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Announcing the June 6, 2023 publication of

A GLOBE AND MAIL BEST SPRING BOOKS SELECTION

DREAMINGHOME

By: Lucian Childs



ONE OF LAMBDA LITERARY REVIEW'S MOST ANTICIPATED LGBTQIA+ BOOKS OF JUNE 2023

A queer coming-of-age—and coming-to-terms—follows the aftereffects of betrayal and poignantly explores the ways we search for home.

Dreaming Home chronicles the fragmenting of an American family. A sister's casual act of betrayal awakens the father's demons, ones spawned during his time in prisoner-of-war camps in Vietnam. The effects of the ensuing moment of violence against his son ripple out over the course of forty years, from Killeen TX, to San Francisco to Fort Lauderdale. Swept up in this arc, the members of this family and those they love tell their tales.

PRAISE FOR *DREAMING HOME*

“Eminently accomplished, (and) often deliciously droll...The novel asks provocative questions: At what age are we wholly accountable for our actions? To what degree do we hold a traumatized person responsible for perpetuating harm?”—**Kia Corthron, *The New York Times***

“This queer coming-of-age, told as a series of interlinked stories from six points of view over a 40-year period, is based in part on the author’s experiences in AIDS-era San Francisco. American-born, Toronto-based Lucian Childs, as you’ll glean from that last detail, came of age some time ago, but is still embracing

new rites of passage: Though his stories have appeared in literary journals since the early aughts, he's making his book-publishing debut at the tender age of 74."—**Emily Donaldson, *The Globe and Mail***

"Childs is an excellent writer, with a keen ear for dialogue and great skill in depicting the complexities of emotional conflict...His characters are living souls, and life being what it is, they will continue to struggle to find happiness."—**Timothy Niederman, *Ottawa Review of Books***

"Childs' ruthlessly genuine depiction of Kyle through these narratives is illustrative of a smart and thoughtful engagement with the simultaneity of a person whose sense of self is moulded by their suffering."
—**Sarah Rutkowski, *The Miramichi Reader***

"It takes a special book for me to detour from non-fiction [...] *Dreaming Home* is a reminder that intergenerational trauma and the coming out journey make for a challenging and uncomfortable path."
—**Brian Bradley, *The Toronto Star***

"Movingly explores how people change, and how they don't; how they heal, and how they can't ... or maybe still can."—**Kerry Clare, *49th Shelf***

"Though weighty, the stories or chapters in *Dreaming Home* are easy to devour because they feel so real and personal. The language is sparse, yet beautifully written, illuminating brief moments and observations that root you to the lives and experiences of these characters, making them vivid and real."—**Will Fawley, *Prairie Fire***

"In elegant, emotionally resonant prose, Childs creates a nuanced and sensitive portrait of a life shaped by loss, abandonment, and generational trauma...Thematically sophisticated, *Dreaming Home* also explores persistent issues in the gay male community such as sexual racism and the disparagement of older men."
—**Shawn Syms, *Quill and Quire***



ABOUT LUCIAN CHILDS

Lucian Childs is a fiction writer, a Peter Taylor Fellow for Nancy Zafris at the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop, a recipient of the Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Project Award and a finalist for the Faulkner-Wisdom Short Story Award. He has been an artist-in-residence at Byrdcliffe Art Colony and at Artscape Gibraltar Point. Lucian is a co-editor of 2017 Lambda Literary finalist, *Building Fires in the Snow: A Collection of Alaska LGBTQ Short Fiction and Poetry*. His stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Grain*, *The Puritan*, *Quiddity*, and *Prairie Fire*, among others. Lucian currently lives in Toronto.

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A Biblioasis Interview with Lucian Childs

Tell me a bit about yourself.

I was born in Dallas, TX in 1949 and I grew up there. I guess you could say our family was upper middle class, though it didn't seem like it at the time. Growing up is problematic for everybody but, it is a special kind of problematic for us gay boys, especially growing up before gay liberation. Now there are gay-straight alliances in schools, people are waving rainbow flags when they're twelve. It was not like that then. I had a typical, gay boy childhood: few friends, really terrible at sports. But, you know, it wasn't all that bad. My parents sent me to a prestigious boys school so I fell into a drama club. I really found sanctuary there. I also found sanctuary in books and reading. So, instead of being out tossing the ball around, I'd be on my bed in my room reading Dickens.

