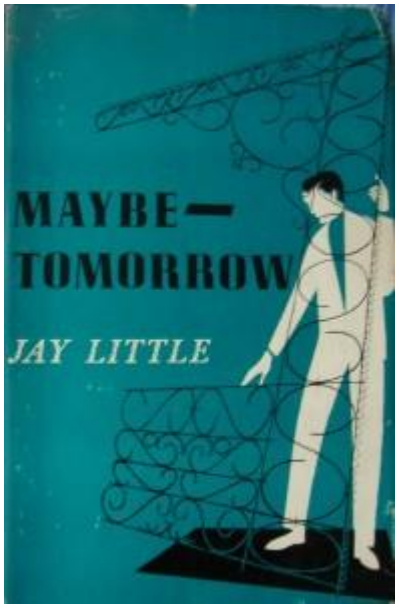
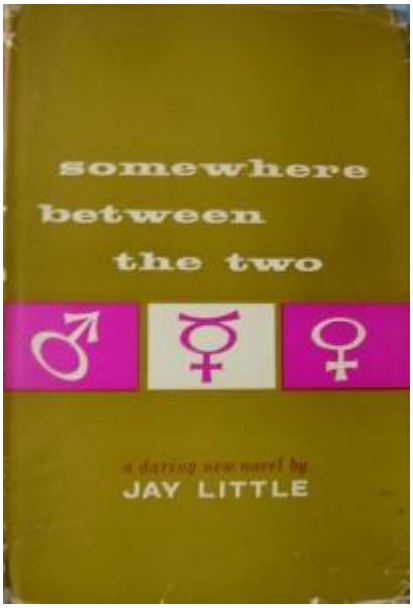
March 1st, 2010

A "Little" Romance

by **Brooks Peters**

In the annals of vintage gay fiction, one author stands out as truly an enigma: Jay Little. Most people today have never heard of him. You won't find his books in stylishly designed reprints at Barnes & Noble or Borders. You can't download him on Kindle. Or read him on Google Book Search. Not yet, at least. In fact, the two books he wrote are almost completely forgotten, except by collectors who cherish classic camp. Most current "queer studies" scholars don't pay much attention to Jay Little today, which is not surprising, since his books are amateurishly written and verge on what one critic labeled "soft-core pornography." His singular oeuvre is often dismissed as irrelevant, a footnote in homosexual literary history.





And yet, Jay Little was one of the most influential gay writers of the 20th century. His two novels, *Maybe-Tomorrow* and *Somewhere Between the Two*, both self-published in the 50s under a pseudonym by a vanity press, were surprising bestsellers. One figure I found estimates he sold over 200,000 copies — and this at a time when "deviant"-themed books were widely censored, if not banned. Even Gore Vidal claims that he was blacklisted for years by the *New York Times* after he wrote the now celebrated gay novel *The City and the Pillar* in 1948. Ironically, Jay Little's books were advertised in the *Times* right next to books about God and religion by Dale Evans and Roy Rogers. Later they were promoted vigorously in various magazines of the period.

Despite his marginalization, Jay Little had a profound impact on many of the liberated authors who came after him. Sometimes this influence was palpable, deliberate, other times more subtle, in fact, unconscious. For Jay Little was one of the first gay novelists to openly explore what was then labeled, "the Twilight World of the Third Sex" — the homosexual demimonde. He didn't couch his story in highfalutin' psychobabble or mystical double-talk or twisted gender-reversals, masking latent queer content. Jay Little told it like it was, using the salty, often bitchy language of the subterranean set and holding nothing back in terms of storyline or plot. And what is perhaps most remarkable about him is that he did this at the height of the McCarthy era when others were scampering back into their closets to escape the heat of homophobic witch hunts.

I first encountered the name Jay Little as a student in college, taking a course on "Ambivalence in the Novel" (which showed up on my report card in shorthand as "Homos in Lit," much to my father's consternation). Compared to Melville's *Billy Budd*, and Isherwood's *A Single Man*, Jay Little's novels seemed like tawdry melodramas, early examples of one-handers, high camp homoerotica. They were not taken seriously as literature and were not, therefore, part of our syllabus.

