphany at some point where their sexual feelings burst through that internal religious firewall. You once wrote that seminary schools have codes and rules that freeze a person's development at about the age of 14. Is this a method of "mind-control" or is my term too melodramatic?

JF: Well, the Church, like the military, prefers to recruit impressionable teenagers and if they can, impress them without any contradictory frame of reference. That keeps down rebellion, revolution, and change. Ironically, people sometimes say gays recruit. What an irony! Again, it's the recruiters themselves accusing us of what they're doing. I think a few Catholic priests have molested a few fourteen-year-olds because when the priests themselves were fourteen, the Church stopped their emotional development; so when the priests are chronologically older, they seek solace in actual fourteen year olds with whom they still emotionally identify. I don't know. Do you want to rephrase that questions again, maybe I could--

AR: Yes. I was wondering if the expression "mind-control" was too melodramatic in response to your thought that seminary school codes and rules sometimes try to freeze people in adolescence emotionally.

JF: All religions are mind-control. Parents are mind-control. The culture wants to control you. Your God wants to control you. You better not eat the apple from that tree! They all want to raise you in conformity. Here it comes! I love the smell of irony in the morning! When everything around you tries to control your mind, but inside, you're gay, your own nature forces you to break through the conformity, and you bite the apple, and come out, not just sexually, but in every way, and go, "Nya, nya, nya!" That's when coming out is successful and effective.

AR: Right.

JF: Once you've broken through conformity in your own sexuality you realize that conformity can be broken intellectually, spiritually, and every other way. It's like Robert Frost says, "we learn from our hands to our heads." Our gay bodies open up our heads. Our alternative use of body leads to our alternative culture. Frost wrote a poem about a

stone wall. The poem is less of a mystery to a reader who has actually taken stones and built a wall. I mean, you can't really write erotica if you've never had sex. We learn from our dicks to our heads. I'm saying that, because you asked.

AR: You once wrote, "You can fantasize how hot gay life once burned [in the 1970s] before viruses and politics and religion repackaged homosexuality." What do you mean by "repackaging?"

JF: Corporations buying up gay culture and dumbing it down. "Gay literary regimes" protecting their little fiefdoms in gay culture and shaping it—and its libraries and archives—to suit themselves. Gay literature could use a great big regime change! Also, repackaging all of gay culture in the shape of HIV as if AIDS is gay culture. Likewise, repackaging gay liberation into gay politics—two totally different beasts. Plus, the arrival of the professional homosexual. It would be a marvelous intellectual exercise for both young students, university professors, and established critics to apply genuine study to LGBT culture. Has enough history passed to take a good hard look at Harvey Milk who became automatically a gay virgin/martyr/saint? Maybe. But in the perspective of time, analysis, and thought, let's check him out. I loved the idea of Harvey Milk. He's a good lightning rod for analyzing recent gay history, particularly since Stonewall. While we're at it, let's check out the party-line perspective on Derek Jarman, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Warhol, Tennessee Williams—you know, our whole canon of gay saints. Sooner or later, every age has to shake itself out like a bathroom rug.

AR: Okay.

JF: My father, and my mother, raised all us kids telling us not to talk about sex, religion, or politics. Of course, those are three of my favorite things. My parents also said, "Don't make an issue out of it." Whatever it was. Once upon a time in America, we used to have topics. We used to have literature. We used to have discussions. But now everything is an "issue." Listen to the way people talk currently. Even on CNN. If you edited the word *issue* from the mouths at lesbigay conferences they way Jerry Springer bleeps *fuck*, they'd stutter. That kind of packaging—turning everything political—is a loser's game. Politicizing always leads to demonization. Most obviously, it causes fights, screaming, and animosity. In some respects, and I do qualify this, so understand this clearly, the politicizing of sex and gender is as unfortunate as the politicizing of airplanes and skyscrapers. Some people think politicizing is necessary. Other people think politicizing just ruins human joy, and human potential.

AR: Exactly.

JF: If people can think in cool principle, then they don't need to descend to hot issues. *Principles. Issues. Uma. Oprah.* Of course, humans don't act on reason; we act on emotion. But if a nation, say, the United States, believes in the principle of freedom, then why is homosexuality an issue, why is abortion an issue? If the Republicans want to bring democracy and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to Iraq, then why can't I pursue my happiness and have a legal federal partnership with my spouse of 24 years? Federal. Not just city, county, or state. Federal. National. American. In the fashion of so many countries in the EU.

AR: I'm going to jump over to a different question. What do you think about the controversy of assimilation of the gay community into the mainstream. There was a magazine out about a decade ago with two young, clean-cut men with two straws sharing a pink milkshake with the heading, "Have Gays Lost Their Edge?" You have made some

controversial statements in the past about gay men needing to enter more into the mainstream to have a positive effect, to create positive change for the gay community. What is your idea of the difference? Do we not want gay people to be too avant-garde in order to gain access to the mainstream?

JF: Without edge, you're dead. You can be avant-garde and be part of the mainstream. What's controversial about "making it" in mainstream America? I mean, don't assimilate and disappear. What's controversial about making your way, paying your way, buying a house, having health insurance. I just think a person needs to be aware of his or her context, and how as one grows older, the context must widen from the bars and baths and ghetto so you can take care of yourself. Tennessee Williams said, "You can be young without money, but you can't be old without money." The mainstream can support life as we live it in a first-world country—like the mainstream or not. For instance, one's horizon cannot be the hills of the Castro, or the end of Christopher Street, or the sunset over WeHo. Capote had Holly Golightly remind us in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, "There's such a lot of world to see." We have to have a recognition that we live in a broader culture—just to do banking, and get our annual physicals. Once in the 70s, on Castro, some gays started the "Atlas Savings and Loan." Sorry to say, that experiment crashed to a quick end. My wish for lesbian people is that as we look at the world, we all get to move to better seats.

AR: Right.

JF: Nobody can be a sectarian, Protestant, or Catholic, and not be an American. You can't be gay and not be part of the national experience. Also, you shoot yourself in the foot if you're not part of the on-going game of capitalism. Buy your own fucking house or condo. Scarlett's father told her and all of us: "Underneath it all, Katie Scarlett O'Hara, it's the land." Capitalism is still the only game basically in the world because Communism has collapsed, taking with it all the politically correct basic principles of Marxism. LGBT persons should be very wary of the dogma and agenda of the politically correct whom I called the "Homosexual Identity Movement" or the "Queer Identity Movement," because they are terrorists 180 degrees opposite that Rudolph guy who bombed the Olympics, a gay bar, and an abortion clinic, because, it's reported, he is a member of the "Christian Identity Movement."

AR: You make this seem way deep. "The Homosexual Identity Movement." Wow. "The Queer Identity Movement." But how far is too far? Do you think that gay men, say, prancing around in sundresses during a parade-- Is there a place where gay men alienate themselves and go too far by shocking the mainstream?

JF: I don't think gay men in dresses any longer shock the mainstream. I think they just make themselves look ridiculous, because most drag—which is way different than the respectability of cross-dressing—rather insults women by dramatizing the worst hair, make-up, clothes, and diva behavior. They look like circus acts. But, fiddle-dee-dee, maybe that's what they want.

