



## **The Other Side of Desire: Four Journeys into the Far Realms of Lust and Longing**

*Daniel Bergner*

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**The Other Side of Desire: Four Journeys into the Far Realms of Lust and Longing** Daniel Bergner  
“Riveting....Powerful...as much about desire and what’s normal as it is an exploration of why we are the way we are, whether we like it or not.”

—*New York Times Book Review*

Subtitled “Four Journeys into the Far Realms of Lust and Longing,” Daniel Bergner’s *The Other Side of Desire* is a literary exploration of science and sex that will appeal to readers of Mary Roach and Natalie Angier. A cross between “a top-rated HBO series [with] provocatively graphic sex, humorous dialogue, and moral ambiguity,” (*New York Times*) and a profound, deeply humanizing study of sexuality, *The Other Side of Desire* has been called, “a foray into extreme passion, in quest of the human soul” (*O, The Oprah Magazine*) and its author, Bergner, “a keen storyteller but above all a humane one” (Salon.com).

## **The Other Side of Desire: Four Journeys into the Far Realms of Lust and Longing Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Other Side of Desire: Four Journeys into the Far Realms of Lust and Longing for online ebook**

### **Syeda Nessa says**

This is a very unusual book. I have read nothing like. I didn't even know these kind of things existed, but I know better. I learned many things about people and their sexual behavior. If you are really interested in psychology this is the book for. Even if you just like learning about new things this is an excellent book for that. I advise that you keep an open mind reading this book. I was shocked with some of the things I read. I have to say that this was a good book even though it's out of the ordinary.

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### **Charles says**

A fine book: unflinching, at times uncomfortable, sentimental sans mawkishness or mockery, revealing, at once sad and hopeful to the core, written sympathetically but not without awareness, self- and otherwise. A prismatic inquiry into the nature and effects of sexual desire, split into the different story-spectra of several people outside the statistical sexual norm. And threading through it all, the dark twin of the human need to be accepted, desired, loved: the need to be reviled by oneself, to find uniqueness if only by and in self-hatred. The levels of self-disgust that at times take each of the main subjects, seen also in some of their therapists, friends, families -- is it even deeper than the sexual instinct? I'm (it's tempting to say "Alas") much more vanilla, celibate, and boringly standard than the people Bergner writes about; you may well be also. But I'd hazard that we've all foundered in that subterranean sea: Am I a freak? Am I the only one who feels this way? Why am I like this? Why can't I change? Who could love me? When will it stop?

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### **Eva says**

Fascinating and beautifully written--non-fiction with the artistry of fiction.

Notes from Kindle:

Toronto, he felt, was a place even for monsters, a city for men such as himself.

Jacob had put together this life of comfort and love

promise yourself all you want that you're not going to give in to that craving for sleep, but let me tell you, eventually you're going to. That's the struggle some people are having sexually."

the prevalence of certain fetishes shifted with changes in the prevailing culture.

And the police picked me up for a hooker. So there I was in the clink, saying, 'I'm not a hooker, I'm a lip-syncher.'" "Well, there's your novel," a man said. Everyone howled. "It's just nice to be around people who get it," a woman said. "Happy birthday," the newcomer mouthed, wishing it to himself, welcoming himself.

her eyelids—parched and pebbled with middle age—trembled.

But in terms of traditionally defined paraphilias, it made sense to her that women seemed most likely to be masochists. Flesh bared and waiting for the whip, or limbs bound, or body suspended from the ceiling, the masochist was desired, receptive, the focus of the sadist's lustful gaze.

It's so clichéd, and the last thing I want to be is common.

"I have very clear boundaries for myself. If I have deviant thoughts on the train, I think, How comfortable would I be with telling my wife what I'm thinking? How comfortable would I be with telling my kids? That's how I block myself off." Beyond the bounds of his marriage, all desire was deviant, ominous, liable to lead anywhere.

There once was a very gifted sculptor who came to a city and was allowed to come in to create his art. He began to work on a beautiful piece of marble he had obtained from a local quarry. While he was carving the stone, a rich patron came by and wanted the piece for his own house. The artist agreed and worked day and night for several weeks to complete the statue for the patron. Once it was completed, the patron arranged for a large gala for the unveiling of the artwork. He invited the entire to...

