

We didn't start the fire, but there's no harm in stoking it every once a while. Hot and bothered conversations follow, amidst the pages of the anthology *Best Sex Writing 2008*, and in the interviews here, with FCB00KS.

Meet the editor Rachel Kramer Bussel, and our pick of the featured writers

LET'S TALK

In her introduction to *Best Sex Writing 2008 (BSW 2008)* 'One Little Word, Infinite Interpretations', editor Rachel Kramer Bussel claims, almost dramatically, 'Whatever definition you currently have for sex, prepare for it to be shattered'. She goes on to talk about, obliquely, the featured pieces that she's so carefully selected for the anthology (in a six-month record time!); mentioning how sex, as discussed in the book, deals with 'biology, gender, crime, politics, environment, health, religion, race, and much more'. The crucial thrust for choosing what went into *BSW 2008* traces back to similar thought patterns in Rachel's head. She tells us, "I think to some extent, we all assume that 'sex' means the same thing to everyone, so what I think of as 'sex' is what we all do, but if you look around and talk to people, you quickly realise that's not the case. And while most people wouldn't say sex in general is bad, they probably have some version of sex they see as problematic, and put all the negative qualities we associate with sex onto that, whether it's a specific sex act, or the kind of person who engages in it. This segmenting of sex makes us all seem more different than we really are. Certainly, there are differences, but I think underlying them is a commonality we all share. In other words, my fantasies may be different from yours, but it's pretty likely we all have fantasies of some kind." The idea is to broaden understanding, free your mind, and surely, the rest will follow; says Rachel, "I think it's to our detriment as a culture, when

we assume sex only means heterosexual intercourse; it's insulting and demeaning to everyone, because it narrows it down to this very specific, small slice of what sexuality is."

She tells us what she didn't want the book to be, "To only be looked at through a journalistic lens. I wanted these pieces to be ones people could relate to, but also learn from, and I think I captured that in the book."

And hence, she deliberately looked at sex through a kaleidoscopic lens, "from so many angles, from sexual identity and gender (in the piece about eunuchs) to fantasies and desires, to sex work, to sex and the law". Ambitiously trying to include it all ("I wanted the book to be well-rounded and highlight sex in all its modern complexity, but I also knew I couldn't possibly cover everything"), and furiously blogging about the outtakes, so to speak, later (<http://bestsexwriting2008.wordpress.com>). Plus, there's *BSW 2009*, which Rachel has already begun work on; she shares, surprising us, "One thing I had hoped to include was one or two more conservative takes on sex, which I hope to do in the new edition, because I don't think liberals have a lock on smart sex writing."

More on 2008, however, Rachel muses on the superlative in the title, "There is no single 'best'... the conversations started in the book... are all constantly changing, which is one of the great things about a book like this. It's very of the moment and about provocative, modern-day journalism, and some of the taboos these writers talk about, are changing." She offers an editor's advice, "I do think the book, taken as a whole, brings out nuances of each individual story that you don't necessarily get from reading just one or two pieces", and



PHOTOGRAPH BY STACIEJOY

hopes for “a range of readers, men and women, straight, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and from difference cultures and backgrounds”.

Sex is broad enough (and powerful enough) that we will continue to write, talk, and debate about it for centuries to come - when we're not busy engaging in our preferred version of it.

Rachel elaborates on what she perceives as the strength of *BSW 2008*, “I think this book is impressive, because it really is thought-provoking and could be read by anyone. It's not salacious, at least, not deliberately so, and the writers are truly smart and think through the issues, they don't just go for the knee-jerk reaction.” But she would rather not “final word” the argument, “I see these essays... as starting points in an ongoing discussion about sex that we should be having more often, but don't.”

Rachel Kramer Bussel is a prolific erotica writer, editor, journalist and blogger. She works as senior editor at Penthouse Variations, hosts the In the Flesh erotic reading series, and used to write the very popular 'Lusty Lady' column for the Village Voice. She's edited over a dozen erotic anthologies, some of which include Up All Night, Dirty Girls, Caught Looking: Erotic Tales of Voyeurs and Exhibitionism, and Hide and Seek. Her writing has appeared in Cosmo UK, Diva, New York Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Time Out New York, and Zink, to name a few publications. Her first novel, Everything But..., is due out in summer this year. Cupcakes are one of her serious passions, and in her spare time, Rachel hunts down the country's best ones and blogs about it here: cupcakestakethecake.blogspot.com. Log onto www.rachelkramerbussel.com for more.