Nevertheless I went out of my way to find copies, and located both novels, in hardcover, at the Strand in New York (for a whopping $2.00 a copy.) Even then, in school, I was aware of the double standard in academia of judging literature by whether or not it fit into the canon of so-called quality fiction. A book like *Maybe-Tomorrow* may not have had the literary gloss or depth of Vidal's work or James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, but from the standpoint of culture, it may be more relevant, and certainly deserves greater consideration.

As a document reflecting the spirit of the times, *Maybe-Tomorrow*, first published in 1952, has few rivals. Re-reading it now, I am struck by how "out" it really was for its era. Jay Little revels in telling the story of Gaylord Le Claire, a curly-haired effeminate youth from Cotton, Texas who powders his face, decorates his room with satin curtains, wears silk underwear and dreams about seducing the star of the local high school football team. It's the stuff of dreams, all right, a gay romance at a time when such things simply didn't exist. And yet, it still strikes a chord of yearning and insouciance that is remarkable in its forthrightness.

In the first feverish pages, we find "Gay," as he is called throughout, struggling with his mixed-up gender identity. "[He] loved the space around him, the furniture, the rug, the etching, all of it. But as he looked around, he longed for something else. Longed for some demonstration to equal the bitter violence he felt within himself…Why, why, he cried within himself, can't I be like fellows my age."

His desire for normalcy is not that unusual for an adolescent, grappling with mystifying growing pains. But Gay's dismay is deeper than mere glandular changes. "For many months he had felt his uneasiness grow. No one he knew was beset with the melancholia, emotional frigidity, or feminine symbolisms he found in himself….He wanted to fight them, but how? He could not fight what he did not understand. Why couldn't he understand them. Why couldn't he be at ease among boys his age instead of drawing meekly away." (Sic: Like the producers of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, Jay Little had no patience for question marks.) Little pushes the angst to a level that is almost comical, and one wonders if he isn't having a little fun at Gay's expense. The language is so over the top that it is almost satire: "He did not sob, or weep like ordinary boys. He cried with a despairing stridency, like an animal, bound and helpless, which is being flayed alive with stones and cannot bear its agony."

The story barely gets underway before Gay finds himself getting hit on at a dance by a drunk redneck who thinks he's a girl. "You're too damn pretty to be a boy, sonny,"… ya'a cute little fag!" The next day he is undressing at the gym, afraid to show off his naked flesh to the other boys, when he is ribbed by bullies who try to lure him into the shower. One of them admires Gay's ample penis, questioning how a boy as pretty as a girl could be so well-endowed. The language is highly charged. "Look at the tool this sissy's got," the leader shouts. "Shit, I thought you had the biggest one in school, Stud, but Pretty Boy here's got you bested by a couple of inches." The bully dubs Gay, "Venus with a Penis," adding, "You ought to be proud of that honker." Things quickly devolve from horseplay to male rape. "I ain't ever corn-holed anybody before, but I'll try anything once," the horny lad says. "I'm hotter than a bitch dog…Ain't ever been up the back door."

Before that happens, happily, Gay is rescued by his idol, Bob Blake, the football stud, who shoos off the attackers, then takes a long, steamy shower with a sobbing Gay, holding him in his arms, apparently uninterrupted by other students, coaches or nosy janitors. The scene ends with a passionate kiss. The muscle boy assures the feminine waif: "There's nothing wrong with you, Gay." In Jay Little's world, anything is possible and it is one of the rare instances before the liberation movement took off after the Stonewall riots when such positive sentiments surfaced in books with gay themes.

Of course it's fantasy. Jay Little is just spinning a fanciful yarn, tantalizing his readers with masturbatory material that until then had been out of reach. No different really than the type of material one might find in a cheap Harlequin romance, except in those novels, the damsel in distress is a busty female, not a boy with a sizable "honker." And the language in those bodice-rippers is not quite as in-your-face. What's interesting from a cultural standpoint is that Little is not afraid of using vulgar street slang, of eroticizing the sexual activity, even if it is violent. Even now it is shocking to read words such as "fairy," "pansy," "fag," "glory hole," "basket," "drag queen," "corn-hole," and "cunt," in a '50s novel. Small wonder the book was published by a vanity press. No other house would have touched it. It's surprising that it was not censored, or banned, and that the *"*Old Gray Lady*,"* the *Times*, took ads for it. But the book was reprinted in several editions.