"I was flabbergasted," the owner of the telecommunications repair company said. "I told him, 'Roy, why'd you go off and do something so stupid?'" I asked the owner about his use of the word "stupid"—it seemed to diminish the crime. "Listen," he said, "I'm not going to get philosophical, because I'm not smart enough."

"We want them to be the few, the perverted, the far away," he said about the perpetrators. "We want there to be the clear line. We want there to be the sloped forehead. It just doesn't exist."

Not many studies had been done, as though to spare everyone the truth.

And until the late nineteenth century in England, the legal age of sexual consent was ten.

he smiles and looks like the kind of man who would lift his eight-year-old stepdaughter onto his shoulders and tour her around their apartment, so she could do what she loved—touch the ceiling and gaze down, from her great height, on the top of the refrigerator.

In the sun-blanced photograph, Caroline, wearing a red skirt and black blouse, tugs at a red scarf with both hands, tugs in opposite directions across her throat in symbolic strangling—or mere fidgeting.

she described a life so permeated by a sense of her own strangeness that, despite the success of her kids, she felt utterly uncertain of her judgments about everything.

For his own curiosity, he liked to ask, "If I had a video clip of your mind in the last ten seconds before you climax during sex, what would I see?" He marveled at how few men, including those who were excited most by adult women, said that the ten-second video would be filled with the women they were with.

The current subjects were split nearly equally between pedophiles and what Blanchard called "teleophiles"—"the normal guys," he translated, though with a hint of irony: a recent study of his own jibed with those Richard Green had cited. Normal didn't mean uninterested in the young.

The surrealists had given shape to the subconscious, to anarchic and bewildering desires that could be buried but never killed off. Here, on the screen, was the science of lust turned into art.

pedophilic men are about three times more likely than teleophiles to be left-handed.

The abused might have a related inborn trait that made them psychologically vulnerable to, or more likely to receive, adult advances, he suggested.

A three-dimensional pixel is called a voxel.

He spoke about the near-absence of sexual aberration among animals. In humans, “higher parts of the brain have taken over things done by lower parts in other species. And it appears that one of those things is sexual behavior.” The result, he said, was not a complexity worth celebrating. “More things can go wrong.

It’s not too much of a leap to say that humans have odor-driven sexual pathways, and that many of the things that are fetishized have or are associated with musky smells—feet, shoes, undergarments.”

Besides orgasm, the sympathetic system takes control in situations of emergency, and Fedoroff’s theory was that some paraphiliacs use the deviant or forbidden to stoke their sense of mortification or danger—to create the emotional emergency that would open up the sympathetic pathways and drive things on toward climax.

he described a patient with an even more rare genetic disorder, Lesch-Nyhan syndrome. The young man had to live strapped down to a chair; unrestrained, he would gnaw off his own fingers and tear off his penis. The compulsion to mutilate and get rid of his own extremities was caused by a deficient supply of a single enzyme. “It’s amazing that it’s just one enzyme that keeps us from doing these things,” he said. Another symptom, for his patient, was that change—any change—was excruciating, unbeara...

The psychiatrist mentioned to me that successful phallometric testing for tendencies toward violent, coercive sex was difficult. Among all men, sexually violent pictures and audiotapes were “too generally arousing.”

At the dinner party, he mused about giving sex offenders Viagra. A parallel approach had worked with AIDS patients. “People say, ‘Men with AIDS on Viagra?’ They’re incredulous. But men with AIDS get erection problems, especially when they’re put on all these drugs. They stop using condoms. Instead, you prescribe Viagra so they’ll have safe sex.”

The dominatrixes in the audience had bodies ranging from the thick to the obese; their faces were plain. Yet the room was charged with the craving, the devotion, the love of the submissives who surrounded them.

In the back room, there were child victims and adult perpetrators. Nothing even slightly more nuanced was permitted, for fear that the men would justify their crimes to themselves.