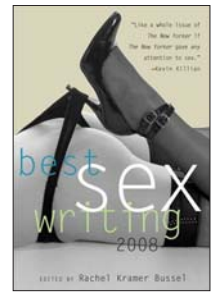
Translates as sex for Rachel: Movie - *Laurel Canyon*, Song - Kirsty MacColl's *Autumngirlsoup*

education programmes designed to teach them to not have sex until they are married. Something that demands psychological repression. Quite honestly, I believe we've already gone completely to pieces precisely because we don't spend enough time exploring our sexuality in healthy ways. We spend a lot of time and money killing people in other countries though. A sexually satisfied country doesn't go around waging war. By that standard, the Swiss must be the most sexually active people on the planet.”

“It's an awakening: having children naturally changes one's attitudes toward the world, but to be a man and have daughters... This alters one's perceptions in a profound way. I think women experience something similar with sons, but sons are still sent out into the world as conquerors; the desire of a father to protect his daughter is felt on a different level, because he knows personally the beasts of the world.”

“Writing is not a normal job for me, it is almost like an affliction. It causes me a great deal of suffering, particularly when I'm not doing it, because it constantly occupies my thoughts, and I only get relief when I sit down to write. But everything else in my life conspires to prevent from writing, or so it seems to me. When I'm in the midst of it, and it's going well, the world around me falls apart. When I'm not doing it or struggling with it, I seem to fall apart physically and mentally. It's quite strange.”

Translates as sex for Kevin: Movie - *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Song - Morrissey's *Jack the Ripper*, Book - Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANGUS LAMOND

KEVIN KECK

... I can't help but think that the God of my Universe would behave exactly in this manner: Meddling in the strange matters of lust and leaving the easier problems of famine, disease and violence to us.

- Double Your Panic, about a man who spent a good number of years lusting after twins ('Double your pleasure'), and was years later, 'blessed' with

twins. Girls.

Kevin Keck is the author of *Oedipus Wrecked*, a collection of essays about his sexual awakening, first published on nerve.com. Log onto www.thekeck.com for more.

“Despite the fact that we may seem like a very open culture, we're actually quite confused about our cultural attitude toward sex. We allow our teenagers to dress in sexually provocative ways, then spend billions of dollars on



LIZ LANGLEY

Lives - and libidos - don't end at fifty... the same parents and grandparents who once scolded their kids for playing outside without coats may not be covering up where it counts beneath the sheets.

- Sex and the Single Septuagenarian, about the high risk of HIV infection amongst senior citizens, partly due to lack of awareness, and also because of general squeamishness

and/or flat denial with regard to giving thought to their sex lives.

Liz Langley has been a writer and columnist for 16 years, and has written for *Salon*, *Glamour* and *alternet.org*. She is currently the pop culture columnist for the *Orlando Sentinel* and works with the Florida Film Festival. Liz also teaches belly dancing.

“Seniors on the dating scene is a really fun topic, after all, but HIV in the elderly is pretty grim, so the balance between being informative, respectful and colourful was important... People were a little surprised by the idea of HIV in seniors, but that’s the point of the piece; it’s a subject few people think about.”

“Sex can range from the blindly carnal all the way to the spiritual - an exchange so intimate that it transcends the physical even while it springs from it. A single kiss from one person can have more meaning and resonance than actual intercourse with another. So yes, the variance in what it means to each of us at different times in our lives is endless - which is probably why it’s so much fun to talk about.”

“From the title, people might be expecting erotica - descriptive, narrative stories about sex - this is not that. It’s a thoughtfully chosen collection of compelling reporting and first-person essays about a range of sex-related subjects.”

“Interestingly, I never had any qualms about approaching my senior subjects. Seniors are very candid if you’re candid with them. I really enjoyed their company - they were thoughtful, funny and interesting. Talking to seniors can be pretty humbling sometimes - **every generation thinks it invented sex and rebellion and music and art, but you talk to people who are 60 and up, and realise they knew about all those things way before you**, even if they weren’t talking about it quite as much.”