AR: (unprofessional burst of laughter) That's what I gathered reading--

JF: The mainstream really doesn't give a fuck who's in it, or whether lesbians are in it. The mainstream—that is, American people—are so self-involved and swept away by their own egos and so blabbing on their car phones they don't even really notice what other people do as long as you don't threaten their children or property values.

AR: Okay, I agree with that somewhat.

JF: Don't agree with anything. All opinions are subject to change without notice. It's just that every time that there's a gay parade and there's one guy in a butterfly costume and half a million people in business suits--

AR: Then that's the picture they take.

JF: They'll photograph the butterfly costume, while gay photographers shoot the shirtless hunks. Two views. Same parade. But that little butterfly video clip always catches the camera. Our right-wing fundamentalist enemies never shoot the masculine-identified gay men. They always love the butterfly footage, because they win if they make us seem ridiculous, and weak, if they make us seem--and this is major--effeminate. So they can feminize us. Then they can treat us like women.

AR: You mean like subordinate creatures.

JF: Of course. Women have been oppressed forever. If religionists pump the idea that gay men are like women, then they can oppress us the way they oppress women. And we don't need to go there. We're not women. We need to be men, and perceived as men, to identify and protect ourselves. Making that statement about gender coordinately also makes women stronger.

AR: I've seen excerpts on *The 700 Club* where their cameras have shot the most outrageous pictures of Gay Pride. They'll show the leather float and then ask people for money to, like, prevent the perverts from taking over the world. Now that we don't have the threat of Communism threatening to destroy traditional family values--that was a *great* money generator for decades.

JF: There's nothing wrong with wearing leather or a dress or any of that stuff, but is that really being *avant garde*? Maybe, by now, leather and drag, are *retro garde*. *Avant garde* means you're leading the crowd. Queers are always going to be *avant garde* because we're always ten years ahead of straight mainstream civilization, the way that California is another country because it's usually ten years ahead of the rest of the USA.

AR: Right. That's an excellent point. You once said in an interview that technology, like DVDs and VCRs, have given gay men an electronic sex partner in the age of AIDS. Daniel Harris wrote in *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* that he perceives strong changes in gay porn from the 1970s to the 1990s, and that gay porn in the 1970s was hot, sloppy, hairy, juicy, and attractive in sort of a looser way. He thinks pornography has moved to the shaved, perfect-looking musclemen who don't have a whole lot of what would seem to be emotional interaction in the porn of the 1990s. Do you agree that such a change is occurring?

JF: I so agree with him I'd kneel down and blow him.

AR: (laughing loudly) Wait! What--

JF: See, what gay video has become is tacky Chi Chi LaRue shit created by studios in Hollywood that are so plastic and impersonal and, quite frankly, corporate, and owned by straight men, that the gay content is skewed. Ironically, if gay culture is so "*avant garde*," as you ask, then why are gay videos so retarded? I have the major gay studios analyzed down to this theorem: "8 Guys in 2-Ways and 3-ways. 8 Cum Shots. 80 minutes. No real sound. Disco soundtrack. \$50." The models in most so-called gay videos are trimmed, shaved, buffed products who are packaged to suggest that they are "18" which is the code number wink-winking the suggestion that they are underage. Why the underage innuendo? Because straight men who like young blond bimbo girls control many gay studios (often times as distributors) and think that gay men therefore must like young

blond bimbo boys. They don't get it. If you want proof of what gay men want in their porn and in their partners, look at any gay rag's "personal classifieds" where straight-acting, masculine, rough, rugged, and ready reflect our real erotic taste.

AR: They want to see images of themselves...

JF: Of themselves really. Yes. Gay men in Iowa are suffocating, gasping for air, and holding their throats, gagging on the images of gay video, wishing that they could see a reflexive video, a reflexive DVD that showed people who look like them. That's why small indie video directors and the Internet are so great.

AR: They reflect real gay guys.

JF: On sites like bigmuscle.com you can see actual guys. That's what I tried to bring into *Drummer*. Actuality. *Verite*. That's why *Drummer* was a success, because the men in the photos were reflexive. They looked like the readers, or like the guys the readers preferred to trick with. That's the terrific thing about homomascularity: it gives gay men a second prime, and a third. Life is not over after 30. A man can be hot in any of his decades. But, here's irony--again. Shades of Pygmalion, Henry Higgins, and Eliza Dolittle, the TV show, *Queer Eye*, has gay men teaching straight men how to groom and care for themselves, which is fearsome, unless there is another reality show I'd call *Butch Academy*, where straight guys teach gay men how to, well, groom and take care of themselves.

AR: Yes. Way better than corporate television or the WeHo gay sex videos, I always think that indie gay porn for some reason is *always* much hotter and better than the slick, packaged--

JF: Sure. In the videos I make, I try to peel the individual person--both straight actors and gay actors--like an onion, layer after layer, like a session at a shrink. So, by the time you're finished watching this guy for 60 to 80 minutes, this guy who I've taken three hours or, sometimes, three days to shoot, you actually get to know pretty much what he's about, maybe even a bit of who he is, and certainly what you might get if you could find him. Unlike the tripod queens, I have always hand-held my camera, and when it comes to the geography of a model's body, my camera goes where you'd like to put your eyes and nose. In videos like my *Sunset Bull*, *Blake Twins Twincest*, and *Party Animal Raw*, in all my videos, I tell the actors to look directly into the camera, and talk directly into the camera, because--you know why? The viewer is on the other side of the camera, at home, sitting on the couch, eye to eye with the model. That's interpersonal. My actors look at you. Most corporate, packaged gay sex videos are like watching fish in an aquarium. The fish swim by, but they never look at you, never acknowledge you, and that ultimately is a demeaning experience. To you, the viewer. It's bad enough that as I watch my favorite videos over the years, the models stay the same age, and I get older. My faves who used to be "older guys" now look like chicken. Yikes.

AR: Yes, you're right, yes. I use the expression "disease aesthetic" because I sometimes wonder if there's a connection between showing the perfect bodies, and everything being so clean, to sort of take away from the feeling that sex is dirty when--I mean with video taped sex, the dirtier the better!

JF: What is forbidden is always hot. What is dangerous is hot. What's more forbidden than bodily fluids. Sperm is the most dangerous fluid on Earth.

AR: Do you prefer the word "erotica" to "pornography?"

JF: "You say potato, and I say potato." Anne Bancroft once sang that song and

pronounced all the key words exactly, identically the same. Her joke made the song about two people who were so exactly the same they had to call the whole thing off. Brilliant. Porn and erotica are synonyms to me. Some people worship at the Church of Porn and others worship at the Church of Erotica. You can get a Lambda Award for writing erotica, but you can't get a Lammy for writing porn.

AR: (laughs) Yes, I've heard that.

JF: I've experienced that.

AR: Jumping back to 1962. You wrote an article, "James Dean: The Magnificent Failure"--

JF: (laughs) Oh, you are good. You did your homework.

AR: It was published in the *Catholic Preview of Entertainment*. I wasn't able to obtain a copy of it. Why did you call James Dean a "Magnificent Failure"?