ONE night, shortly before his privileges were taken away, Roy and his wife had launched a vast, luminous gold-and-red kite at the town beach. Usually after dusk the beach was empty. But a group of kids—“a mob,” it seemed to him—came running toward them, boys and girls who looked between the ages of four and twelve. By his agreement with Liddle and the probation department, he was simply supposed to tell the kids to keep their distance, to tell them they might get tangled in the heavy lines. The ...

The cornfields churned around them like windswept lakes.

He persisted until Ron confided everything, then asked Ron if he hurt anyone, if he hurt himself. So there was, the psychologist advised, no reason for self-reproach, no reason for reluctance. It was far from that simple. Yet the therapist’s logic began to unburden him

he rediscovered Bellmer, whose work he'd first been staggered by in college. He confronted what the surrealist had called his "plastic anagrams," the photographs of his dismembered dolls.

Yet I had heard her laughter float across the hall from a master bedroom with leopard-print pillowcases and a leopard-print comforter, laughter that was light and warm, the laughter of being beloved.

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### **Elizabeth says**

req from the library in Feb. read p1-69

Got this in June and there is so much pressure that I can't renew it. Got it again in Sept and renewed it once but there is still a lot of pressure on this.

I heard the author interviewed today on NPR. He told a story of a patient who was treated by that psychiatrist at John's Hopkins Fred Berlin, who gave him drugs to kill his foot fetish. That should be illegal or at least the tx of plan B. 17 Feb/09 approx 5:45pm

there are many more stories of people's sexual problems and how they were treated.

Part 1 The story as ref above about a man with a super-powerful foot fetish who couldn't really get to any kind of normal because even though Berlin is in principle leaning toward permission and normalizing of paraphilic, especially when they are so harmless, he(FB) doesn't really know about sex and so he was left with his own disgust of physicality, lust and fundamentally impotent in the face of shame. This chapter is somewhat autobiographical of Berlin and includes ref's to Money in his progression of thought and failure to recognize that there is still nature and the nature/nurture continuum.

Part II The Baroness-she is as individual as she is discerning. She happens to be a sexual sadist. She gets it. P67 some basic sexuality ref Whipple and Gina Ogden and some measuring techniques. Starting p 69 there is a review of the Hx of SM going back to K-E.

Part III child molester doesn't get much help with his desires. The author's babysitter's story of her stepfather and what no one really wanted to hear until she finally told her mom. Mom called the police. he was beaten by the police who assured her mom that this was a better solution because court was messy and it would be her word against his.

Then there is the brain imaging scientist who is sure he is going to find what he is looking for in the mri!!! He said there is virtually no sexual aberration among animals!!!!that this is a result of more cerebral cortex--what a waste, in his opinion.!!! and there is no point in therapy, biology is the cause and there is no other hope. I guess I can be glad he doesn't do icepick therapy.

There is the therapist (psychiatrist) who has a client that has sex with dogs and horses. This therapist believes in learning. He also understands that medical exogenous serotonin is a real complication not a pretend one. High presence of s makes the necessary excitement to go from high plateau to orgasm too high for sex with her regular partner and she had to do a lot of fantasy and revving up her brain with novelty. This is a therapist I could work with. He seems to understand sex and sm. He understands issues of consent, dominance, and negotiation.

the author has a real experience with the effect of understanding sexuality from going to a lecture by the baroness. his own experience starts to change. he realizes that culture actually has a real programming effect. P 148

Part iiiii The man in love with the lady with an amputated leg is called a devotee. Since society wants to confront neither real sexuality nor disability what else are the real life amputee's and their devotee's supposed to do????

The Body Has a Mind of Its Own: New Discoveries About Body Maps in the Brain That Show You How to Do (Almost) Anything Better

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## **Elevate Difference says**

Daniel Bergner's new work on sexuality, *The Other Side of Desire*, garnered a considerable amount of press before it was released thanks to an adapted excerpt from the book published in the New York Times under the title, "What Do Women Want?" Many feminists were disgruntled by the piece, which included University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) professor Marta Meana's insistence of narcissism in the role of female arousal. ("Being desired is the orgasm.") As one NYT letter writer pointed out, "For many women, it's occasionally hard to know the difference between sexual agency and male-driven definitions of sexiness[...:] we are not 'post feminist' yet."