In *Playing the Game: The Homosexual Novel in America*, Roger Austen writes, "The Bob Blakes were never that available to the little Gaylord LeClaires who adored them." He rolls his eyes at Jay Little's plot. "Once a reader detached himself from vicarious emotional involvement, however, he would have to admit that reality had been suspended to permit the acting-out of adolescent fantasies." Author Richard Dyer, in his 1993 book *The Matters of Image*, writes poignantly that he was both attracted and repelled by Jay Little's protagonist: "…it was more longing I felt towards Gaylord Le Claire in *Maybe-Tomorrow*, a wish that I could both be him and have him with his 'earnest face and handsome physique.' And I took on board the two main messages of the type — that to be homosexual was both irremediably sad and overwhelmingly desirable."

Perhaps if those of us who studied these books had known a bit more about who Jay Little actually was, we would have seen it differently, and with more humor. For what I've learned about Jay Little indicates that he based much of this book on his own

experience, including a love affair with the local Big Man on Campus that was entirely real. But back when *Playing the Game* was written in 1977, Jay Little's identity was a secret. The first edition of Ian Young's ground-breaking *Bibliography of the Male Homosexual in Literature* in 1975 simply gives the author's name as Jay Little. But the revised and expanded volume from 1981 identifies him as Clarence Lewis Miller. I asked Ian Young how he came to know Little's true name but he couldn't recall. Nor did he know anything else about him. All subsequent mentions of Little's work rely on Young's guide as the only source for that information.

So when I began my quest to find out who Jay Little/Clarence Miller really was, I faced several hurdles. First off, I had to find out if he was still alive and where he lived. I asked around but no one I knew in gay literary circles had a clue. A well-known writer, who is regarded as the *eminence grise* on all lavender literary matters, had never even heard of him. Searches on Google revealed nothing other than a few listings of his books on eBay and a citation from Michael Bronski's book *Pulp Friction*, which had little biographical information in it, other than what was available from the book's dust-jacket. On it, Jay Little divulges that he was born in Texas in 1917, that his "interest in writing is rivaled only by his preoccupation with the theatre," that he "entered the entertainment world after his graduation from high school," and sang over the radio at station KTLC in Houston and had a "fifteen minute program once a week for over two years." He then moved to California where he performed in the Pasadena Playhouse and toured as an actor across the country, before returning to Texas. "In his spare time," he adds, "he enjoys oil painting, designing his own furniture and fishing." Was any of this true?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PAGEANT PRESS, Inc., 130 W. 42nd St., New York 36, N. Y.

I started with the birth year, combing the 1920 census records from Texas for a Clarence Miller who would have been two to three years old. Who knew there were so many Clarence Millers! And in Texas, to boot. Then I tried the Social Security Death Index, always a reliable source. But none matched up with 1917 as a birth year. I called the Pasadena Playhouse and asked if they had any records of a Clarence Miller who performed there in the 30s or 40s. They responded immediately with a list of programs he had appeared in, but it turned out to be a different Clarence Miller, a doctor from Pasadena with a family.

A chance reference to a Clarence Miller in a 1982 *Texas Monthly* article I uncovered about the eccentric gay artist Forrest Bess, *above*, however, proved more fruitful. This Clarence Miller said he had known Forrest when they were both 5 years old and living in Clemville, Texas, a rough-and-tumble oil town. Well, Forrest Bess was born in 1912, so if they were the same age, then this was probably not the same guy. But as I read Miller's chatty quotes about Bess, I was struck by the similarity of his voice to the tone of Jay Little's prose. So I wrote to the author of the article, Michael Ennis, and asked if he knew more about this particular Clarence Miller. Turns out, Miller ran a fabric and design business in Houston for the decorating trade. That certainly sounded promising, considering that Jay Little had claimed to enjoy painting and designing furniture in his spare time. So I went back to genealogical records and found a World War One registration card for a Theodore J. Miller, living in Clemville in 1917. I then checked the 1920 census again and found him living in El Campo, Texas with a son named Clarence. Voila! Or so I hoped. All I really knew was that I had found the Clarence Miller in the *Texas Monthly* article. That didn't prove it was the same man who wrote *Maybe-Tomorrow*.