We lived in a nice part of Dallas. After I finished my education, I fled to San Francisco. In my case, I got a BC in English and Architecture. Similar to the character Kyle, he leaves the state of Texas, and never lives there again, but both he and his mother Diane realize they can't really quit it. You can take the boy out of Texas, but can't take Texas out of the boy. I can't stop writing about the place. I've two other books that feature Texas in the works.

I split to San Francisco. I was there for eleven years, from 1981-92. I practiced architecture and dove into the city's amazing gay life. I got there right before AIDs happened, so it was definitely still the middle of the party. Those years that I spent there are the model for the three San-Francisco based chapters in *Dreaming Home*.

In 1992, I met someone. I was studying Zen at the time, and I met my first husband at a Zen mountain center. He took a job in Alaska, and, after resisting, I followed him there. I ended up living there for twenty-five years. And then similarly, in 2005, I met a Canadian online and he wooed me away from the frozen north. I never thought I'd live in Alaska or Canada, really, but there I was. And here I am.

We went back and forth for seven years, then we married in 2014. In 2015, I moved here and became a Canadian permanent resident. And now, I'm talking to you.

***Dreaming Home* teeters between novel, novella, and linked short stories. I'd love to hear you speak a bit about the form, and how your vision for the work changed during your writing and editing process.**

It is interesting. I guess there has been some internal debate about what to call it. I guess the gambit recently has been not to call it anything. Novel was struck from the cover design, which I think is good. We should let the reader decide what it is.

It is definitely unusual. This is my first book, so I don't really know how things typically go. For me though, it had an interesting genesis. I have published twelve short stories in literary journals. Three, kind of by chance, were Canadian. When you get to that point you think well, now it is time to collect them.

I don't have any formal or academic training as a writer. I thought, you know, let me see if I can hone these stories before I start schlepping them around. So, I enrolled at the Banff Centre's literary program's five-week residency. I got in but immediately, of course, covid shut it down. It worked out anyway because I emailed Caroline Adderson, who was the director. I had read about all of the instructors and really wanted to work with her, and she said she would love to work with me. So, we spent nine months on the manuscript. For someone who doesn't have an MFA, to have that experience was amazing. One of the first suggestions she made was linking the stories. And I was like, "what?" They were written ten, eleven, twelve years apart. How could they be linked?

My process is to balk first, then think "hmm, maybe" and then I go "definitely!" So, the more I thought about it, the twelve stories did seem to arrange themselves into two groups, each of which with its own implied narrative arc. I wholeheartedly signed on to the project and was able to plug in some of my dissatisfactions with the short story. I feel that I am a short story writer, for ten years its practically all I read, but I became frustrated because they seemed like these little walled gardens. As lovely as they were, you didn't really get a sense of who the characters were. They just existed under the microscope, within the confines of the walls of that garden. It excited me to be able to look at a group of characters over time. But I wanted to be true to the original shape of the stories and improve upon them. So, we let the original POVs stand, stripped the stories to the bone, and I essentially wrote new stories on top of them.

And then John got a hold of it, and said that he'd publish it if I made some changes. I'd balked with Caroline but, when John Metcalf comes knocking on your door, you just don't hesitate. Just say yes.

Between nine months with Caroline, and nine months with John, that's my MFA right there. With John, we pushed even further the inner connectivity of the stories, and added another one. For me, it's not so much a linked short story collection, because the linkages in those collections can sometimes be really slight. I wanted this to be a single thing, six parts tightly integrated in a single narrative.

***Dreaming Home* is, in many ways, a queer coming of age story of the main character, Kyle. Though, as I read, and as the voices shift in the book, Kyle becomes less and less knowable. The image of him appears refracted through the eyes of those around him. I'd love to hear you talk about Kyle, and your thoughts on who has control over his narrative.**