In the book itself, Bergner examines four distinct case studies of individuals with non-normative sexual proclivities, including a foot fetishist struggling with debilitating shame, a man who propositioned his adolescent stepdaughter, and an unrepentant female sadist who openly rejects the "safe, sane, consensual" mantra of the Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism (BDSM) community. Bergner alternates within each section between intimate portraits of his subjects' lives and feedback from psychologists and psychiatrists who provide their professional take on the situation.

The female sadist is by far the most articulate subject and her chapter is subsequently the most memorable. Her practices are intense, and, to his credit, Bergner presents her actions to us without apparent judgment. The book's greatest strength is the author's willingness to admit moments when his own sensibilities are challenged and then do his best to set those reactions aside and continue reporting. What his interviewees confess is often stunningly honest, and the best way to respect their candidness is to simply share it.

The book ends on a weak note with "The Devotee," a section focused on an amputee fetishist, Ron, and his amputee wife Laura. While Bergner touches on the ways disabled individuals' sexuality is neglected (the doctors never address what sex might be like after Laura's accident nor do they inform of the existence of a devotee community), he doesn't linger on the subject for long. He also abandons his strategy of providing medical insight as a counterpoint to the personal experience and instead becomes strangely caught up in describing the artwork of Hans Bellmer, a man who photographed damaged-looking dolls, and Ron's own photographs of amputees.

While Bergner does an admirable job of conveying the eroticism some men experience in sex with a disabled woman, his writing at this stage is often overly dramatic: "The body parts were letters, and their violent reordering would reinvent the body's language and unmask its messages and lead to shaman's wisdom." Furthermore, there seems to be little room for Laura's sexual needs in the relationship. She wonders what she can offer a man now after losing her conventional beauty in an accident. Once she begins modeling as an

amputee her confidence is somewhat restored, yet she still doubts she could ever attract a “normal” man. It seems that Laura, like many women, grew up substituting being desired by a man in place of any desires of her own. Ron’s tastes are catered to, but Laura’s? As readers, we’re never entirely sure what she wants. Perhaps that New York Times letter writer was on to something.

Review by Monica Shores

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### **Erinmelissa999 says**

Nice primer on paraphilia/kink. Chapters 2 & 3 should come with trigger warnings. Significant violence is described in each.

As a clinician I found it educational since the science discussed was absent from my training.

As a mother I found chapter 3 challenging: a view of pedophilia that is more compassionate and nuanced than I have previously seen. This is an issue that is most comfortable to view in black and white terms but this study makes that perspective more difficult to justify. To the author's credit he is able to make his points by grounding them in the limited available science and without forgiving or condoning abuse. Too bad these issues can't be simple.

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### **Tracie says**

I found the stories somewhat sad. The first was about a man with a foot fetish. He was so ashamed of his fetish that he took drugs to diminish his entire sex drive - recommended by his doctor. The man couldn't open up to his wife about his wants and desires either. Such a waste...

The second story was about a man who was attracted to his stepdaughter - uncomfortable, again the drugs. Odd character who ends up marrying one of his co-workers at his supervised job.

Third story about a dominatrix who apparently enjoys her life and fetish, but the writer and other people in her life judge her and not in a positive way. If the submissives want/need the pain, why should she deny them?

Last story about a man who loved amputees and paraplegics. He ends up with a woman who loves him and enjoys him for who he is.

The writer is from The New York Times, but I felt there was a bias throughout the book.

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### **Lila says**

Increasingly irritating as the book progresses. I guess it's a testament to its readability that I kept going, cos I rarely read non-fic and often don't finish or get very far when i attempt it. The best sections of the book are

the ones that were already published in the NYT Mag - for instance, the section on a man who lusts for his 12-year-old stepdaughter was published there YEARS ago... Bergner does not do his fascinating subjects - BDSM, pedophilia, foot fetishists, devotees- justice. His tone is totally irritating, "tolerant" in this way that's so condescending, as if to say "Isn't this nuts? And yet it makes them HAPPY...." he also doesn't get far enough into answering the question of why some seemingly harmless fetishes should be repressed rather than accepted. It reminded me of this very wack treatment of transvestites in Amy Bloom's non-fic book Normal. Just... annoying. Maybe if I didn't know this stuff existed it would be a better reading experience, but since I do this just seemed really lacking.