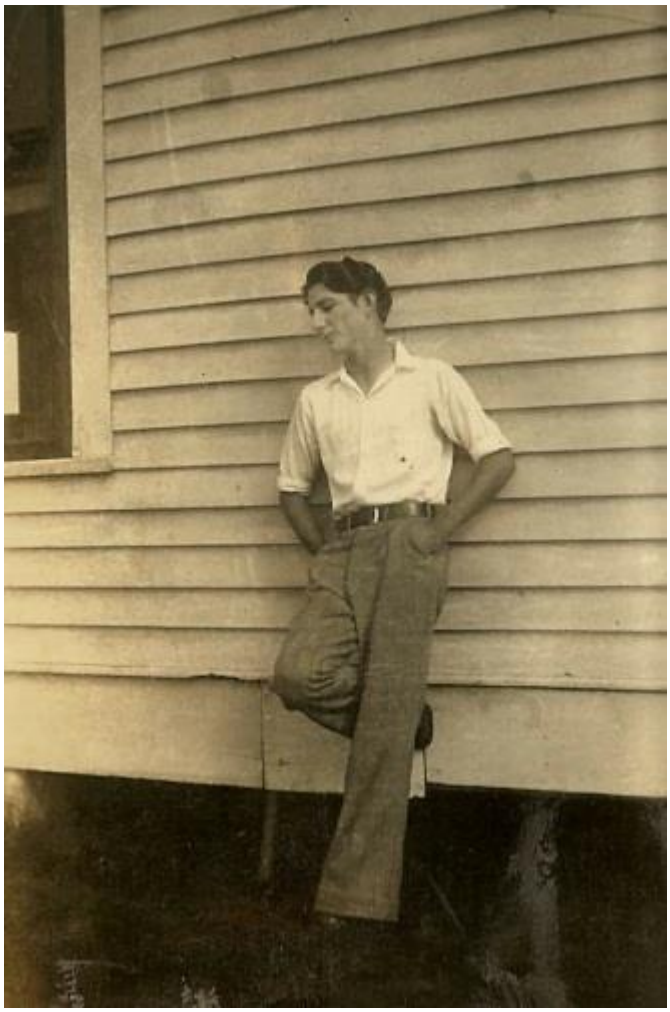
I decided to try a different tack. On the back of *Maybe-Tomorrow* is a pencil sketch portrait of the author signed by a "Jon Pinchback." A little digging around revealed that an artist named Jon Joseph Pinchback [1916-1989] had served as an airman during the war, then moved to Houston, where he became a window decorator, interior designer, and painter. He worked as a commercial artist for several Houston department stores, finally retiring from Sears. That seemed to dovetail nicely with the description of Clarence Miller in Ennis' article. But while I managed to find relatives of Pinchback in Texas, none had any clue of his ties to a friend named Miller or Little. (Jon Pinchback, *below*.)

In the end, I managed to tie up the loose ends by a stroke of luck. While researching Pageant Press, the vanity outfit which had published Jay Little's two books, I came across a reference to the papers of one of its editors, Edgar H. Leoni, which are archived at the One Institute in LA. Leoni, who later ran Vantage Press, had written the classic gay study: *Jonathan to Gide*, using the anagram pseudonym Noel I. Garde. So I called the One Institute to see if there was any correspondence between Leoni and Jay Little. Turns out that there wasn't, but they did have a copy of Jay Little's book, *Maybe-Tomorrow*, signed and inscribed with his address "235 Hathaway." Oddly, they also had a subscription record to *One Magazine* by a "Jay Little" at that same address. I began to wonder if Jay Little had used a pseudonym at all and if seeking out Clarence Miller was not in fact a dead end.

But when I researched that street number, I discovered that Hathaway Avenue had been renamed Westheimer Road, one of the best-known addresses in Houston in the gay-friendly Montrose area. I googled the address and found pictures of the house, *above*, and a listing for its current resident. But no mention of a Clarence Miller. Using the zip code, however, I was able to then find a listing for a Clarence L. Miller who died in 2001 in Houston. He was born in 1911, which would make him just about the same age as the boy who played with Forrest Bess in Clemville in 1917.

But was he in fact Jay Little? There was only one way to find out. I had to locate a relative. I scoured the cemetery records of El Campo, Texas, where this Clarence Miller had grown up. I found graves for Theodore, his wife Elsie, and other members of the family, but no Clarence. A call to the funeral parlor in hopes of getting a phone number for the surviving and only child,

Clarence, led nowhere. But it did lead me to think about calling the Probate Office in Houston since that is where he would have died and his will, if he had one, would have been filed. Lo and behold, the Harris County Clerk's office has one of the most sophisticated websites I've ever seen, and I was able to search online and immediately came up with a Clarence *Lewis* Miller in Houston. Bingo! A quick phone call to a secretary there and I had the name of the executor, Harold Ray Yoder. No doubt there must have been easier ways to arrive at this information. But I had to make sure I had the right Clarence Miller before I started making calls and this time I knew I had the right man. (Clarence Lewis Miller, *below*. All snapshots courtesy of Ray Yoder.)



