

contains pieces on cinema and in one instance works on canvas. Les Wright's discussion of German gay coming-out film in the context of New German Cinema traces the development of this genre from "the primitive [von Praunheim], the classical [Fassbinder], the revisionist [Ripploh] and the parodic [Wortman]" (321). His line of argument is carefully reflected, clearly presented, and ultimately persuasive. Equally insightful and cogent is James W. Jones's discussion of Ripploh's *Taxi zum Klo*, in which he shows how the technique of "intercutting" is used to undermine the stereotypes associated with gay sexuality. Ute Lischke-McNab sees the beginning of a new acumen in German cinema and cinema attendance with Sönke Wortmann's *Maybe ... Maybe Not*. She ascribes this film's novelty and success to its comedic character, its nostalgic revival of 'swing' music from the Weimar period, and Hollywood marketing strategies that include comic books, T-Shirts, posters, and soundtracks. Although the film exploits sentimentality and nostalgia to ensure a healthy profit margin, Lischke-McNab notes that its portrayal of gender fluidity and "'perversity' as an aesthetic impulse" are a significant example of queer discourse (412).

Space does not permit that more than fleeting reference be made to other substantial contributions to this collection, such as Caryl Flinn's analysis of soundtrack and camp aesthetic in von Praunheim's film *Anita*, or Martin Scherzinger and Neville Hoad's essay on the undoing of the hierarchy of major and minor chords in music (of greater interest to those with some background in music notation and theory). Taken as a whole, *Queering the Canon* contains a good deal of original, creative, and inspiring scholarship.

Michael Riordan. *Eating Fire: Family Life, on the Queer Side*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001. 302pp. \$22.95 (Cdn) ISBN 1-896357-45-8.

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Three years ago, when I first picked up a copy of Michael Riordan's *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country*, I was on my way out of the publisher's fair at the Learned

Congress in Ottawa. It intrigued me: as a young lesbian from Newfoundland, living in Alberta, I was interested, to say the least, to read someone else's experiences and interpretations of queer life in Canada's *other* spaces. I had read many excellent accounts of the gay ghettos and villages of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, but the scholarly writings on smaller, less metropolitan queer Canada were few and far between. Riordan's book was a treat – informative, thorough, beautifully written, even entertaining. So it was with enthusiasm that I anticipated his new book, the just-released *Eating Fire: Family Life, on the Queer Side*. I was not disappointed: *Eating Fire* has proven to be an equally strong book, pushing the boundaries of oral history, ethnography, and academic writing, and challenging readers to examine their own limitations and biases when it comes to defining 'family.'

Eating Fire, according to the author's preface, began four years ago with a friend's suggestion that Riordan write a book about the 'success' of his own twenty-year relationship, within the particular context of a community whose reputation has not lent itself to long-term couplings.

From that first conversation about the particularities of queer relationships, Riordan began a more detailed questioning of non-traditional family units. He spent eight months traveling across Canada, interviewing parents, children, couples, singles, threesomes, and groups about their experiences in building, being born into, or being thrown into queer families. Riordan skilfully weaves his participants stories together around themes common to these very diverse families, sometimes delivering an individual's story in one extended, thorough narrative, but more often introducing and revisiting a person or family repeatedly throughout the book. Though the book could arguably have been organized in a variety of ways, Riordan's organization is interesting – he divides the book into three major sections. "Fruitful couplings," which comprises roughly the first 80 pages of the book, looks at the various romantic, sexual, and domestic pairings of his many participants. The second (and longest) section, "Family Values," focuses on parents and children – straight parents of gay children, gay parents of straight children, transgendered parents and children, adopted children, adopted parents, and guardians and caregivers of various sorts. The third and final section, appropriately titled "Roles in the Hay" delves into the stories of the

much-less-traditional family structures that are, as Riordan points out, sometimes perceived as a threat even by their own queer communities. These stories are of intergenerational sex, transgendered marriages, leather threesomes, and sex for money. As Riordan describes them, these are the “bad queers ... who continue to have sex with too many people, or people of the wrong age, or in places the authorities considered insufficiently private. Or they would be too effeminate, or too butch, or they wouldn’t have enough money, or they would be too old, or the wrong race, or they would dress badly” (204). Their stories are among the most fascinating in the book, reflected in Riordan’s tendency to pay much more detailed attention to them.

Evident just in the description above, one of the foremost strengths of *Eating Fire* is the incredible diversity of the group of participants that Riordan gathered. In this sense, he has overcome one of the usual difficulties inherent in the snowball-sample method – very often, when participants are contacted by word of mouth, they are a relatively homogenous group. As Riordan says in his preface:

To find stories, I asked a few well-connected folks to suggest potential contacts. Those contacts led to others, and they to others; this is family on a grand scale ... This isn’t a survey or a comprehensive study. I missed whole provinces, whole races, and many people in unique relationships that I’d like to have met. (viii)

What he fails to reveal in this list of ‘lacks’ in his book is the surprising breadth of people who he did contact. The families are racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse, individuals interviewed range from toddlers to octogenarians, and their sexual and domestic partnerships span the very traditional through to the wildly unconventional. Despite his own claims to the contrary, Riordan has met with remarkable success in presenting a far more colorful picture of queer family life – and queer communities – in Canada than most authors ever achieve.

Another characteristic of Riordan’s writing that sets him apart from many other ethnographers and oral historians is his very balanced self-awareness and presence in the book. The book begins with a story about Riordan’s own relationship with his partner; similarly, the last story in the book is his. And without a doubt, his thematic arrangement of stories, his choices for inclusion, and his occasional

commentaries and observations are deliberate. In simply choosing which stories – and how much of them – to present, he moulds and manipulates his material to tell stories that will inform and inspire his readers. His occasional comments – of surprise at the lack of legal entanglements in one child’s nine-parent family, of envy for some of the warm and supportive family units he encounters, or of rage for a ‘justice’ system that has been so unjust to sexual minorities – remind us of his constant presence in the stories he tells. He even interjects with periodic acknowledgments of his own biases, saying:

Certainly, queers can do appalling things, like abusing other people, or supporting right-wing political parties that do it for them. But that’s not because they’re queer – it’s because our hard-won equality includes the right to be as greedy, brutish, and narrow-minded as anyone else ... As the last sentence might suggest, I’m a little inclined to be judgmental.” (205)

Those moments of ‘judgement’ are rare, but appropriate to his work. The book would be invariably weakened by a total lack of the author’s voice. Riordan’s voice is audible, but it is careful; his presence strong, yet subtle, and an excellent conduit for the stories of his participants.

While many books about gays and lesbians struggle – and often fail – to acknowledge and examine the intersections between sexuality and all of our other identity markers, Riordan’s book valiantly engages in that struggle. Marginalized sexual orientation is the common bond of these stories, but the uniqueness comes from the cross-points with race, dis/ability, age, gender identity, class, HIV status, monogamy, and values. *Eating Fire* is a book *about* the intersections, about the messiness and leakiness and blurriness of the lines that form the box we each know as “family.”