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## Benjamin says

Daniel Bergner's *The Other Side of Desire* is a self-proclaimed case study of four distinct paraphilias, or what in layperson terms would be called sexual fetishes. Chapter one is dedicated to podophilia and centers on Jacob, a man who bemoans the fact that his erotic interest is limited almost solely (no pun intended) to feet. Chapter two examines the world of BDSM, a subculture in which a woman known only as The Baroness is both a celebrity and, even among her fellow sadists, something of a rebel. In chapter three, we learn of Roy, a 40-year-old whose yearnings for his 12-year-old stepdaughter ultimately lead to court-ordered counseling sessions and a surprising slew of sympathizers. And finally, chapter four introduces us to Ron, the highly successful advertising director whose keen eye for conventional beauty has not diminished his carnal (and emotional) cravings for amputees.

Considering the menu of sexual "anomalies" that *The Other Side of Desire* covers, Bergner cannot take much credit for the fact that his book is consistently interesting. Curiosity comes easily in matters like these. Where Bergner flounders, then, is in failing to plumb the psychological depths of his subjects. Much of the time, Bergner seems oblivious to the endless array of fascinating questions that he fails to explore, while at other times, he teasingly raises such questions only to squander them as food for the reader's thought. It is as if he does not wish to impinge on the stories he tells by taking them anywhere other than where the subjects wish for them to go—an admirable aim, perhaps, but one for which the book suffers.

Missed opportunities aren't the only failings of Bergner's work. The writing style in general is hit-and-miss. It is sometimes unclear what one paragraph has to do with the next, and occasionally even the individual sentence is clumsy enough to cause confusion. Unfortunately for the reader, Bergner's writing is at its best when it is at its least relevant. The author shows a much greater knack for describing the physical appearances of the people to whom he speaks than for articulating their psychoses (as some would consider them). It is evident that Bergner is a journalist, not an academic, and that his tome serves more as an idiosyncratic human interest piece than as a culmination of scholarly research. (The book doesn't even feature an index!) That is fine, if that is Bergner's purpose. And yet, I can't help thinking that a few further deviations into the annals of science would have benefitted the book greatly.

To reiterate, *The Other Side of Desire* is far from uninteresting. But that is precisely why I wish it had been better. Rare is the reader who will not learn something from the book, and there are certainly some interesting (if not discomforting) points to ponder. Among other things, you'll hear plausible explanations of why some people might find sexual intimacy with a horse to be more emotionally rewarding than with another human, of why it might make a lot of sense to prescribe Viagra to a child molester, and of why paraphilias are just as likely to be hardwired in the brain as is sexual orientation. Perhaps the greatest asset of the book, however, is the increased understanding and sensitivity that it will bring to open-minded readers, those who previously may have been all too ready to write off certain sexual proclivities as vile and

depraved. When you learn just how common some of these paraphilias can be, you may even question the legitimacy of such a label, as I did. (Thus, my use of scare quotes in the second paragraph above.) As it turns out, it may be that the true paraphiliac among us is the one who has no sexual fetishes at all.

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## **Malbadeen says**

I've recently been called "doe eyed" in reference to my naivety about my knowledge of the more perverse side of peoples sexual lives and yet after a few years of finding out intimate secret after intimate secret about people, after being gifted things I hadn't asked for and sent pictures I didn't want by long time friends, I think anyone could tell me pretty much anything about their sex life and I'd shrug and say "hmmm" without the slightest bit of surprise.

"what's that? you like to have sex while wearing your dogs leash and your moms underwear - hmm."

"you say you conjure images of your gynecologist to help you climax - hmm."