Translates as sex for Liz: *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt, the soundtrack to *Twin Peaks Fire Walk with Me* by Angelo Badalamenti.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TINA ZIMMER

MICHAEL MUSTO

Jodie (Foster), it turns out, is one of the foremost residents of a glass closet - that complex but popular contraption that allows public figures to avoid the career repercussions of any personal disclosure while living their lives... Such a device enables the public to see right in while not allowing them to actually open the latch unless the celebrity eventually decides

to do so herself.

- *The Glass Closet*, about the hypocrisy prevalent in the very idea of wanting to respect the privacy of celebrities, whilst simultaneously devouring the junk in the tabloids. Focused on being gay and coming out of the closet, in Hollywood, and looking forward to the day when we won’t have to say, ‘Bravo!’ when someone does.

Michael Musto writes the very popular La Dolce Musto in the *Village Voice*, some of which have been turned into a book as well. He is also a contributor to *Out* magazine.

“Sex equals dirty in our culture, but that’s okay, because dirty in turn equals sexy. **In America, we cloak sexuality in so much shame - Janet Jackson’s career was nearly destroyed because she flashed one breast for two seconds**



- but that adds to the fetishisation and passion with which we learn to embrace sex. **The dirtier the better.**

The more taboo we’re told it is, the more we want it.”

“I love the cover because, first of all, high heels are always automatically sexy, especially when lifting a bit of panty near the butt region. Also because it’s just one person alone - and let’s face it, some of the best sex we’ve all had is with ourselves!”

“Eventually, the masses will realise that since they devour every aspect of celebrities’ lives, to leave out the gay stuff is absurd. Even more importantly, the *media* will realise that.”

“In an ideal world, there would be no closets of any kind. Every gay public figure would be able to say ‘Yep, I’m gay’ without hesitation or regret. The longer I live, the closer we get to that world - but I might be in diapers when it finally comes.”

Translates as sex for Michael: *It Happened One Night*.



KELLY ROUBA

After the birth of his second child, my friend Jeff was surprised when his mother-in-law asked him how he has sex in spite of his inability to walk. The quick-witted forty-year-old replied jokingly that he and his wife, Monica, rely on an intricate system of ropes and pulleys in order to pull off the carnal activity.

- *Tough Love*, about having and enjoying sex despite (and beyond) physical impairments and/or disabilities

Kelly Rouba was initially a stringer for a major area newspaper, which has led her to maintain the inform-and-entertain tone into her writing career. She handles public relations projects and volunteers for several non-profit organisations. Kelly is a contributing writer for *Playgirl* magazine, and is currently busy working on a book on juvenile arthritis.

“It was my idea to do the story, because I have a mobility impairment and know that people like myself don’t always know where to turn for advice on sex. While I may have written it specifically with those who have mobility impair-

ments in mind, the story is also applicable to the elderly who may not have the same flexibility as they once had, as well as those who lack confidence when it comes to having good sex. In fact, there are tips that can apply to anyone!”

“I think there are many people who are, in a sense, afraid of sex. This is not to say they don’t desire sex. However, they are afraid that they don’t measure up, and this is in part because they don’t know what their own bodies are capable of doing.”

Translates as sex for Kelly: *Kiss from a Rose* by Seal. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Also, “totally adores” Upen Patel and thinks he was “especially sexy in the *Aashiqui Meri* music video from *36 China Town*”.



GRETA CHRISTINA

Did I mention the fretfulness, the anxiety, the blank terror?... I'm tempted to say that it felt like crossing a line, like stepping across a border into unknown and forbidden territory that I could never return from unchanged. All of which is true... except I was also aware of what a dorky, overdramatic metaphor that was... And while I was still deeply weirded out, I was also getting a little turned on.

- *Buying Obedience:*

My Visit to a Pro Submissive, about the writer's experience of being a client, paying for sex work (with a professional submissive). Thinking it through, doing it, and 'analyzing*

it to death' soon after.

Greta Christina is the author of the erotic novella *Bending*, and the editor of the anthology *Paying for It: A Guide by Sex Workers for their Clients*. Her writing has appeared in several newspapers, magazines and anthologies, and she is currently editing the annual *Best Erotic Comics* series. Log onto <http://gretachristina.typepad.com> for more.

