

WHAT I'M READING

MALLORY ORTBERG

(AUTHOR, *TEXTS FROM JANE EYRE*)

DEERSKIN BY ROBIN MCKINLEY

It's hard to find fantasy that doesn't make me cringe at some point, and I usually can't handle a book that goes really dark (I am not dark, I am shallow and happy), so I didn't think this would be the book for me—but I stayed in bed all afternoon and couldn't leave until I finished it.



protests were planned.” In a few cases, the actual role of the teenagers fails to come to light during the course of the story: The rant against abstinence-only education, while worthy, doesn't actually address how youth have responded to these policies (apart from failing to practice abstinence, that is).

While the bite-size examples make the book easy to browse, the chronological organization of the material often hampers its cohesion: Anti-rape protests end up next door to students complaining about the lack of a bouncy house at their graduation, for example, which is jarring. But the conclusion reins things back in by emphasizing that injustices arise generation after generation and that it's the job of students to “fight for the schools you deserve.” That's a compelling message, even if it's a bit of an erratic ride to get there. —KATURA REYNOLDS

RATING ♥♥

QUEER ROCK LOVE: A FAMILY MEMOIR

Paige Schilt
{TRANSGRESS PRESS}

Queer femme writer, mother, and activist Paige Schilt is a rare bird, and she has pulled off an even rarer feat with a book that stands out in the crowded realm of memoirland. Her tale has the narrative arc and vividly drawn characters of a compelling novel, seamlessly interwoven with an interiority and praxis that breathe new life

into that old feminist saw “the personal is political.”

Queer Rock Love opens 15 years ago, with Schilt meeting and almost immediately falling for Katy Koonce, a genderqueer therapist who would ultimately come to identify as both a “mommy” and a “boygirl.” Koonce is the child of a high-school football coach and a high-femme Southern belle, quite the power couple in a smallish East Texas town. Schilt, by contrast, is nine years younger and was raised mostly in the Midwest by hippie parents determined to turn her into “the next Gloria Steinem.” As their love story unfolds, the cultural clash is played for laughs at times, but it's also an important element of Schilt's own anxieties around identification. She leaves an academic post in Pennsylvania, moves to Texas, and embarks on a life with Koonce, sure of little except that she loves the hard-rocking boygirl.

It's a life that turns out to entail quite a bit of struggle beyond the built-in stresses of being a queer couple in an extremely red state. Koonce, a former IV drug user, was diagnosed with hepatitis C, and Schilt's role as caretaker through her debilitating interferon treatment is central to the story. As one might expect from the coupling of an introverted, academic femme lesbian and an outgoing therapist who fronts a metal band and has a past as both a Bette Midler impersonator and a homeless drug addict, pretty much everything about their marriage and parenthood is by turns weird, touching, funny, dramatic, and political.

Schilt's witty, precise prose is imbued with a skeptical/empiricist worldview as she

describes journeys large and small: to a Wiccan-friendly Methodist church and New Age healers, to the offices of gay evangelists and heterocentric Lamaze classes. These trips also trace that decade's political struggles, particularly those in Texas and the South: the antiwar encampment that occupied then-president George W. Bush's hometown, Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, the passage of a DOMA-like state law, and the outing of Ted Haggard, to name a few.

The author's interior narrative is no less politically charged; Schilt examines her personal and public choices with a sophisticated politics belied by the clarity of her writing style. As things get darker, she gets even funnier. Her cutting wit edges on classism when turned toward her adopted home state (oh, you hick-crazed, scary Texas, you!), but she navigates the personal toll living—and, ultimately, thriving—in a conservative state in frightening times can take on a queer person's soul. It's a testament to Schilt's intelligence, compassion, and talent that *Queer Rock Love* shows us how it's done.

—CINDY WIDNER

RATING ♥♥♥

NOT GAY: SEX BETWEEN STRAIGHT WHITE MEN

Jane Ward
{NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS}

Women's sexual fluidity is something we've come to take for granted, yet men are often still viewed as firmly either/or. Turns out it ain't necessarily so. In *Not Gay*, author Jane Ward looks at the circumstances that allow for sex between white men that not only fails to diminish their heterosexuality but serves to further confirm it.

Ward restricts her focus to pink dick to avoid confusion with the stigma of sex “on the down low” between men of color, which could be another book entirely. The hazing rituals she details are mostly ones that combine sex and humiliation (like the navy tradition of performing anilingus on colleagues while covered in garbage) to cement a view of homosexuality as a trial to be endured for the sake of bonding. (Then again, nonmilitary U.S. guards in Kabul