"you're fondly recalling the time you kissed a girl, you say you wish you were a boy and yet you're sitting here with your boyfriend - hmm"

Recently I argued with a friend that yes in fact everyone was "messed up" (it was a slightly drunken argument, so my lack of profound thought should be forgiven). He claimed his own sense of "togetherness" and took offense to my generalization. Before the night was over he had forgotten he had a girlfriend, was making out with another of my friends and spilling his guts about thoughts kept to himself for months regarding his crush on her.

On my birthday a friend invited me to go to Ireland with her and observe her and her husband renew their wedding vows (20 years). then she spent the rest of the evening fawning on another friend (10 years her junior and NOT her husband).

Lack of commentary on my own stupidity over all things sexual is not to meant to elude to any sort of false pretense of being the exception to the rule, rather provide room to get on with the actual review of the book at hand.

I got this book for free at a trade show but true to human nature it was the first of the many, many, many books that I dove into. I'm not sure what I expected to get out of it, possibly a scientific-ish perspective to balance all the anecdotal stories I've been collecting this past year or two- ? Maybe, like George Michael, I just want to "talk about sex baby"? who knows, but what I found out was the following:

### **THE BOOK:**

the book has 4 stories of "desire":

The man with the foot fetish:

this chapter defined fetish in a whole new light for me and made me sad. The man's life is a wreck and his wife chooses to live behind a veil of ignorance regarding what exactly plagues him. Crazy sad!

S-M: Just interesting enough to give one a new perspective on fetishes, a little disturbing at turns but mostly just an interesting view into a life I will NEVER be part of.

The man with the obsession with his 14 year old step daughter:

There is one line in this chapter that made me want to cry, throw up and hurl the book across the train all at once. This chapter was the hardest to read and I while I left it behind with the tiniest ounce of understanding(?) for the perpetrators, it was the one fetish I could not come to terms with. Nor do I care to, nor do I believe was the author trying to do.

The amputee chapter: zzzzzzzzzz, and a little too saccharine after all the other chapters.

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### **Will Byrnes says**

What if you were wired to have sexual desires that were considered odd, bizarre, maybe even criminal? Bergner looks at four people whose needs are not like yours and mine. While living in a garden variety marriage, one man finds true sexual fulfillment only with women's feet. The Baroness is a rare female sadist, who offers her masochist slaves, servants and clients far more than they can find anywhere else. A child molester struggles with his forbidden desires. A photographer is attracted to amputees. We get a close up look at these four people. Were they born the way they are? Were their predilections the result of nature, nurture, specific chemical interactions while they were in vitro? Bergner talks with caregivers and researchers looking for insight. What is normal? This is a fascinating book that treats an out-there subject respectfully and offers us a window into the challenges faced by people who are truly different? Or are they?

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### **Cissa says**

While the subject matter is compelling- what is a "kink", and how does it come about?- this book offers very little in the way of insights or information.

One problem is that the author seems overly credulous: he takes the word of his subjects, be they paraphiliacs or scientists- without weighing what they say against anything else- even published facts, in the case of the pedophile stepfather; one would have thought a journalist, in particular, would have looked up the newspaper accounts sooner rather than later.

A bigger problem, though, is that the writing zooms all over the place. Partial anecdote! scientific study! Interview with therapist! then maybe zooming back to touch on one of the previous before hitting a new tangent! It did keep me unsure of what was going on, which tends to lead to people being more credulous themselves... but I didn't appreciate that; it felt overly manipulative, and the end result was increased confusion rather than understanding.

Not recommended if you want insight rather than "intellectual" titillation.

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### **Aldrin says**

In his acclaimed nonfiction book released in 1999, New York-based journalist Daniel Bergner details his stay in a penal institution in Louisiana, where he met and became friends with six inmates serving a life sentence. Using the penitentiary's annual rodeo competition as a framing device, the award-winning writer

recounts his experiences with his incarcerated subjects as he discovers that underneath the serious crimes that led them to the largest maximum-security prison in America each of them is still very much a person and not a mere prototype of a bad guy in a crime TV series. Bergner's year-long self-imposed sojourn within the prison's walls ultimately resulted in the publication of *God of the Rodeo*, a book that evinced both the author's propensity for compelling narrative and his deference to the plight of others — qualities which he would exhibit again a decade later in another well-written work of nonfiction called *The Other Side of Desire*.