JF: I didn't know what homosexuality was, but I was in love with James Dean, and mourning him, besotted with him, the only way to write about him and get the article published was in the Catholic press which is a very strong force in America. I spent five pages praising his genius and then in the last paragraphs injected some spin to make it play in terms of Catholic morality. So I wrote five pages detailing his life and a couple final paragraphs going lickety-lickety. He was a romantic bad boy. I used the formula that director Cecil B. DeMille used for his biblical movies: three hours of sex and violence followed by ten minutes of repentance.

AR: Sure.

JF: I wrote the article glorifying and romanticizing the man James Dean and then had to put on a final paragraph to get it published. Jimmy tried very hard to be who he was but ultimately his car crashed. So making the title sound moral and judgmental was needed to get it published. The priest-censor at the seminary told me, "You'll never get this article published." The first mag I sent it to took it. I received a check for \$15. I was accused of being "worldly" for writing it.

AR: Imagine you being considered worldly! Something I've *really* been dying to ask you is about political correctness and erotic literature. After-the-fact consent revealed at the end of a story is frowned upon. A lot of pro-censorship feminists are freaking out over erotica rape fantasies. Also, what about racist material in erotic literature? How far--how far is *too* far with the responsibility of the writer to frame his or her erotica in an acceptable light? For example, if someone came out with a gay men's erotica anthology that features all stories of unprotected sex it would receive rabid reviews.

JF: But only from the rabid.

AR: There's also the controversy over the sex-murder books and stories.

JF: Yes. The way there was over the film, *Cruising*, which is a gay classic.

AR: What is the responsibility of erotica in that it turns some lesbigay people off if it's too *this*, or too *that*?

JF: Well, they're Puritans and I can't help how they feel. Most of them are *declass*e Puritan radical fundamentalist robots, and only recognize art by its threat to their sense of world order--which means they want to run the world their way. Erotica has no responsibility toward these politically-correct people who are its enemies.

AR: Alright.

JF: I think that art is larger than morality. Art is a principle. Morality is about issues. Principles trump issues. Putting art into the service of morality is no more than, for

instance, taking the art of stained glass and putting it to the service of telling Bible stories. Putting the art of lesbigay literature into the service of the “morality” of political correctness, or of hortatory HIV culture, or the limitations of the coming-out story is a myopic travesty of our literature’s potential. Moral messages injected into art are perversions of that art, which needs only the absolute measure of art for art’s sake. Murder might be immoral, but a snuff film could be art if the script is well written and the lighting and focus are good. *Reductio ad absurdum*? You decide. Some of my characters do some bloody acts in “How Buddy Left Me” and “[RoughNight@Sodom.cum](mailto:RoughNight@Sodom.cum).” Hamlet on wry.

AR: Okay, so you don’t see anything wrong with somebody using a racist term while they’re having sex because it makes the person hotter or the scene hotter. (Remember the teacher-student scene in the 2002 film *Story Telling*? Whew!). A lot of people won’t publish something like that because, it--

JF: Then they’re censors. (laughs)

AR: Yeah. (laughs) Okay.

JF: These fucks are fascists and Nazis. Their being gay doesn’t change that. It’s the self-hating principle again. Mapplethorpe used the forbidden word “nigger” with his black sex partners, but he used it sideways, the way African-Americans spin the term on each other. Just like we can use the words *fag* and *queen* and *queer* affectionately. Every S&M top in America affects a southern redneck accent: “You hear me, boy?” Like that. Like they all were born Georgia crackers and graduated the USMC at Parris Island. That redneck character could also be considered racist, but not by anybody with a hardon.

AR: Okay.

JF: Censors of free speech are ignorant oppressors. My writing has been stopped by Canadian customs and banned. At least, that was straights banning gay literature. Worse was when a reviewer at the former *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* told me he couldn’t review my novel, *The Geography of Women*, because it was a book about lesbians written by a man. Now that really is fucked, because, while I may not be Pirandello, I am a neutral artist simply channeling characters that speak to me. That really is benighted censorship, really ignorance. I asked him how he’d review *A Streetcar Named Desire*. *Geography* won a major writing award from a straight magazine, but the lesbigay regime in charge of politically-correct literature proved, you know, you don’t need *The 700 Club* when you have people who are idiots in the gay media. I’m embarrassed at the intellectual level that even in lesbigay culture has gotten dumb and dumber, and no one is speaking out about it. Could this ignorance in our community be because so many LGBT people were so abused in high school that they couldn’t really study, or, worse, dropped out? Which leaves them like the fundamentalist literalists on the far right.

AR: Gotcha.

JF: You ask about racism. Robert Mapplethorpe was often accused of racism for his gorgeous photos of black men as if the mere lensing of a black by a white is a racist act. Actually, a black Mapplethorpe model threatened to kill me for writing the book, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera*. He threatened to kill me on the book tour in Manhattan. The NYPD got involved. The publisher had to hire a bodyguard to protect me, because this black model, who claimed to have been a lover of Mapplethorpe, didn’t like a white lover of Mapplethorpe writing chapters on black men in art. So that was racism, that threat to kill me because of my race. He wanted to write a memoir of Robert

and he felt my memoir stole his thunder just the way that Patricia Morrisroe thought my book stole her thunder. He threatened to kill me because I was white which he wasn't; she wanted to assassinate me because I was gay which she wasn't. Hey, my memoir was published first, and because I succeeded in making it personal—a story between Robert and me, and Robert and other friends—they felt what? Jealous? Another touchy example: the artwork of the Oregon gay artist, the Hun, whose drawings, with their erotic dialog balloons written in both redneck and black southern dialect, could be interpreted as racist, but they are not racist and have appeared in many gay mags.

AR: Right.

JF: But everybody has carefully skated around this for years and looks at his stuff as just hot, and I think that's the way sex is because the Hun is *not* a racist. His lover happens to be African-American and he's very sensitive to race, because to him, as to many, race is an attraction. Maybe it's a fetish. Is that racism? To turn Blacks or Latins or Asians or White Trash into sexual fetishes of desire?

AR: Okay. It seems like we're over-analyzing things to death, is what I'm finding.

JF: Well, you're asking analytical questions, which is cool, so I'm giving you my analysis from my years of experience in living in gay culture and creating a bit of it. Yes, you're right. But, remember the ancient wisdom: the unexamined lesbian life is not worth living.

AR: People are overanalyzing to the point where it's no longer hot. They get a swell of guilt: is this going to hurt someone's feelings?

JF: Analyzing sex is a no-boner no-brainer. When you start analyzing sex, you get a need for Viagra. By the way, feelings? Let me tell you about feelings. Nobody cares about the feelings of GWM who have been demonized by the politically correct with their particular double-sin of both sexism and racism. GWM's get prejudicially trashed by the politically correct for being 1) male and 2) white. Add to that, GWM's also get kicked in the butt by right-wing fundamentalists for being 1) gay. That's why there is the huge schism in LGBT culture in which masculine-identified men have simply abandoned that "corporate culture" of institutionalized homosexuality. There are the hundreds of thousands of bears and other masculine-identified men who simply have nothing to do with the PC drumming circles singing "Kumbaya." Irony alert, again. How did the politically correct take over gay culture and themselves become the left-wing version of right-wing corporations. It's the pot calling the kettle black when the politically correct are in the streets demonstrating against corporations they think are taking over the world when the politically correct think it has been perfectly alright for them to take over LGBT culture and destroy its soul. Believe me, I know about souls.