What Ray Yoder revealed about Jay Little, however, made the crazy quilt quest I'd been on completely worth the time spent. "You mean, Tex?" he said, when I finally reached him. "Tex," it turned out was Clarence Lewis Miller's nickname. No one called him Clarence, not since he'd appeared in a nightclub in Baltimore and one of the drag queens he met there said, "Honey, you don't look like a Clarence, I'm gonna call you Tex." Ray, I soon learned, is the nephew of Charles Lester Yoder, who was Clarence Miller's lover for many years. After Chuck's death in 1973, Ray remained friends with "uncle-in-law" Miller, moving to Houston at his request where he eventually settled down with his partner Marc Sullivan.

Getting to know the hilarious figure Clarence Lewis Miller, *above*, that Ray describes, one is not surprised to find he could have written *Maybe-Tomorrow*. He was a true character, with a scorching wit. “He always told me,” Ray recalls, “‘Mary, it takes a fairy.’ That was a favorite expression of his.” That sentiment was more a reflection of his sense of humor since Tex was not particularly effeminate. “Uncle Chuck was more that way,” Ray says. “Tex was the masculine one,” although, he adds, “he did sometimes like to wear powder.” (Chuck Yoder, *below*, at the shop.)

According to Ray, Tex first met Ray’s uncle when he was in California. He’d gone there around 1937, after his initial brush with show business as a radio announcer, hoping to make his name in Hollywood. He studied acting and fencing at the Pasadena Playhouse and became good friends with fellow student Robert Preston and his wife. “Tex was always starstruck,” Ray recalls. During the next decade, he met a lot of movie people, including Ramon Novarro, Franklin Pangborn, and Richard Ney, then a young beauty who would later marry Greer Garson (both, *below*).

But men were not his only pals. Tex, as he once told Ray, “was a queer queer. He liked to sleep with girls now and then.” He related a story to Ray that I found particularly fascinating. One night he picked up a woman at a nightclub, went back to her hotel room where they made love. On her night table was a picture of Paulette Goddard. Tex wondered why it was there. “That’s my daughter,” the lady told him. She was Alta Goddard, the notorious stage mother of Paulette. Or so Tex claimed. Ray says there’s no reason to doubt the story since Tex didn’t lie about such things. (Except his age. That was the only detail from his “About the Author” bio on the dust-jacket of his books that turned out not to be true.)

Clarence Miller's bisexuality may come as a surprise after reading either of his books (although Gaylord LeClaire does sleep with Joy, Bob Blake's girlfriend, in *Maybe-Tomorrow*.) But Ray tells me that Tex would brag sometimes that "he had had to pay for a lot of abortions." In fact, I was stunned when Ray told me that Tex had been married. He met his wife Evelyn, *above*, a local beauty, in El Campo. They were married in Texas, then he took her with him to California. The marriage was strained, and eventually dissolved when he met and fell in love with Chuck. "They met at a drug store where Chuck was the soda jerk," Ray says. Uncle Chuck, who like Ray was born in Indiana, had hoped to make it in show business as well. He was an actor and had written plays. Tex fell for the tall, rakishly thin waiter, despite a 12 year difference in age, and they stayed together from then on. (Tex and Chuck, *below*.)