“I do think our culture has a tendency to define sex very narrowly... and at the same time, we see it everywhere. The pro submissive I visited, Rachel, was very clear that ‘sex’ was off limits: I could dominate her and spank her and such, but I couldn’t have sex with her. And yet, even though I completely respected the limits she set, a lot of what we did I would most definitely call ‘sex’. Our personal definitions of what did and didn’t count as ‘sex’ were very different. It’s one of the things that made it such an odd experience.”

“There is sexually arousing, erotic writing in it - I think my

SMIRNOFF
GREEN APPLE
TWIST

TWIST IN THE TALE

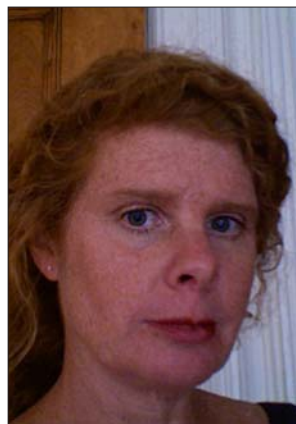
Rachel often doesn't tell people what she does for a living, "People have trouble separating the two (writing erotica and about sex). They think if you write about sex in any form, then you're a slut, or you always want to talk about sex." Cassettes & CDs.

piece is sexually arousing and erotic (a lot of it anyway) - but that's not the main thrust of the book. But even the pieces that aren't naughty and exciting, are very mind-opening. And that's arousing and erotic in a different way. Having an open mind is key to having a great sex life.”

“I tried very hard in this piece to be both personal and analytical. Most writing about sex work is written about the workers; there's not much being written about what it's like to be a sex work customer. I definitely wanted to describe the physical, emotional, sexual flavour of the experience as vividly as I could... but didn't want the piece to just be descriptive, either. I'm a very analytical person, and for me trying to understand an experience is a big part of capturing the flavour of it. I didn't want to demonise it, of course - I do think sex work can be a valid way to have sex, both for the worker and the customer - but I didn't want to sugar-coat it, either. “

*(Defined by Greta Christina): Someone you pay so you can dominate them, spank them, order them around, *et cetera*. Most pro submissives won't have genital sex with their customers - largely to avoid prostitution laws, but partly to keep some boundaries.

Translates as sex for Greta: “The dance scene between Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse in *Singing in the Rain*. They're both such beautiful, graceful people, completely sensual and comfortable in their bodies. I've always thought that was one of the hottest sex scenes in the movies... even though there isn't any sex in it!”



JILL EISENSTADT

Barring the religious, most people nowadays wouldn't dream of marrying somebody with whom they hadn't slept. Common sense says that ignorance is dangerous. Better to know the body to which you're pledging monogamy. Rule out incompatible fetishes and irreparable conditions. Decide you like the bed you're getting into. A lot. Marrying later, we're hardly naïve. So

what's all this hullabaloo over a one-shot screw?

- *To Have or Have Not: Sex on the Wedding Night*, about exactly that. Examining the big deal-ness of it. And aren't we grown up and twenty-first century enough to not care? Well, are we?

Jill Eisenstadt is the author of *From Rockaway* and *Kiss Out*, and the co-writer and producer of the 2006 feature film *The Limbo Room*. Her work has appeared in *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Mademoiselle* and *Bomb* magazines. Jill's *BSW 2008* featured piece originally appeared in *Altared*, an anthology about women's takes on modern weddings.

"I've always wondered if the letter 'x' made sex such a powerful word, or if it was the other way, that the word 'sex' radicalised the letter."

"It (the cover) is a bit of false advertising, especially in my case, since my essay is all about not having sex. But why not? Books can use all the help they can get in this world."

"Married people who read my piece almost always feel compelled to tell me whether or not they had sex on their wedding night. The unmarrieds just seem surprised."

"Straight up vanilla has its own sex appeal."

Translates as sex for Jill: "Anything in Portuguese".



JENNIFER CROSS

What does it mean to pass as a survivor? I mean, to be read as a survivor?... the experience/identity is silenced, unless you're crying all the time, can't have sex, are unable to be intimate (and who doesn't have intimacy issues in this time of torture, television and target marketing?). If you're relatively functional, forget it. No one wants to talk about survivor-hood except your therapist, and she's getting

paid.

- *Surface Tensions*, exploring, questioning, debating 'dyke', 'butch', 'femme', 'normal', and other queer labels. In an autobiographical format that speaks of living through rape; searing, heart-rending and brutally honest in tone.

