

Litlog

Göttinger eMagazin für Literatur - Kultur - Wissenschaft

Litlog Pride Parade InEnglish

Diverse · Friday, June 18th, 2021

It's June and that means: It's Pride Month! On this occasion, Litlog authors have compiled a colorful list of recommendations for you. Be they a bit older or current - you shouldn't miss out on these five LGBTQ books, movies and series.

Ihr könnt diesen Artikel [hier](#) auf Deutsch lesen.

Trigger warning: Homophobia

And Then We Danced

By Sebastian Kipper

When it premiered at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, the drama *And Then We Danced* received standing ovations for fifteen minutes. The screening in Germany, instead, was overshadowed by the Corona pandemic. This is regrettable as the Georgian-Swedish production is an enthralling contemporary contribution to the increasingly international queer cinema.

And Then We Danced portrays young dancer Merab (Levan Gelbakhiani) who has been training at the National Georgian Ensemble since his childhood. His dream is to become a successful dancer and travel the world. However, during class, Merab is often criticised by his dancing instructor as his style defies the ideal image of traditional Georgian dance. In addition, Merab is put under additional pressure by the arrival of the new dancing student Irakli (Bachi Valishvili), who turns out to be a talented dancer. At first, it looks like Merab and Irakli might become rivals after it was announced that a spot in the main ensemble has opened. But rivalry turns into desire to which both eventually succumb during a trip. With their love affair, however, both dancers put their potential careers at risk.

And Then We Danced portrays a society in which all gender and sexual identities deviating from the norm are sanctioned. The spot in the main ensemble became vacant because a male dancer was caught having sex with a man. For Merab, who wants to pursue a dancing career in order to escape his family's poverty and the desolate economic situation of his country, his existence is at stake, should his homosexuality be revealed.

Film Info

And Then We Danced

Sweden/Georgia 2019

105 minutes

Director: Levan Akin

Starring: Levan Gelbakhiani, Bachi Valishvili, Ana Javakishvili and others

Since anything sexually deviant is sanctioned violently, there is a pressure to exhibit one's own (heteronormative) masculinity to dispel any suspicion of alterity. During typical locker room talk, male dancers are bragging about sexual experiences with girls. Ambiguous insinuations or open doubts about one's own (hetero)sexuality are met with aggressive demeanour. Everybody is permanently under observation. Even during their first, rushed sexual encounter, Merab and Irakli cannot ignore the danger of being discovered. While both are hastily satisfying each other with their hands, disembodied male voices are celebrating national Georgian values in the distance.

Even traditional Georgian dance is instrumentalised to perpetuate a regressive image of masculinity in Georgian culture and national identity. »The Georgian dance is based on masculinity«, his dancing instructor tells Merab. »There is no room for weakness in Georgian dance«. A sturdy posture with a straight back and chest pushed out, controlled movements - certain types of Georgian dance are meant to symbolise soldierly rigour and masculine strength, displayed to the beat of drums and the music of an accordion.

And Then We Danced portrays Merab's artistic escape from this ingrained doctrine. Fuelled by his gay desire, he finds access to a new style of dancing outside the studio. Although Merab and Irakli do not seem to have words for their relationship, about which Georgian society is supposed to be quiet anyway, both find a common language via dancing. Similarly, Merab's coming out takes place without any words. During his audition, Merab delivers an impressive performance by applying his newly discovered way of perceiving his body to the already familiar movements from the rehearsals. In essence, Merab queers Georgian dance moves.

However, the association of homosexuality with traditional Georgian dance was perceived as too much of a provocation by some people. [In Georgia, the release of *And Then We Danced* was a target of mass rallies organised by far-right groups. The screening of the movie had to be protected by the police. The orthodox church also condemned the movie.](#) In an interview, which is part of the DVD's bonus material, director Levan Akin - who was born in Georgia but grew up in Sweden - says that homophobia persists as a norm in Georgian society because most Georgians do not know queer people who could refute the discriminatory images disseminated by ultra-conservative groups and the church.