When the acting career didn't exactly pan out, Tex worked at a high end florist in Beverly Hills. "They often were hired to do the flowers for big Hollywood parties and sets," Ray recalls. "Tex got to meet many stars that way." Later Tex would keep up correspondence with some of them, in particular Joan Crawford, whom he'd met during a radio show back in his early Houston days. They corresponded, Ray says, up until her death.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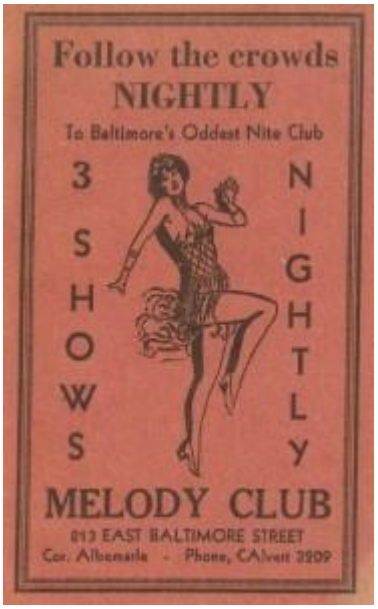
Likewise Marlene Dietrich. When she came to town for a premiere of *Golden Earrings,* Tex sent flowers up to her hotel suite to welcome her. A few hours later he got a phone call. "'This is Marlene Dietrich,'" the husky voice said. And "Tex shot back," Ray says, "'Yeah, and this is Shirley Temple.'" But it *was* Marlene and they became friends. Tex wrote letters to everyone from Harry Truman, and his wife Bess, to George Wallace. "He kept a shoebox full of these letters," Ray says. "There were letters from Jean Harlow, Mary Martin and Jackie Kennedy," as well as a letter from Beatrice Lillie's secretary ordering a copy of *Maybe-Tomorrow*. Among his papers is a handwritten note from the famous transsexual Christine Jorgensen, thanking Jay Little for the copy of his book which he'd sent to her. Tex, it is interesting to note, while eager to share his accomplishments, always used his pseudonym when promoting his work.

What Ray remembers most about Tex was his charm and flair. “He always did things with style. When he came back from California in the ’50s he and Chuck arrived in a ‘49 Roadmaster convertible. It was a prime Buick.” Later he would get a Cadillac which he would drive proudly when visiting Chuck’s parents in Indiana each fall for the foliage season. It was on those visits that Ray first met him. “I always just thought of him as my uncle,” Ray says. “It wasn’t until I was twelve that I realized that, technically speaking, he wasn’t.”

At the start of the ’50s, Tex returned home to take care of his ailing father, Theodore Julius Miller, (with little Clarence, *above*) who still lived in El Campo with his wife Elsie. Theodore had come to Texas from Louisiana where his family had a long lineage among the bayous. Elsie, who was born in Nebraska, was from German stock. Tex returned with Chuck, having divorced Evelyn. He didn’t hide his new relationship from his parents, and in fact they seemed to embrace it. “Tex’s father told him that the best thing that ever happened to him was meeting Chuck,” Ray recalls. The couple opened a restaurant in El Campo called The Log Cabin. “Tex was not one to really enjoy a lot of work,” Ray says with a laugh. He didn’t care for physical labor.” But Tex enjoyed the interplay with the rough trade that sauntered in. “He often joked about the big-ass truck drivers who just loved his demi-tasse coffee.”

It must have been just after they returned to El Campo, that Tex decided to write his two books. What inspired him to do it? We may never know. Perhaps he was bored with life in a sleepy, small town, and felt nostalgic for his wilder days during the Depression when he had toured New Orleans, Miami, Baltimore, New York and San Francisco as a young actor in the nightclub circuit. At some point he had hooked up with a band of female impersonators, and traveled the country, including Cleo Gordon Stafford, who remained a lifelong friend, and the legendary Rae Bourbon, also from Texas. This aspect of Miller's life had only been gleaned through his writings. So it was a terrific surprise when Ray told me he had several rare period photographs of his friend Cleo, as well as ephemera stemming from Tex's tours of the various drag joints of the era.



The biggest surprise of all was to find evidence that Tex had performed in the shows himself, donning feminine attire under the name "Jay Little." Originally, I imagine, the name Jay was intended to be feminine, but proved a useful brand for gender-bending, since it literally could "go both ways." Glancing at the material, one is transported back to a lost world, the notorious enclaves of the "Pansy Craze," when female impersonators were all the rage from coast to coast. He writes about that strange

demimonde in *Somewhere Between the Two,* his daring backstage novel about the world of female impersonators: “Through this world of intrigue and subterfuge he had moved, learning innumerable experimental obscenities. Apparently he had a fatal talent for picking out ways of life that ran like lonely waters. Nothing that had happened to him had seemed evil at the time. Indeed, he had felt like an ordinary young American.” Here we see Jay Little at his bizarre best. He exposes the loneliness and degradation of the world in which he traveled, but he demands that it be taken seriously and treated with respect.