Well, I don't really think of Kyle as the protagonist. Patrick Earl Ryan, who kindly wrote a blurb for the book, calls Kyle the polestar, around which the story and the other characters revolve. I've been calling him the pivot character. It is a book about family. You've got the contentious relationship between Kyle and his sister, Rachel. And you've got his doting mother, Diane, intruding on his life in San Francisco. The father and the grandparents are lightly sketched but they are a presence in the book too, as are Kyle's two lovers, Robert and Jason, and Kyle's best friend Rebecca. It is an odd way to write a book, but I think it mirrors the way we perceive others. You can't really know people directly. You cobble together an idea of them through your own observations and interactions but

also those that are reported to you by other people. Most contemporary fiction iterates the individual journey. And I get that, I love those stories too. But I find the topic of family a richer terrain to explore. I suspect that because I left Texas so early in my life, lost my parents in my mid-twenties, lost both of my husbands, family has taken on a greater importance in my life. Kyle's presence grounds *Dreaming Home* and that there is plenty of evidence that the reader can cull from the text to get a real sense of him and his progression. I understand that telling a story over forty years, from six points-of-view, in a not very long novel, might be baffling for some readers, because you really must do the work to piece the overall story together for yourself. But I find that exciting, and I hope others do too.

The major, structuring theme in the text seems to be the effect of trauma. Each character, in some way, has experienced a trauma that they will carry with them for decades. Can you talk a bit about the role trauma plays in the novel, and why writing fiction is an effective way to explore lifelong traumas?

When I was younger, I thought I was going to be a therapist. So, I studied psychology. RD Laing always stood out to me. He said, we are all in a post hypnotic trance induced in early infancy. In my own experience, and research, I think this is true. We are marked by the cascading effects of past events, especially traumatic ones. And I think these markings become our character, and that we have to accommodate ourselves to them, which is not an easy thing to do. Traumas, and the difficulties they engender, also provide us with opportunity for growth and individuality. There is a quote at the beginning of the book by John Donne, that I love: "Affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it." You don't normally think of affliction as being a treasure but it really makes us who we are. In the book, Kyle has lost his sense of safety. The physical and emotional abuse he experiences leads him to this desire to create homes, quite literally, because he becomes an architect.

For me, the novel and its broad sweep allows for multiple perspectives to be explored across long periods of time. It is able to outline the ripping effects of trauma throughout an entire life, freed from fact. It can do things that nonfiction can't.

In *Dreaming Home*, the vehicle that drives the narrative is the response of the characters around Kyle to his depression. Many people who go through conversion therapy have difficulty forming attachments and deal with lifelong depression. For me, there is a problem with depression when it comes to storytelling. Depression is monolithic, emasculating inertia. Fiction is action directed against impediment towards a result. So, if you ground the story in depression, which is the inability to act, what are you left with? It can become a tedious recounting of symptoms, which you do see in other books. So, that is partly why I chose not to focus only on Kyle's story, but to show the stories of everyone around him, and how they are impacted by his condition.

Who are some of your literary influences? And how do you think they manifest in your work, if at all?

When I first started writing in 2005, I was in the thrall of Cormac McCarthy and Annie Proulx. I loved that high literary style imbued with western speech patterns. As time went on, I really gravitated to Alice Munro and William Trevor. And then, of course, a close third, not that I want to rank them, is Mavis Gallant. Working with Caroline and John, their work has become important.

John's story, "The Years in Exile," has become a lifeline for me, especially when I get stuck. He writes, "particular life, particular life, all else is tricks of a trade or inexpressible." Whenever I get stuck writing, I just throw myself into the moment and start writing details.

How they manifest in the work is hard to tell. So much of what we do is subconscious. The only thing I can figure out is that I am really attracted to the poetic precision of all these writers. I'm a sucker for a line that sings, and I try to do that in my own work.

Lastly, what are you reading these days?

I just got through reading Alexander Hemon's new novel, *The World and All That It Holds*, and Garth Greenwell's *Cleanness*. I finally got around to Andrew Sean Greer's *Less*. They are all novels that have amazing word craft and interesting narrative structures. I don't always read queer authors, but it is always nice to read books with queer protagonists that really elevate the form.

In between chapters, I take breaks and read stories. I am reading Clarice Lispector and am chipping away at the collected works of William Trevor, Mavis Gallant. I also read *The Paris Review*, *McSweeney's*, *One Story*. Sometimes, it is too much, and I think I should just watch Netflix tonight. So many books, so little time. But I am just getting started with all this, in a way. I am seventy-four and I feel like I need to be ambitious in my reading and my writing, because I want to get some more stuff done.