AR: Of course, in 1971, you published *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth* and you wrote about how witchcraft has had a huge impact upon modern culture. Do you believe that been sustained into and past the year 2000?

JF: Why would witchcraft stop with the Millennium? Witchcraft is always renewing itself. Last week I came off six months of rewriting *Popular Witchcraft* for a new 2004 release. I am renewing it.

AR: Really?

JF: For Halloween, 1963, I was ordained an exorcist by the Catholic Church, and, educated by the white magic of Catholicism, I am also, shall we say, on the other side, also extremely, mmm, familiar with the white and black arts. I'm amazed that the

principles--I write, as I mentioned, on principle and not on issues--that the principles of witchcraft I wrote about in 1969/70 still hold true today. The people whom I was lucky enough to interview then became even more famous [after the book was published in 1971]. Back then, I had to soft-peddle the gay connection to the occult. I could barely--just like with the James Dean article--I could barely mention homosexuality in 1969 so I had to skate around that, and was able to code my book, and thereby include gay magic as the first mention of gay sex in American witchcraft. Now in the new version, I'm able to put in juicy details that before were censored. Things that formerly had to be put into sort of a bourgeois way I can now give the full frontal Fritscher treatment.

AR: That's going to be a *great* book.

JF: I'm introducing *The Gay Grimoire*, the gay book of spells. The underground book that has circulated through gay witches' hands for centuries. All the stuff I couldn't put into it before, like Aleister Crowley shooting his own cum on the first 100 covers of his book titled *White Stains*, after he created a spirit child through mutual masturbation with another man.

AR: That's going to be a great book. Well, my sister's a born-again Christian and she's involved in a lot of religious organizations. She told me that they're growing very concerned because Wicca is growing extremely popular in the U.S. as well as France. I think part of what attracts people to this is that sexuality is considered normal in Pagan ideologies. And I think that the more religion separates the spiritual from the sexual, the more they're sort of missing the boat. Does that make any sense?

JF: The more that religion separates the spiritual and the sexual? Absolutely. Sex is one of the most spiritual things, if not *the* most spiritual thing you can do. You can know somebody's soul within minutes of anonymous sex. People who think anonymous sex is a bad thing, if they want to analyze something, analyze anonymous promiscuous sex. You can meet more people's souls doing that than any other way. Satan is not politically correct like the poor victims of the Human Potential Movement with its leftist-derived values that bled into gay liberation and turned it political. Get on your knees for some anonymous worship of the God Priapus. You ain't just sucking cock. You're worshiping dick.

AR: Okay. (giggling)

JF: I love anonymous sex as a variation on a theme of collecting souls. You can gain access to a perfect stranger's very being, his soul, and learn everything he is, yet you don't know anything about his baggage--if his rent is paid, if he hits his teeth with his dinner fork, and all that ugly stuff. His baggage is not his soul. His essence is something that you fuck or work over in a sex scene until there's the click of epiphany. His or yours, or both when it's great. Anne Rice and I lived in the Castro in the late 60s and early 70s. We knew some of the same vampires and witches. I wrote the nonfiction *Popular Witchcraft*, published in 1971, and she wrote the fictional *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976. Gay sex is about collecting souls. Wanna see my collection?

AR: Your writing? Your videos? Omigod, I'm beginning to get it.

JF: When your perfect strangers end up crying, then you know that they've had good sex. They are so relieved, accepted, loved.

AR: (laughing) That's *great*.

JF: (laughing) When you see that catharsis in their eyes and they're saying, "Baby, baby, baby," then you know you've done a good job of sexual healing. I believe in liberation

through orgasm. That's why I write to make the reader cum. Masturbation cures depression.

AR: Whew. I'm getting a little warm, myself. I-- Uh--

JF: (laughs)

AR: Okay. Uh, alright. Speaking of sexual archetypes, do you think that the Leather Daddy persona is a gay archetype?

JF: Archetype, sometimes. Stereotype, sometimes. Everybody in American culture in the last few years has been saying, "Who's your Daddy?," because Daddy, on one hand, is someone who is well loved and desired. But with the repackaging of humanist women's lib as fundamentalist politicized feminism (which is exactly like a corporation), Daddy has been so trashed in the last 30 years, along with the unjust trashing of men, that naturally the thing that is forbidden--Daddy--is the thing that is most lusted after.

AR: The attraction of the taboo.

JF: Yes. Everybody in therapy seems to have been told that their father abused them and did all these other things. Men are beasts, and fathers are universally the worst. Not!

AR: Right. Oh, yeah.

JF: What's the matter with eroticizing one's father, especially if you're a guy, and you need a man to initiate you into manhood? Have you read my story, "Daddy's Big Shave"? A father and son, in my book, can't really commit incest, because incest is a taboo mainly about breeding. Incest is 1) a straight taboo and 2) a gay erotic fantasy. Three of my favorite Palm Drive videos are *Blake Twins Raw: Twinscest*, as well as *Sex My Father Taught Me*, and *My Nephew, My Lover*. I've certainly mined the theme.

AR: So, there's a direct link between the erotic Daddy archetype and persona and the way that we've sort of demonized the adult male authority figure?

JF: Right. The lesbian press is full of stories of people desperately seeking Daddy sexually. Yet, the irony is, they don't want to be told what to do by any authority. And the essence of Daddy is authority. Tennessee Williams invented "Daddy" for gay culture with Big Daddy in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Big Daddy was God.

AR: Okay.

JF: Which offends ignorant people who think that an omnipotent God has a gender. No one wants to be told what to do, unless it's in a sex scene. They don't want their individuality stifled. Yet there is the human need to be told what to do. That's why people join the politically correct who tell them what to think and feel. Nevertheless, gay culture is full of icons of authority whom people want to kneel down and worship: firemen, policemen, soldiers, truckers, priests--

AR: Exactly.

JF:--so those are all Daddy types. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. But you know that." The problem with the Daddy/Son fetish--

AR: That was my next question.

JF: There's the bedroom fantasy. Then there's real life. I wrote the first article eroticizing cigars. I meant cigars as a fetish used occasionally in a sex scene. I didn't mean cigars should become a 24/7 habit. Daddy/Son games are harmless in bedroom and dungeon. But to live it out in real life, I think, infantilizes men who should be self-starting adults. Hey, if you're 60 and have a Daddy who is 70, well, that's play, psycho-drama. But some of these boys who at 30 are seeking Daddies every night in the bars run the risk of getting stuck in the Peter Pan Syndrome, and remaining juvenile, and not taking responsibility

for taking care of their job, their health, their future.

AR: Right.

JF: Because this is all psychological and psychosexual. Lifestyle has repercussions in the length of the lifespan, and the quality of life.

AR: But turning lifestyle into a full-time life?

JF: God help us. A philosophical point: should being gay be a full-time life? Gay consciousness is 24/7, but that's who we are, and not necessarily a 24/7 lifestyle. Saint Oscar Wilde warned us all about the danger of total gay lifestyle in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*.

AR: I see.

JF: We don't want to be juvenile. We want to be boyish and young and sweet and fresh and all that, but we don't want to be juvenile, in the bad sense of that term.

AR: Here's something to connect to all this. What did you mean when you wrote this--I thought this was really interesting: "If I have a mission, a personal quest, it's always been to penetrate further and further into the tighter and tighter circles of fraternity that men put together for their own rituals. That's what I've been trying to capture on screen."