Still, *And Then We Danced* is not a reckoning with Georgian culture but rather celebrates its dance and music, whilst critically exploring its gender conservative constraints. By recounting a gay love story between two young dancers, Akin succeeds

in portraying a nation that clings to its national dance to affirm its own identity. He also exemplifies how Georgian dance could be renewed aesthetically once the rigid concept of masculinity is dissolved and fluidity is permitted.

Ife-Chudeni A. Oputa: Rummage

By *Hanna Sellheim*

Somebody once said to me: »I like poems, but they don't make any sense«. Ife-Chudeni A. Oputa's *Rummage* is one of those collections that prove the opposite. In four sections, Oputa writes about childhood and coming-of-age (*We Are Sitting Around Discussing Our Shame*), then about a break-up (*A Brief History of She*), about the human body (*Lessons on the Body*) and about weltenschmerz (*All the Dead Call You Friend*). Oputa was a fellow of the US-American literary collective [Lambda Literary](#), which does not only award prizes to LGBTQ authors, but also gives out scholarships and holds writing workshops.

Yet, (as often the case) one would be mistaken to read *Rummage* merely in regards to its queer topics. There is much more in the slim book; from experiences with racism (*Tunnels*) to the depths of a sister relationship (*Mosaic in Nine Lives*) and reflections on evolution (*Portrait of Memory with Evolution*). A recurring theme is shame, which Oputa introduces in the first poem *Ode to Shame* with the well-chosen symbol of the ash tree, eponym for her hometown Fresno (Spanish for ash tree) in California.

Book Info



Ife-Chudeni A. Oputa

Rummage

Little A: Seattle 2017

96 pages, 5,99€

Thus, the poems do not tell a typical problem narrative. It is true that Oputa's description of a coming-out captures the difficulty of this moment by use of the simile to hair stuck in the throat and many enjambments which suggest a faltering flow of words: »I am twenty-three and it is spring, so / I break open / a new silence / and pull / queer out / like hair / from the throat-« The narration of a first unhappy crush as a child in *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, too, shows an undercurrent of homophobia and racism. However, the lost love that is mentioned in several poems is not tragic because it is between women but because it is over (»my body a mourning sprawled between / drafts of a love poem, which remains unaddressed«). In *Rummage*, same-sex love is not the capital-O ›Other‹, but just as wonderful, complicated and worth narrating as heterosexual love. This way the collection, using the subject of love, - just like a classic of lesbian love poetry, Carol Ann Duffy's *Rapture* (note the similarity of the titles) - forms a story that transcends the borders of the individual poems and smartly combines narrative and lyrical elements.

Oputa manages to put the sadness after a break-up, the loneliness and pain, acutely into words. In an impressively beautiful manner, she writes about longing and change. Especially compelling is her exploration of the metaphoric field of prism/kaleidoscope/microscope in combination with the typography in *Transition*:

* * * * *

A single ray of light passes through a prism's blade
and it is a million rays of light. It is a billion molecules

of *no*. A trillion atoms of *stay-*

and then it is not.

*

The tripartition of the poems structures this process of change, which ends in a dialectical solution: »Everything looks alien / when seen through another lense- [...] Pull the eye back from the glass, / blink let it come into focus«

At the same time, hope blooms in Oputa's verse: In the last poem, the recurring motif of silence, of a missing answer, is finally answered by a choir, the poem *Girls as Matryoshka Dolls; or, a Brief History of She*, which stands out due to its length, ends with the promise of a »new myth all your own« and in *On the Early Arrival of Spring* the speaker, who is dressed way too warm for the first spring day, encounters a stranger in patterned tights who makes her forget an ex-girlfriend and augurs a new beginning: »Made me remember // how good the glint of the strange can be // when you stumble / toward it. When you look on // without stopping-«

Hence, the book can be read not only as a collection of single poems, but also as a whole, as a process of self-discovery in which the speaker learns to situate queerness as part of her identity, overcoming the shame imposed from the outside. So much about poems making sense.