Jennifer (or Jen, as she's called) Cross is a smut writer, workshop facilitator, and a co-collaborator in the dyke erotica collective, Dirty Ink. Her writing has been part of many anthologies including *Nobody Passes*, *Best Women's Erotica 2007*, *Naughty Spanking Stories from A to Z 2*. Log onto www.writingourselveswhole.org for more.

"When I went through the volunteer training for San Francisco Sex Information (www.sfsi.org), we were reminded to ask for clarification whenever someone came to us with a question that began with the statement 'So, I had sex this weekend, and now this-or-that hurts', because so many pos-

sibilities are encompassed therein, each which could significantly impact/alter our answers!"

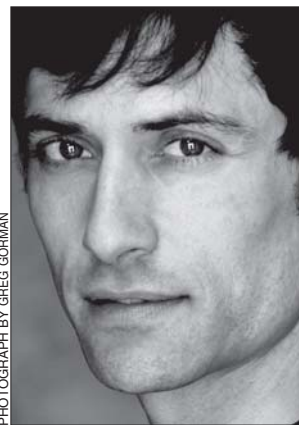
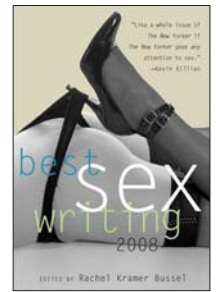
"The cover does hint at the book's being an erotica anthology - I kind of like the fact of the surprise lurking behind the packaging, though!"

"As far as an ideal reader goes, I'm interested in speaking to 1) other femme dykes who are survivors of sexual trauma (because I think that place of solidarity/decreasing of isolation is so important!) and 2) to folks who never think about gender beyond the strict/straight-up male/female binary, and who may leave the piece with their world-view shaken up a bit..."

"I often worry about not sharing enough - like, are there layers I haven't remembered to interweave? Are there bits of the story that have been left out? **It's not possible, of course, to ever tell an 'entirely true' story, since we, as writers, are always choosing what to include in our tellings, depending on what we remember, but I want to embody as much as possible of all the pieces of this story/moment...** It's true that, once I

decide to put something out for publication, I have already prepared to release the piece to folks' interpretations - we, as writers, can only do so much to influence the reader's perception/reception of our work; every reader brings their own history/understanding to a piece of writing, and so every reader will receive a slightly different story."

Translates as sex for Jen: Song - Massive Attack's *Protection*, Book - Dodie Bellamy's *The Letters of Mina Harker*, Film - Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mama Tambien*.



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG GORMAN

PAUL FESTA

I consider the fate of my own foreskin with ambivalence. Apart from bypassing a few Craigslist ads stating a preference for intact dick, I've never been aware of being discriminated against for lacking one.

- *How Insensitive*, ambivalent, thought-provoking musings about feeling and not feeling, from the owner of a circumcised penis.

Paul Festa is an old hand at the Best Sex Writing series, having been part of the 2005 and 2006 editions. His essays on sex have been part of *Nerve* and *Salon*, and his curious movie, *Apparition of the Eternal Church*, about the music of Olivier Messiaen, was named the Best North American Independent Feature Film at the 2006 Indianapolis International Film Festival. Log onto www.paulfesta.com for more.

“The word sex and sexual imagery are overused, thanks mostly to people in marketing. For years, I worked as a deadline reporter in technology news, and every time some shellacked Silicon Valley flack or pimply reporter used the word ‘sexy’ in the context of a web portal, or e-commerce start-up, I felt some life ebb from the erotic universe.”

“If a company that sells wireless phones has the right to use sex in advertising, can you fault an anthology of sex essays?”

“For some people, male circumcision is a religious sacrament. For others, it’s a public health issue. For others, it’s a barbaric blood rite. Get representatives of those three positions in a room and you will not lack for conversation.”

“I almost never think about who my reader is, though I’m often urged to (by people in marketing!). The only time I ever thought about my ideal reader was when I was single and hoped that my true love was out there somewhere, reading my prose and falling in love with me. He was. His name is James, and we just celebrated our fifth anniversary.”