JF: Yes. That's one of my main themes as a writer, because "belonging to the inner circle" is the heart of the gay quest. *Some Dance to Remember* is about.

AR: "Penetrating into the circles of fraternity." I'm-- I'm not--(laughs) I'm not grasping this.

JF: You were born when? After Stonewall? Lucky young you. Remember, I was raised during a time of hunted, haunted homosexuality when gay stories, plays, and movies always ended in gay suicide, like *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman whose birthday is the same as mine. My childhood occurred in the arms of men departing as soldiers for the Second World War. Those men belonged to something. When I was a little boy I always thought that, you know, those other boys--they were the football team. I'd never be on the football team. I don't have that kind of body or temperament. But how can I penetrate into that fraternity of men who are alternative to me who am a man nevertheless?

AR: Oh, I get it.

JF: And so as a gay boy, as a gay man, I pumped weights and learned how to play football enough to hang with the team. I always seek other fraternities deeper inside the gay fraternity. There was one inner circle of A-Gay fraternity where I was invited and chose not to go, and that was the very inner circle in the 70s who were secretly shooting up at parties and orgies. That IV drug use, sharing needles, I think, infected the super A-group more than the actual exchange of sex fluids. Nevertheless, I pursue deeper circles of masculinity inside the concentric rings of the gay world. Just like after 9/11, firemen became even more heroic, and people wanted to penetrate deeper into the secret fraternity of the fire station, to get in there and cook the supper, put it on the table, watch them shower, and, I, with the same infiltrating desire as Walt Whitman and the twenty-ninth bather wanted to get in there with them.

AR: A lot of gay porn revolves around that, breaking into secret worlds, our curiosity seeking satisfaction...

JF: It's our theme, our archetype, the goal of our cruising. We are all like Walt Whitman who was an imminent gay example of infiltrating deeper circles of masculinity.

AR: ...where you suddenly find that all the firemen, cops, and Marines are all gay but

only within their fraternity.

JF: Absolutely.

AR: --“homomascularity” is what you refer to it as.

JF: That’s the word I coined back in the 70s, when modern homosexuality was talking about itself for the first time, and I haven’t found anything to improve on that concept. And I really think--

AR: That’s great. Every year the American dictionary includes new words. Someone should suggest *homomascularity*.

JF: That term could end some gay-bashing because it’s a declaratory, almost aggressive, and certainly assertive word. I think that masculine gay men are the group that are most ignored and denied by gay culture.

AR: Oh?

JF: Masculine gay men are exactly the image we need to balance the butterfly costume, and to keep us from being classed as women and mistreated the way women are. Genuine women’s lib and genuine gay lib are two sides of the same coin.

AR: Right. I guess lesbigay discrimination against gay males is now a strange form of reverse discrimination but--it’s very sneaky. Discrimination is a strange bird.

JF: If sin exists, discrimination is a sin. The Pope says racism is a sin; so why wouldn’t sexism be? A great example of homomascularity is the film, *The Sum of Us*, starring Russell Crowe. Australian culture exudes understanding of the homomascularity of men even while it understands *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. What is more wonderful than the ever-lovely Terence Stamp fingering his hair back from his face? I imitate him all the time. The great metaphors of homomascularity these days are the bear and the muscle guys.

AR: Sure. I love bears.

JF: Straight guys who want to be--you, know, want to bash fags--don’t go out and bash bears. They’re afraid of the perceived masculinity. They might just get punched back. I know I wouldn’t want to tangle with the guys at bigmuscle.com or beefyboyz.com or bigmusclebears.com. They’re real fellas and it looks like they’ve got their shit in order.

AR: Yeah. Oh, yeah. You once mentioned you liked the film *Angel Heart* and I was wondering what you thought of *The Sixth Sense*? And I loved Nicole Kidman in *The Others*.

JF: In *Angel Heart*, Mickey Rourke found the Devil in himself, which is, of course, the truth about the Devil, and the only truth about Satan you need to know, because each person is their own Satan. Nicole Kidman in *The Others* is tight and intense. *The Others* is, of course, about the sixth remake of Henry James’ novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, which has also been a Benjamin Britten opera and a Broadway play.

AR: Oh?

JF: In fact I was just proofing the Hollywood part of my witchcraft book a little bit ago. *The Sixth Sense*, I think these [types of films] alert people to another dimension that’s out there.

AR: Absolutely.

JF: And I also think that all the approaches to the occult, to the neo-paganism and all that, are all ways that help explain what it is to be gay besides just genital sex.

AR: Really?

JF: Yes. Spiritually. Psychically. A sixth sense is something that gay people have. It’s the

foundation of gay irony which grows from a seer's extrasensory vision. In fact if you take the literature of witchcraft--

AR: --That's brilliant. I never thought of it that way--

JF: --from witches, homosexuals, or women, you get a completely different view of what witchcraft is, of what power is, of what extra-sensory intuition is, of what gaydar is.

How a culture treats its women, its children, and its homosexuals tells you all you need to know about that culture.

AR: Sure. And how it cares for its disabled people.

JF: Some straights think of us as pets, waiters, and servants who do their hair and decorate their houses and run around in butterfly costumes. If we look like we won't take shit, maybe they won't fuck with us--because, you know, right-wing Americanists who are patriotically correct--and hate the left-wing politically correct--are very much going to fuck with us, soon, and hard. Life in this first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is very Weimar Republic, very Isherwood and Sally Bowles, and very threatening as history circles back around over our cabaret.

AR: Right.

JF: My life, education, research and writing have made me aware that the last time [in 1490] Christianity and white culture were fighting infidel Muslim and Jewish cultures, Christians began the Inquisition that turned inward from attacking the Muslims and Jews to persecute its own women and homosexuals they called witches and heretics. The Inquisition was the holocaust of witches and homosexuals. Believe me, straight men are rarely accused of witchcraft, because they don't exude that sixth sense.

AR: Be afraid. Be very afraid.

JF: Lesbigans need to get our act together. Thirty-four years after Stonewall, and we LGBT folks are again in danger. Ironic. Like Jews in 1930s Germany. History has taught us: people might want to fuck around with Jews, but they don't fuck around with Israelis. So we have to be a little bit more Israeli, or we're going to end in disaster, back in the closet, or killed, like Garcia Lorca whom the Spanish executed by firing a gun inserted up his gay poet ass.

AR: Okay, I got ya. One thing--I'm not sure if this'll work out well--but I'm curious about what you think about this quote. Camille Paglia wrote in 1992's *Vamps & Tramps* that she considers Robert Mapplethorpe to be her spiritual brother. She believes that his photography was utterly brilliant because he was able to open people's eyes and to see people and objects as they really are, and that we're trapped by certain impulses. She wrote, "Mapplethorpe, in his life and his work, shows the harsh truths faced by our Sixties generation, whose quest for sexual freedom ended in disaster. It is nature, not society, that is our greatest oppressor." What do you think of her analogy? I always have a little bit of trouble with when she almost insinuates sometimes that the sexual freedom of past generations is to be blamed for the growth of HIV and AIDS.

JF: Here's a news flash: sexual freedom didn't end in disaster. A virus was introduced by some world corporation, but sexual freedom still manages to endure. Anyway, I love Camille Paglia as my female doppelganger.