Byrne Fone: Homophobia. A History

By Philip Flacke

»The COVID-19 pandemic has led to even higher levels of violence and discrimination against LGBTI persons«. Thus reads the [unambiguous official declaration of the EU](#) on occasion of this year's IDAHOT (International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia). The effects the pandemic has on queer persons differ [depending on country](#), additional experiences of discrimination and other circumstances. [Sometimes they are very severe, including in Germany.](#)

Meanwhile, some religious authorities can think of nothing wiser than to put the blame for the virus on the LGBTQ community. During the first wave in Turkey, Ali Erbaş, President of Religious Affairs, proclaimed that homosexuality and unmarried partners [were causes of illness - a statement that president Erdoğan defended as](#) »correct in every way«. The Ukrainian Patriarch Filaret called the virus a punishment

for the sins of humankind, especially same-sex marriage. Others could be added to this list. Men like Filaret and Erbaş are the exception, in their religious communities and on the whole, but an exception with high standing and influence.

Book Info



Byrne Fone

Homophobia. A History

Picador: London 2001

496 pages, \$26,00

The slop they warm over is two thousand years old. The Old Testament story about the destruction of Sodom has been read by Jews and Christians as a warning against sexually deviant behaviour since at least the first century CE. According to this interpretation, the citizens had incurred God's wrath because of same-sex intercourse and same-sex desire. Such behaviour would thus bring catastrophe over an entire society if tolerated. Believers today often interpret the Sodom story in a different way.

Talk of epidemic queerness is particularly painful since HIV/AIDS, but this manner of speaking has been around roughly as long as the construction of the Sodom-story as the homophobic ur-myth. The scholar Philo of Alexandria, who lived around the year zero, imagined life in Sodom in bright colours: Same-sex desire appears as an illness to him. It degenerates the body, is transmitted from one to the other and spreads like an epidemic disease.

How extraordinarily consistent stereotypical metaphors and assertions persist throughout several millennia of homophobia! This persistence can be studied in *Homophobia, A History* – a book by American literary scholar Byrne Fone. Trigger warning: Fone also talks about abuse allegations on multiple occasions. The book is not new – it was published twenty years ago. While there is a Spanish translation, in Germany the book seems to have been barely noticed. Thus the union catalogue GVK lists only a single copy, in the State and University Library Hamburg. Hopefully, a copy will be added in Göttingen soon.

Fone provides an overview from Greek antiquity up to the twentieth century. Strictly speaking, the term ›homophobia‹ is too narrow for Fone's subject-matter. He examines the various forms of rejection, discrimination and persecution of people who love or desire someone of their own gender and of those who do not fulfil the gendered expectations assigned to them. This wide scope makes sense. But readers today would like to ask more sensitivity from Fone not to give the impression that trans women who love men could perhaps be subsumed under male homosexuals.

Fone is aware of the importance of intersectionality when it comes to mechanisms of discrimination: ›Homophobia has links with sexism as well as with anti-Semitism and with prejudice against people of color‹. Discourse about women features far less

prominently than discourse about men. Colonial history, [which has all too often also meant exporting a homophobic worldview and homophobic laws](#), is discussed almost only with regard to North America. The deportation of homosexuals in Nazi-Germany surprisingly does not feature at all. Despite these omissions: Fone overviews a vast period, and he provides detailed insight into documents of various countries and languages in Western Europe, the Mediterranean region and the US.

Homo-, bi- and transphobia aren't just there and that's that – they have a history. Fone tells a story not just of hate, disgust and fear but also of overcoming these and of fighting for rights and recognition. His book has two important strengths. For one thing, he compiles what numerous other scholars in the field have unearthed. For another thing, he stays close to the historical sources and provides ample readings of legal texts, treatises, reports, poems, novels and other most interesting material. His prose is easy to understand, and his chapters are so well structured that any one of them can be read out of context if needed. What their entirety reveals is not a linear development of progress but again and again the terrible simultaneity of tolerance and ignorance, the up and down of achieving and losing again, and the willingness to fight one form of discrimination by promoting another. In the time of the pandemic and climate change one insight is especially terrifying: How radical change and collective traumatic experiences can jeopardise tolerance of sexual minorities. Therefore as well, we need a queer historical consciousness.

