



Unlimited Embrace: A Canon of Gay Fiction, 1945-1995

Charlotte Sheedy

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In this pathbreaking book, a gay literary critic evaluates a half-century of fictional works "by, for, and about" homosexual men and situates them in the context of an emerging American gay culture. Reed Woodhouse shows how the best gay fiction of the period, like all good literature, not only reflected but anticipated social changes that were afoot—from the founding of the first enduring gay rights organizations through the Stonewall riots to the ambiguous mainstreaming of homosexuality that continues today. Written in a personal voice, *Unlimited Embrace* is as much about gay identity as about gay literature. The canon Woodhouse constructs is not merely a list of gay books worth reading, but a guide to "leading a good life as a gay man" as well. In the fiction of Tennessee Williams, James Baldwin, Christopher Isherwood, James Purdy, Edmund White, Andrew Holleran, Larry Kramer, Ethan Mordden, Dennis Cooper, David Leavitt, and Neil Bartlett, Woodhouse finds intimate glimpses of lives previously veiled in euphemism, slander, and contempt and now striving to take new form. More than that, he raises questions about sexual identity and desire, defiance and wit, that are as relevant to straight readers as to gay ones. Although the book ends with a sober consideration of the literary legacy of AIDS, *Unlimited Embrace* is more celebration than lament—an affirmation of the enduring power of literature to shape life.

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