AR: Oh, really?

JF: We did a BBC Channel 4 TV show together called *Priapus Unveiled*. It was about the modern world's fear of penis, dick, cock....

AR: I just love her and people hate me for it. (laughs)

JF: I love her, too. (laughs) If I were straight and she'd have me, hmmm, maybe we'd both be teaching someplace, a faculty couple, a little like a good George and Martha. If we were both teaching in the same place we'd both be, you know, I think, fairly close. We both like dick, pop culture, erotic literature, and analysis.

AR: Yeah.

JF: I think Camille's mostly a humanist despite all the other things she seems to be.

AR: Right.

JF: I also am a humanist despite all the things that people want me to be, or say I am. I'm what Variety calls a "hyphenate:" author-photographer-producer-videographer-professor-critic. People get confused about me, because they fail to make the distinction that the fiction I write is not my autobiography. In my fiction, I channel characters. Camille, however, writes nonfiction. I do think Camille's a bit swept away in terms of saying that nature is our oppressor, especially when it's the federal government, the state, that's trying to regain power to oppress us, unless one equates the state with nature, with governing the natural order by legislating nature, by legislating morality. I don't think nature is our oppressor any more than nature is heterosexuals' oppressor. If we say that HIV oppressed us, we could then say that SARS is now oppressing heterosexuals. Nobody ever mentions the population explosion, that there's too many people on the planet and nature's using HIV and SARS trying to thin out the herd. Everyone talks about the environment, but no one ever mentions that the problem with the environment comes from over-population. There once were actual parking places available. Stop the breeders: straight, lesbian, and gay, in every culture. Sexual freedom was not destroyed by promiscuity. The Titanic 70s was a ship, speeding along with a party on every deck, until it crashed into the iceberg of HIV. Sex did not cause HIV. Nature might have. More likely some scientist invented HIV as a chemical weapon of mass destruction and released it in Africa where gays contacted the virus. HIV is the ultimate closet if not the ultimate concentration camp. Camille is interesting on the subject of Mapplethorpe who had the ability to see with his sixth sense, to visualize, to see visions, and Mapplethorpe is a good example of somebody who refused to be ghettoized.

AR: How so?

JF: He was a success in the gay world, then the art world, and then a phenomenon in American culture. He made it. He got rich. He was incorporated. He was a media rocket who set the government on its never-ending McCarthyite ass. He escaped the gay ghetto and many people hated him for leaving, were jealous of his success.

AR: People resented that?

JF: Because he didn't take them along.

AR: Ahh.

JF: They couldn't get over themselves.

AR: And there you have it--

JF: I've interviewed a lot of photographers. Most of them are very cool. But some gay photographers actively envy and totally *hate* Robert Mapplethorpe's guts because he and his photos made it out and they didn't. Some people then spin things and make it a virtue not to escape, as if escape is selling out, or is losing one's gay identity through assimilation into the mainstream. When Mapplethorpe died, his estate was estimated to be over 225 million dollars, but more importantly, his work is art to die for. He was brilliant. He burned bright. We fucked each other. He died.

AR: Wow. The one thing I like that Camille says is that she really pushes [the concept of] men's fear of women's sexuality. Do you agree that one of the reasons why our culture is so misogynist is because of this underlying fear of women's sexuality?

JF: Hey, why ask me? I write novels about women as main characters. My good friend, the much-published British critic, Edward Lucie-Smith, says that misogyny and male attitude toward women is basically due to the male fear of castration.

AR: I'm crossing my legs.

JF: Coupled with the fear of being expelled from the female womb and feeling that as a rejection.

AR: I see.

JF: Whether or not that's true, you can ask Freud who in the alphabet comes after Foucault and before Fritscher. I don't know. Could you rephrase that question?

AR: Sure. Do you agree with Camille's idea that at the basic root of misogyny is a tremendous fear of the power of woman, the power of the female?

JF: Do women have power? Witches do. I would only like to address "misogyny" in terms of "misandry," the hating of men, as well. Both are hateful, divisive, stupid, and dangerous sins of the intellect.

AR: Okay.

JF: One can't talk about hatred of women without talking about the hatred of men because they're both gender specific, and gender is a limited horizon. "Hey, I can't see the forest for the gender." *Male* and female are reciprocal terms like *mother* and *child*. You can't even think of one without thinking of the other. Like *matriarchy* and *patriarchy*, and *God* and *Goddess* are also reciprocal terms that balance and explain each other. You can't have one without the other. The gender wars, the battle of the sexes, has gone on since Adam met Eve. The danger is becoming trapped in gender. Gender is a function of being human. Humanism does not allow the hatred of other humans, and does not favor one gender over another, or patriarchy over matriarchy. Yet today if you yell "matriarchy," everybody goes "Cool." If you yell "patriarchy," they boo and hiss. I want no matrix and I want no patrix. It is, however, easy to see why some lesbigay people strung out along Kinsey's scales of gender and sexual preference, see themselves as emblematic of the battle of the sexes that has gone on from prehistoric caves until now.

AR: Right.

JF: *Misogyny* and *misandry* have been especially virulent in the past 30 years because the women's movement, like the gay movement, has been hijacked from humanism into feminist politics. There's nothing wrong with being a feminist per se, but even feminists have to allow for people to be masculine which is as forbidden a topic in the politically correct lesbigay press as it is in lesbigay society. I fear for the psyches of male children being programmed in man-hating households. A diverse group of modern people, including the humanist Bishop Spong, are trying to restore respectability to being male; unfortunately, one has to be careful of these champions of masculinity, because many of them are right-wingers who mean the macho of John Wayne, which is not what I mean by homomascularity. My concern is that some of them—especially the politicians who do not separate government from religious fundamentalism—will go overboard. The war on Iraq, for instance, is among all the things that it is a macho drama directed by a man with exaggerated male body language in the way he walks, sits, and drawls. My main theme

in *Some Dance to Remember*, in which a main character writes a “Masculinist Manifesto,” is that absolute masculinism is as wrong as much as absolute feminism is wrong in a world of humanism where first a person is human, then a gender, then whatever comes third and fourth in the list of what you are existentially.

AR: It’s a two-way street.

JF: Once you get into gender you’re only talking about half of anything. If you talk about the whole thing, you have to talk about what it is to be human. And so after 30 years of male bashing--look at all the TV commercials where men are told they’re fools if they don’t eat that cereal or eat that canned soup. Who gets slapped in movies? The men get slapped by women all the time. But if a man slaps a woman it gets a different moral rating. If a woman is killed, as in the case of Nicole Brown Simpson, or Bonnie Lee Blakely, or most recently, Laci Peterson, automatically, it’s the husband who did it.

AR: I see. I still think Scott Peterson did it, the sick bastard.

JF: The media, needing a contrapuntal news story to Bush’s Iraq war, cause you to say that. Ask yourself if the 24/7 news coverage brainwashes viewers and crucifies the innocent to get ratings. That Peterson woman’s murder is an issue, but the Peterson husband’s right to be “innocent until proven guilty” is a principle. Actually, as a writer of nonfiction and an author of fiction, I look for plot twists that are less than the obvious. Our escalating reality in the first three years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes dreaming up fiction harder. Once it was fiction to fly a plane into a building on purpose.