Tales of the City

By Lisa M. Müller

Göttingen is a textbook example of a certain feeling ranging from »ah, that's right, I've seen that person in the ›Turmmensa‹ several time« to »we took the same French course with Madame Bréhinier in the second semester, AND we both like the falafel at ›Grüner Libanon‹ – that can't be a coincidence«. One of my favorite series, which I would like to recommend warmly here, reminds me of this feeling: the series [Tales of the City](#), based on Armistead Maupin's novel series of the same name. Both season 1 from the 1990s and the revival from 2019 are available on Netflix.

Series Info

Tales of the City

USA 1993/2019

Idea: Richard Kramer/Lauren Morelli

Starring: Laura Linney, Elliot Page, Olympia Dukakis and others

The series focuses on a house on Barbary Lane in San Francisco. The trans woman Anna Madrigal rents out the house, grows weed for her own use and brings people together as a hobby. The protagonist Mary Ann Singleton comes from the country and ends up in Barbary Lane, finds herself and finds out a few other things. In the 2019 follow-up, Mary Ann returns to Barbary Lane, her daughter (Shawna, brilliantly played by [Elliot Page](#)) and

her ex-husband after more than 20 years. Shawna is furious that Mary Ann left her as a child to pursue a television career and distracts herself with various bed stories. Her ease in doing so is reminiscent of Shane from another good series, to which a separate article could be dedicated: *The L Word*. There seems to be more to one of Shawna's flirts: She is filming a documentary about Barbary Lane and its community. The intentions behind this only become clear in the course of events.

The series deals with important topics of the 90s as well as our time: HIV and dying of AIDS as well as struggles for recognition and equality of queer life. All of this is told in a natural and appropriate way. The characters become a family, but the observer also feels very close to them. The narrative pace of the old episodes is pleasantly slow and the style is warm in all seasons.

Some cross/queer connections in the series may seem a bit deliberate, but reality is often just as interconnected, especially for queer people. In Göttingen, new acquaintances often already have (ex) partners, fellow students or party flirts in common. These coincidences multiply for queer people in Göttingen. That is partly the case because there are only a few places for queer life. In turn, the few queer-positive places in Göttingen, such as the collectively run [Café Kabale](#), are very nice and important. Hopefully, we will soon be able to sip a lemonade there with a good feeling about it and minor corona worries. Until then, check out *Tales of the City*!

Casey Plett: Little Fish

Von Linus Lanfermann-Baumann

Have you ever spent an entire winter in Winnipeg, Canada? Or immersed yourself in Russian Mennonite culture in southern Manitoba? Perhaps several middle-aged trans women are among your friends? Or you happen to be familiar with the day-to-day business of sex work? If not, then Casey Plett's novel *Little Fish* is a wonderful chance to explore these uncharted waters.

Plett, a Canadian, Mennonite trans woman herself, tries to write what she calls »truthful« stories about these worlds. Visiting McMaster University in March 2021, she said she was well-aware that most readers would not be familiar with them. And of those who are, she added with a smile, »half of them are probably my friends«. Still, she invites her readers to immerse themselves into her story, to dwell with the unfamiliar:

Maybe you don't understand every nuance about what these things are, but hopefully you understand how the characters are feeling about them and what that means in the immediate moment.

Book Info



Casey Plett
[Little Fish](#)

Arsenal Pulp Press: Vancouver 2018
320 pages, \$19,95

Plett's careful writing ensures this without a doubt. Her protagonist Wendy, from whose perspective the entire story is told, is a Mennonite trans woman living in contemporary Winnipeg. She is poor and precariously employed, therefore soon forced to return to sex work. Transphobia is part of her everyday reality, just as it is for her trans friends. At her grandmother's funeral, she finds out that her deceased grandfather might have been trans, too, and wonders whether she should pursue the hint.

Little Fish is at times as disturbing as it is hopeful overall. Suicide, sexual violence, and alcoholism are intertwined with experiences of goodness, friendship, and love in many varieties. While it is unfortunate that Plett's work has not yet been translated into German, *Little Fish* is not overly ornate. Anyone with intermediate English skills (and for whom the often-unsettling topics are no deal-breaker) can gain brutally honest insights into worlds yet unacquainted with. Just take Plett up on her invitation and see where it leads you.

This entry was posted on Friday, June 18th, 2021 at 11:41 am and is filed under [InEnglish](#)

You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.