At once bold and captivating, *The Other Side of Desire* is an anthology of psychological nonfiction that could very well be *God of the Rodeo*'s identical twin. In this new book, the real-life protagonists are also prisoners, but they are of a different kind: they are prisoners of lust and its promise of ecstasy. The book, four years in the making, comprises four episodes of Bergner's encounters with four individuals who are affected by different modes of fascinating, if bizarre, psychosexual conditions. Known in psychiatric parlance as paraphilias and often, but disputably, classified as sexual disorders, the conditions discussed in length in *The Other Side of Desire* include atypical patterns of behavior that when exposed are sure to cause raised eyebrows and turned stomachs, body parts that, while no doubt responsive, are not what Bergner sets out to elicit reactions from. As made evident as early as in the book's introductory pages, he is after the reader's heart and mind.

Each of the four intriguingly titled chapters in the book sees Bergner juggling between telling, fly-on-the-wall style, the interesting and at times surprisingly inspiring story of a paraphiliac person and presenting scientific information that seeks to clarify the mystery surrounding that person's unusual condition as well as the varying proclivities of other similarly affected people. In the opening chapter called *The Phantom of the Opera*, Bergner introduces Jacob, a traveling salesman who has a deep-seated fetish for feet, endowing him with the ability to reach orgasm within seconds and without touching at the sight of a pair of what he refers to as "platypus feet," with "toes [that:] formed a perfect staircase." In the next chapter, *The Beacon*, The Baroness, fashion designer by day and female sadist with a pronounced preference for "the topography of lacerations" by night, the author (and by extension, the reader) is made privy to her sado-masochistic sessions with her numerous slaves. The penultimate episode, *The Water's Edge*, brings to mind Vladimir Nabokov's Humbert and Lolita as it focuses on Roy, a band performer turned pedophile, arrested for harassing her eleven-year-old stepdaughter. Finally, in *The Devotee*, an advertising executive named Ron shares how he lives with his odd and highly selective erotic attraction towards amputees.

These stories of real people who happen to possess inclinations that are perhaps no less strange than the wish of some persons to buy a piece of celebrity memorabilia at a ridiculously high price are interspersed with reports of Bergner's research and interviews with experts in the study of sex, that force which is nothing if not "a powerful, biologically based appetite." In his attempt to pinpoint the provenance of desire, Bergner talked with a number of renowned scientists and psychiatrists, including the personal therapists of the four protagonists of his book. Not surprisingly, the bits of information he gathered from his research and correspondence with the PhD-wielding authorities resulted in another long and winding battle between nature and nurture, a seemingly endless tennis match between heredity and environment. Taking the case of Jacob for example, I could easily come up with a series of questions in relation to the classic debate: Was Jacob somehow hard-wired to feel extreme sexual interest towards feet while still in his mother's womb, perhaps causing the absence of an enzyme that would trigger this abnormality? Or was it his habit of looking down when asked a difficult question in grade school, evading the humiliating stares of his classmates and admiring their feet instead, that caused his fetish? And how come one man's craving for feet is considered abasing and another man's attraction towards breasts, buttocks, legs, or napes isn't? Is a sexual "disorder" a mere product of society and its established norms? How does Jacob cope with his problem? Will he ever be able to completely contain such a strong desire? Does he even have to?

Although the book is filled with informative and thought-provoking disciplinary statements and most of its paragraphs are punctuated with interesting bits of trivia, probably the most memorable being the existence of a tribe in Papua New Guinea where fellatio between an adult male and a young boy is traditionally encouraged, I finished *The Other Book of Desire* feeling a slight sense of not knowing the answers to all the questions posed by the author, much less to the ones that swam in my head while reading it. However, I also felt a seldom experienced sense of fellowship, inevitably established after having read about the lives of Jacob, The Baroness, Roy, and Ron, not because I could relate to their unusual desires but simply because I could relate to their humanity. Bergner immersed himself in the world of these paraphiliacs, who I should point out are all human beings lest somebody forget or think otherwise, let them be seen in a new light, and wrote about them with such sensitivity that I gradually developed nonjudgmental empathy towards these individuals who are no more prisoners of desire, sexual and otherwise, than you and I.