AR: A quick question about Madonna.

JF: (laughs) Talk about flying a plane into a building.

AR: What do you think about the criticisms that Madonna has siphoned off the gay and African-American communities to create trendy styles? I’m guessing that you would approve [of her tactics] since Madonna has taken some underground sensibilities and brought them into the mainstream. Is it theft, celebration, or a combination of the two?

JF: One question: who died and made Madonna an interpreter of gay culture? Go figure. Good for the girl! Madonna seems to celebrate gay culture, although she, like all those divas, may just figure gays as an easy market who will buy records out of gratitude for the attention the divas seem to pay. I like her name. Actually, long before she hit the scene, the main female character in my 1970 novel, *Leather Blues*, was named Madonna. Catholics get it. In my experience, Madonna is cool, because one day in the 90’s, Madonna’s people, let’s put it that way, actually called [me].

AR: Really?

JF: Very sweet. Very nice. When my photo book, *American Men*, was published in England, Madonna wanted my model, Dave Gold, for a video. So, I called Dave Gold and told him that Madonna’s people wanted to contact him. I thought it was great. He didn’t. Shows you what my opinion is worth. I was shocked because he wouldn’t even give me permission to give his fax number to give to her. (laughs)

AR: Really?

JF: I mean, my God, if Madonna wanted you in a video, wouldn’t you do it? (laughs) Wouldn’t anybody? What fun!

AR: (laughs) So, he never did it, the fool.

JF: He let the moment slip by.

AR: That’s something.

JF: I appreciate Madonna trying to penetrate into the inner circles of fraternity in gay

culture. She harvests gay culture; that's what the mainstream does; it samples us. What was she doing looking at my gay photo book? Jerking off? Looking for hot guys? Through my photo images, she was sampling, casting one of her videos. And I think that's just swell.

AR: I agree.

JF: Madonna is a Catholic girl who celebrates everything to make sure she's not feeling Catholic guilt. Thank God, she champions gay culture instead of bashing it.

AR: Yet people are jealous of her fame and wealth.

JF: I'm jealous of her for snapping up that cute and talented Guy Ritchie. I don't get people hating her for the sake of hating her, as when people dismiss the movie, *Swept Away*, where she plays a capitalist bitch who gets taught a lesson by a blue-collar hunk...

AR: (loud laugh, interrupting)

JF: That looked like acting to me--like movie acting. She was certainly better than the actress in the original back in the wild 70s. And that was a very good film by Lina Wertmüller.

AR: Real quick. Well, actually I want to jump back to something else and ask you about the future of--

JF: Let me get my crystal ball.

AR: (laughs)--about gay cultural--

JF: Here, wait until I shake it up to make the snow swirl around Satan, because hell has frozen over.

AR: What is the future for gay cultural studies at a university level? John Burger wrote in 1995's *One-Handed Histories: The Eroto-Politics of Gay Male Video Pornography* that he believes gay porn is a means of documenting the history of at least part of gay life for future generations. What do you think will be the historical significance of gay male pornography?

JF: Burger's title straddles--and illustrates--the schizo divide between pop culture and academia. *One-Handed Histories* is pop sexy. The rest of the title, particularly the *Eroto-Politics*, shows that academia's viral jargon has entered the bloodstream of pop culture. I mean no offense to John Burger who is absolutely right. For gay cultural studies to succeed at the university level, the canon of gay literature must be rescued from the politically correct academics who are smothering the life out of the list. The University of Wisconsin is doing some wonderful publishing of lesbian literature. Gay male porno, both on page and screen, actually reveals the heart, soul, and character of its time because it is pop culture, and pop culture is always more reflexive of the truth of the way we are. Also, gay porno has always been around. Porno endures. Remember there was no gay book publishing house until the mid-80s.

AR: Right.

JF: In the 70s I had to use magazines to get historical pieces about gay culture published. Mags were the great gay medium of the 1970s. I'm currently putting a book together, *The Best of Drummer Magazine*, because those articles were historical things written at the time, written inside the time, and each one needs a thumbnail to introduce its historical context.

AR: Absolutely. They were ahead of their time.

JF: Because no one knows who Anita Bryant is anymore, I have to explain her evilness in a paragraph. But I think [Burger's] totally right. In fact, I was in a panic in 1971 because

the first video cameras were coming out and they weren't available on a consumer level, but they were supposed to be as soon as the Beta [versus] VHS format wars were ended. Well, that did not end until 1981, which means that all the 70s exists on super-8 film and they're all silent and short, unlike video of the 80s which has sound and hours of footage. Believe me, all these revisionist critics who don't understand the 70s! Everybody would have a different attitude toward the Titanic 70s which went steaming onward like a glorious party until it hit the ice burg of HIV. Don't blame the passengers on the ship; that's as stupid as beating the messenger..

AR: Right.

JF: If the 70s had been on video tape with sound, that decade of our history would be so accessible...

AR: I never thought of that.

JF: --PBS [television] tries to show what the 70s were like and they're begging people, "Go to your super-8 movies and try to find some footage of some parade or [another gay event]." When I shot the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade in 1972, I could only afford two rolls of Super-8 film, and that's only eight minutes total. I had been shooting films for 20 years by that time so I had early on learned how to edit in the camera while I was actually shooting because I always hated editing. I taught myself to count, like visual music, so I would shoot just the right number of seconds I wanted of any particular thing. I always try not to get garbage footage that I'd have to edit and cut. I learned that discipline in Super-8 that taught me how to get nearly a 90% return on the video footage I shoot. out. In the 70s, I shot units of four-minute films, whereas now I go to shoot video documentaries of the gay parade, or the Folsom Street Fair, and I shoot two hours of digital video.

AR: Right, right.

JF: What a pleasure. Burger is right, because in the thirty years I've been shooting gay men, this footage becomes a documentary [a record of] changing styles of what gay men look like and how they dress and how their lives have changed as they appear in, for instance, that annual measurement of bodies, faces, and leather, the Folsom Street Fair.

AR: Burger talks about the films of the 70s of men meeting each other on the docks--

JF: --Check out the NY dock photographs of Arthur Tress to whom I gave an erotic ride in *Drummer*--

AR: --and how different it is now-a-days, and that captures gay men's history. How they meet and interact.

JF: For one of the best--or, *the* best--documentary of the real S&M players of the New York night, watch *Cruising*. Get a DVD of *Cruising* and single frame your way through that and you'll see everybody who was anybody in the Manhattan gay leather and street scene in the 70s.

AR: Really?

JF: *Cruising* is one of the best existing historical documents of gay culture in the 70s, and activists hated it when it was being shot, and when it was released--

AR: Yeah, they boycotted it.

JF: I mean, why? Because the gay guy might be a murderer?

AR: There's that over-reaction again.

JF: They don't object to *Who's Afraid of Baby Jane*. (laughs) I've made a hybrid title.

AR: (laughs)

JF: When a gay icon like Betty Davis plays a murderess everybody cheered. But back then, have a gay character be a murderer, especially of other gays, and suddenly [people are protesting] in the street.

AR: That's sort of like--

JF: I never understood that. *Cruising* is just such an extraordinary film, because its *mise en scene* is the warp and woof of homosexuality, of a very popular kind of homosexuality.