“When you’re ambivalent, it’s not because you feel nothing, it’s because you feel contrary things equally. Sadness for loss of part of my body and an unknowable capacity for sensation that went with it, is at one pole of that ambivalence, and on the other, are relative contentment with my sex life as it is and gratitude, whether it’s for fortune or circumcision, that I’ve never had an STD on my dick. For what it’s worth, I consider myself a circumcision opponent. I would never do such a thing to an infant. But amid the garden of criminal acts humanity is constantly tending, male circumcision looms small to me.”

Translates as sex for Paul: “When I watched *War Games* with Matthew Broderick at 13. Any song sung by Beck Hansen. *The World According to Garp*. Hot!”



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN WYNN

Gael Greene

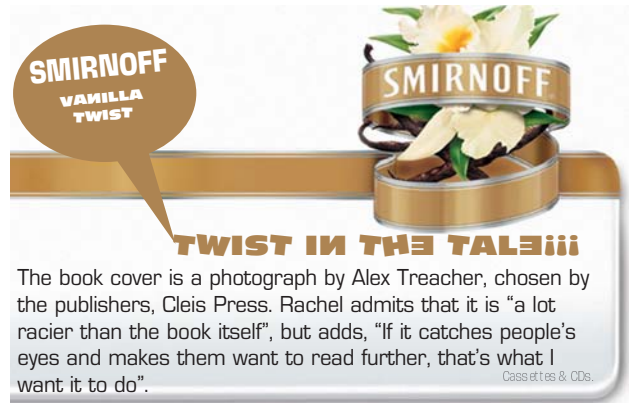
I was a woman who had amorous adventures in marble bathtubs in five-star hotels. I used lavender soap from Provence and olive oil bars from Les Baux... I caught myself wondering how many times a year he changed his sheets, then shook my head to banish the thought.

I dropped to the bed on all fours and purred. He closed his eyes.

I was in my own porn movie.

- *The Prince of Porn and the Junk-Food Queen*, about a woman’s experiences with a porn star, from the late seventies.

Gael Greene, known as *the food critic of New York* who



started her restaurant reviews with *New York* magazine, when the publication was still in its formative years, in and as ‘The Insatiable Critic’ famously stayed anonymous for the longest time. Her memoir, *Insatiable: Tales from a Life of Delicious Excess*, of which the featured piece is an excerpt, talks about, among other things, bedding Elvis Presley. She is the co-founder of Citymeals-on-Wheels, an organisation that delivers 2.2 million meals a year to elderly housebound New Yorkers. Log onto www.insatiable-critic.com for more.

“For me, sex is delicious, exciting, transporting, funny, naughty and nice, sometimes like a trip to a foreign country, or a dream.”

“I thought the cover was provocative and also a giggle, being such an exaggeration.”

“This is an excerpt from my memoir... memories of my life, the joy, the happiness, the disappointments... the book is in my voice.”

Translates as sex for Gael: Frank Sinatra singing *That Old Black Magic*.



SCOTT POULSON-BRYANT

Steele feels the sexual sting of stereotyping every day he goes to work: as the hung black stud he’s the personification of a stereotype that controls the very image of black men everywhere, yet he has to rely on the stereotype as a fantasy creation to ensure that he stays on top of his game... “By nature,” Steele says, “this business isn’t about any color except green - money... the only thing that separates it from being prostitution is that there’s a camera in the room when people are doing their thing.”

- *The Hung List*, ruminations exploring the stereotype of the ‘well hung black guy’, featuring a particularly enlightening discussion on race and sex politics, with a porn star, Lexington Steele, former Wall Street broker, making

money for being well-endowed (11 by seven inches), as well as 'non-threatening black'.

Scott Poulson-Bryant, journalist, author and screenwriter, is one of the founding editors of *VIBE* magazine. His essays have appeared in several publications, including *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, and he is currently working on the first in a series of graphic novels. The piece featured in *BSW 2008*, is an excerpt from his book, *Hung: A Meditation on the Measure of Black Men in America*.

"Some people are surprised I took the time to examine a porn actor. Some people are taken aback by the intelligence Lexington Steele brings to the analysis of his chosen profession. Some people are turned on by his actual physical dimensions and transpose those feelings to reading my piece. LOL."