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This review was cross-posted from The Polysyllabic Spree. *The Other Side of Desire* is available at Fully Booked, Bonifacio Global City, Taguig City.

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### **Tina says**

lush, memorable character study and exercise in empathy. no one is a monster here for their fetishes. even though more than half of the people Bergner writes about have behaved monstrously on behalf of their fetishes.

the only moral to the tales is the best moral of all: we are all worthy of understanding, compassion, intimacy and we are all complicit in our desires.

Now what made Bergner's writing interesting is that he is neither clinical nor salacious, but direct and explicit. Enough so that he puts the reader in her/his rightful place as a voyeur. Not a devotee? Find stumps or any physical disfigurement repugnant? Not in Bergner's hands. If the beauty of Venus is more beautiful in fragmentation, he is able to get that across while slowly erasing the notion of freak show exploitation. The dark side of desire is when the fetish takes over. Compulsion sets in and the object of desire is just that, an object. The humanizing of the desired is often the most difficult for Bergner's subjects. Regardless, he shows them love and kindness and never objectifies them in return.

His stance as the author is thankfully ambiguous, although because he never promotes his subjects proclivities, one might guess his own sexual attention is without fetish. Yet he gets inside what is always truly erotic: trust. The guy who despite having a girlfriend, really feels true intimacy, true sexual intimacy with his horse. He swears the horse trusts him. Bergner never second guesses this and leaves the statement open. The real point is that the eros for the equine is really about that he trusts the horse. The importance of his desire is that he trusts the horse to respond in a way that, apparently, his girlfriend or any girl or boy doesn't.

Concerns regarding disease are raised to which this man wants to further gain our trust by revealing that he always wears a condom... with his girlfriend.

So, the book has it's, for me anyway, seriously queasy moments, but Bergner keeps tight reign (sorry) on the ride (can't help myself.) He keeps to four characters and then intersperses the thoughts, personal theories and clinical studies of researchers and therapists who work with these topics and people daily. Bergner is not afraid to describe their attractions and attractiveness either. Everyone is treated with the sensitive, delicate, skilled handling of a hothouse gardener. Or better yet, a botanical illustrator. The paraphiliac is a kind of distinctive, colorful and somewhat thorny orchid for Bergner. But he tends to them with enough directness of

line and brightness of color to not only hold your interest but to find yourself empathizing with portions of their structure and as he lays out the Latin and the common names he gets right to the heart of the matter: truth is beauty. And you can always trust in that. Even trans-species.

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### **Judith says**

Before I read this book, whenever I heard someone had a foot fetish, I thought it was comical; if I heard someone was masochistic/sadistic, I thought it was frightening; if I heard someone was a pedophile, I was thoroughly disgusted. This book is truly an education in what we normally consider perversion, from the merely weird to the criminally insane.

The author treats his subjects with respect, dignity, and natural curiosity. When his own biases come into play, he clearly states them, and then puts them aside in the interests of setting forth as much clear information as possible. He interviews probation officers, psychiatrists, doctors, along with child molesters, and various people who practice deviant sexual behaviors.

There's the guy with the foot fetish who finds summers to be torture because he can hardly bear to look at all the women who wear sandals in the grocery store. He gets as completely turned on by bare feet as another man might be if women went to the grocery store topless. His life is extraordinarily difficult and he cannot bring himself to share his secret fantasy with his wife.

Then there's a "famous" female masochist in New York City known as "The Baroness" who is happily married to a normal man, yet she spends her weekends at parties where she is the guest of honor (without him). She is one of the rare female masochists to be found. Although many prostitutes will perform masochistic acts on request, the Baroness is actually sought after because she is a true masochist and enjoys sexual torturing, which heightens the pleasure of her "victims/clients".

One of the interesting aspects of this book is that it doesn't feel voyeuristic and there's no prurient interest being evoked. Rather it is a rare window into the minds and lives of people who are so extremely different from the norm that they might be another species, and yet, they are just like "us" in all other respects.

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