AR: Like *Basic Instinct*. That one seriously pissed off the lesbian community--

JF: William Friedkin also directed *The Exorcist*, you know. Let's look at the dark side of things. He helped witchcraft by presenting the *mise en scene* of the urban occult. Why wouldn't he have helped gay culture?

AR: Speaking of *The Exorcist*, real quick--I found on the sidelines--I found in writing that you were ordained with the minor orders of Porter, Rector, Acolyte, and Exorcist. Is that right?

JF: Yes.

AR: Could you elaborate on the Exorcist part? I was just really curious when I saw that and I wasn't sure what it meant.

JF: In Catholicism in order to exorcize Devils, a man needs to be ordained by the Church. There are four minor orders: *Porter*, the keeper of the door; *Lector*, the keeper of the book; *Acolyte*, the keeper of the candle; and *Exorcist*. I'm all four.

AR: Wow.

JF: In October, 1963, just in time for Halloween, I was ordained an Exorcist.

AR: Isn't that amazing.

JF: Sexually it comes in handy. Just kidding. I was ordained with the power to exorcize Devils.

AR: That is just amazing. Unbelievable. (pause) Uh, okay. (pause) Um, we're getting--

JF: (laughs)

AR: We're getting--

JF: Rather primitive! Actually, exorcism is rarely used--

AR:--Right--

JF: --because it's more or less, just something, you know, *atavistic*, left over from the white magic of paganism which Catholicism co-opted when Christ founded the Church. In the New Testament, Jesus was always casting out Devils. He was tempted by the brightest of Devils, Lucifer, who was wearing black leather chaps and carrying a silver bullet of amyl nitrite.

AR: (laughs) Right.

JF: (laughs) In the Swinging 1960s, witches were among the first groups liberated.

Anton LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966. The Manson-Tate cult murders hit the headlines in 1969. *The Exorcist* followed--

AR: Yeah, whew! That film fucked people up.

JF: When I started interviews for *Popular Witchcraft* in 1969, hardly anybody believed in witches, but after August 9<sup>th</sup> 1969--

AR: They did.

JF: --That morning, with the news of the Manson-Tate murders, suddenly everybody believed in cults, covens, witches, magic, sorcery, evil....

AR: What a fascinating piece of history. I'm going to try a small experiment and we can

strike this if it doesn't work. There are many famous people with whom you've associated, or are connected with you, and a few people I wanted to ask about. So what we're going to try is a little word association. I have a list of 15 people. I want to say their name and I want you to tell me the first word that comes to your mouth, or to your mind.

JF: (using thick German accent) Yes, Dr. Freud.

AR: Let's go ahead and give it a shot. The first one--deep breath, clear your mind--Patti Smith.

JF: (pause) Mapplethorpe's Muse.

AR: John Schlesinger.

JF: (long pause) Daring pioneer. His *Darling!* His *Midnight Cowboy!*

AR: Thomas Aquinas.

JF: The only great mind the Catholic Church ever produced without burning him at the stake.

AR: Tennessee Williams.

JF: My friend. A great male writer channeling great female characters.

AR: Joel-Peter Witkin.

JF: Shocking, astounding artist. Loved by the French. A sweet man.

AR: James Dean.

JF: (pause) The human ashtray. He loved to be burned with cigarettes. I want his red windbreaker.

AR: Excellent. The Promise Keepers.

JF: Religiously correct fundamentalist husbands.

AR: (laughs) J.D. Salinger.

JF: Why wasn't Holden Caulfield just a little bit gay?

AR: Winston Leyland.

JF: (long pause) Um... (big laugh) Oh, boy.

AR: You can pass on that one.

JF: Winston Leyland. Um...um, let me see. There's so many spontaneous things I could say about him.

AR: Okay.

JF: (laughs) A keeper of the canon of gay literature.

AR: Okay. Our current President, Bush.

JF: He always be a governor to me.

AR: Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin.

JF: Two fundamentalist Puritans.

AR: (laughs) Yeah, I know.

JF: Aren't they over?

AR: Excellent. John Waters.

JF: (pause) Genius on a shoe-string. I once ate lunch on Castro with Divine, and when she was finished, the waiter broke her dishes.

AR: That's good. Andrew Sullivan.

JF: A British god descended from the Romans. Cute, too.

AR: Madonna.

JF: Catholic girl, over-achiever. Got it on her own. Nobody gave her anything.

AR: Lou Reed.

JF: (long pause) Blew my mind, live in 1966, with the Velvet Underground performing in Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* on Wells Street in Chicago's Old Town.

AR: Okay, last one. Robert Mapplethorpe.

JF: You're breaking my heart with this.

AR: Yeah.

JF: It's a heartbreaker.

AR: It's a hard one.

JF: Robert Mapplethorpe. (long pause)

AR: I didn't really write it down on my list because I wasn't going to ask, but--

JF: No, um...Smart man. Good sex. Very sweet.

AR: Okay. Okay. Alright, I'll tell you, I've got one last question and it's pretty ridiculous, but I ask everybody this and it sounds hokey, but I'm going to ask anyway. If they made a movie of your life...

JF: Is Ken Russell still making movies?

AR: ...what would be the theme song?

JF: The theme song?

AR: Yes.

JF: (laughs) "Moon Glow and Theme from *Picnic*."

AR: Why?

JF: Because "Moon Glow" is the song that I sing most of the time when I catch myself singing, which is often.

AR: That's great--

JF: So it must be in my head most of all. It's kind of witchy. Because everything that I think and everything that I write comes out of "Moon Glow." I remember all my sexcapades bathed in "Moon Glow." My domestic life is lived totally in "Moon Glow." My parents' favorite song, the one they memorialized each other by, is "I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you."

AR: Ah.

JF: We are a very Dianic family. We seem to honor the Goddess of the Moon, Diana. In fact, I have a niece named Diana who's a lesbian. We are Catholics who have always worshiped the moon. Are you aware of all the statues of the Virgin Mary who is usually standing on a crescent moon...

AR: Do you know what I was listening to just before you called? I popped in one of my many anonymous compilation tapes and it was "Moon River" by Sarah Brightman.

JF: "Moon River" is a wiccan hymn of white magic.

AR: Very strange. I never listen to that anymore, but I just popped it in this afternoon right before you called.

JF: At the end of the last interview I did with another journalist, Bill DeNoyelles of the Leslie-Lohman Gallery, the house next door caught fire and burned to the ground. His sister is a witch. She was impressed.

AR: I think I'll leave now. Is there anything you want to add?

JF: I think your questions were extremely good. You did your homework. You must have used my website. Great!

AR: (laughing) Good, because I was nervous as shit before I returned your call. It's like—I don't know, interviewing you is a little bit like asking--it sounds stupid-- but it's like asking Shakespeare to read one's play.

JF: (laughs) I have his high forehead and his bad hair, that's the only resemblance.

AR: I didn't really want to ask too much, but, you know, I had to force myself...because I can learn something interviewing people.

JF: Are you shy? I never believe gay men who tell me they are shy. How shy can a man be who has dared to come out to the world?

AR: (laughs) I'll tell you what. It was really a pleasure talking with you.

JF: And with you, Alexander, as well.

AR: Thanks so much for being a part of *Pornographic Pulsar*.

JF: Which part?