"At the end of the day, sex is as much an intellectual pursuit as a physical one. It's a cliché to say that the best sex happens in one's mind, or that the best sex organ is actually between your ears and not your legs, but I think it's true. **So much about good sex is this actual ability to connect with another individual - and I'm not even necessarily talking about love, but really about that 'click' that happens when two bodies and minds meet in this very vulnerable physical place and contribute to mutually good erotic feelings.**"

"The black penis operates simultaneously as spectacle and hidden object, as both something revered and reviled, something literally desired and mythically constructed... It was important to express the degree to which the myth of the big black dick has further shackled black men and their relationship to their own sexuality. There are black men who *don't* live up to the Hung Myth and feel burdened by that. There are black men who *do* live up to it and feel the burden of being regarded as solely sexual objects. There's a kind of dehumanisation that goes with being constantly sexualised - which is why I think so many women have enjoyed the book (and excerpt) and understood the story. Objectification - worship - can feel as devaluing as it does celebratory."

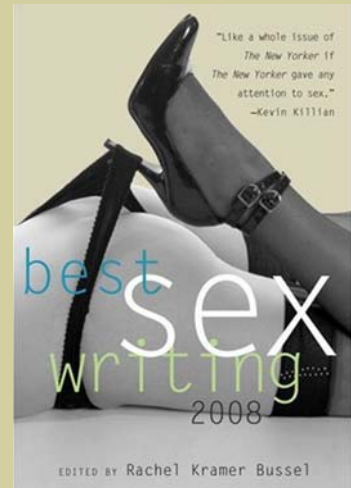
Translates as sex for Scott: "Prince's *International Lover* has a rough-and-ready vibe to it. (Though I suspect his tongue is planted fairly firm in his cheek as he sings it. Then again, the best sex seems to be with someone you can laugh with, in my opinion.)"

(Extracts in italics from featured stories, *Best Sex Writing 2008*, Cleis Press.) ■

BEST SEX WRITING 2008

Edited by Rachel Kramer Bussel

First off, it's not what you're thinking. Writing about sex is different from erotica, and so if that disclaimer's lucid enough, read on... The many shades of sex and sexuality, with their smells and tastes, race and gender and expectations, desires and fantasises, collide with anxieties, insecurities, fears, strong opinions, even ambivalence, lending *Best Sex Writing 2008* its unique keepsake value. Chosen from the point of view of being an anthology



that covers maximum fair ground on the topic, the stories that make *Best Sex Writing 2008* bring up and urge discussion on several varied themes. With only one aspect in common - they're all written extremely well.

There's examination of naked parties (Miriam Datskovsky's *Absolut Nude - So what is it about nudity that makes us feel so, well, naked?*), the Jewish connection with giving good head (Rachel Shukert's *Big Mouth Strikes Again - After centuries of massacres, are we the product of some lewd natural selection, in which the copious production of saliva and disciplined suppression of the gag reflex proved the only means of survival?*), the irrational fundamentalist opinions against pornography (Violet Blue's *Kink.com and Porn Hysteria - ... people who molest children and rape will do so regardless of whether a copy of Edward Penishands is available for rental or downloading...*), and the gender politics that come into play when dealing with sexual offenders (Ariel Levy's *Dirty Old Women - For many Americans, being a real grown-up requires a penis. And if you've got that, even if you're only fifteen, you must have the maturity and the manliness to know what you want to do with it - even if that involves intercourse with a forty-two-year-old.*), among others. There are niche (first world?) discussions too (the concern over using good quality sex toys in Tristan Taormino's *Dangerous Dildos*, and the analysis of why capitalism ignores menstruation porn in Trixie Fontaine's *Menstruation: Porn's Last Taboo*). There's humour, of course, great, post-coital descriptions (*that loose, rumpled, hormone addled strut people get when they've just gotten it good*), powerful, gut-wrenching writing (Ashlea Halpern's *Battle of the Sexless* describes willful castration and the desire to be sexless, to achieve *eunuch calm*), terms you never thought you'd read (*cartography of the penis, doing it pro bono* instead of consensual sex), and some vicarious live-through the hedonistic seventies (Gael Greene's *The Prince of Porn and the Junk Food Queen*).

Writing about sex has that inherent potential to be the be-all and end-all of all writing. If done well, if it's good, full-bodied stuff, hot blooded, meant to arouse you out of deadened, jaded stupor, it can be all there is. It can wake you out of a dazed and confused haze, and thrust you towards whichever direction it's going. It can make you think, and not only about sex. This is what 21 writers and one editor are talking about here.