What is also fascinating about these priceless souvenirs is that it is clear he adopted the stage name in the 30s. A signed photo from 1936 is inscribed by Cleo to “Jay Little.” Where or how he came up with this nom de plume, is a total mystery. There are no Jays or Littles in his family tree. And from what Ray tells me “Little” would have been an ironic moniker for him since he often bragged about being big where it counts.

But he was deeply moved by the nomadic lifestyle of the boys he hung out with, and promised himself, despite never having studied beyond high school, to write about it. He actually started *Somewhere Between the Two* first. In it, he writes about a dozen or so nightclubs, including the Sunset Cottage and the Edgewater in New Orleans, the Hi-Fi in Baltimore, Club Ramon in New York, the Silver Crest in St. Louis, the K902 in Chicago. The main character, Terry Wallace, is a troubled soul, wandering from sensation to sensation, from trick to trick, until he falls for a boy named Nick. "He examined his life and wondered if he had done right in bringing Nick into this twilight life. This stranded life with its fits of frustrations, its chaos and unidentified future… like a furtive creature pulled out of a river, half-drowned, mysterious, mute, seedless."

While *Somewhere* is not as viscerally erotic as *Maybe-Tomorrow,* it succeeds in being more realistic. It's equally campy and shocking, but the language is more guarded. He describes a sex encounter with metaphors instead of four-letter words: "A warmness put itself across his flesh like melted wax. A burning flame was ebbing out by receding waters, a surge of exquisite pain, a deep sigh, then limpness." It is also a bit darker in tone, with fag-bashing episodes that are not meant to be erotic, and an emphasis on the harms of promiscuity. Ray says Tex jokingly called it, "*Somewhere Between the Sheets*."

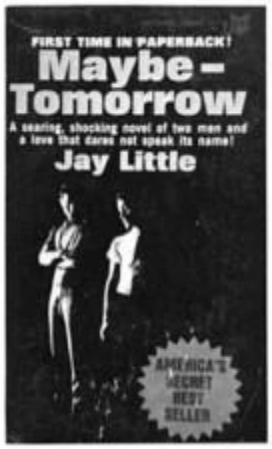
At some point, Tex put the manuscript aside and began *Maybe-Tomorrow*, which was based almost entirely on his own experience growing up in El Campo, and took the sex talk to a whole new level. His erotic infatuations with locals are set against recognizable backdrops: the railway depot, the drug store, the school hall. Even Gaylord's home life bore a striking resemblance to Tex's own: a single child; a handsome, masculine father; a devoted mother; the close-knit friendships with neighbors. What Roger Austen had read as fantasy was actually not that far from the truth. Ray tells me that Tex did indeed have an affair with the local jock. "They were madly in love," Ray says. "His parents had a big ranch. But he had to get married. He and Tex kept in touch for the rest of their lives." Tex even kept a picture of him on his dresser, long after settling down with Chuck. "His mother told me they were inseparable," Ray adds. Had this fellow read the book? "I would not be surprised."

It's possible that Tex submitted *Maybe-Tomorrow* to traditional publishers, and was rejected. That part of his history is still unclear. He sent it to Pageant Press and probably paid for its printing costs. It was barely edited and sometimes the print is laid out oddly on the page. And I wonder if a standard publisher would have left in that peculiar hyphen in the title. Despite being on the fringe of publishing, Pageant did a good job marketing the book. It was a hot ticket, selling out almost immediately, although such self-promoted books would not register on any official bestseller lists. "Tex told me," Ray says, "that he made his first $100,000 from that book." The copy I have is a fourth printing, which is highly unusual for a first-time novelist. Whatever its circulation, the book created a sensation. Gay men across the country warmed to its positive slant and its campy lingo. Nothing like it had ever been seen before. In fact, it contained one of the first vivid descriptions of masturbation (long before *Portnoy's Complaint* scandalized a new generation): "Oh, Bob… Bob, he thought, and the blood in his veins hardened and grew warm. He

tightened his palm, and out of the pounding motions, came; I shouldn't do this… I'll feel tired afterwards… I'll… he closed his eyes and wished he had never begun this evil vice…"

Perhaps for this reason, *The Standard Times* of San Angelo, Texas wrote: "*Maybe Tomorrow* is more than most people will be able to take. It gets down to too many brass tacks…" Which I suppose is a polite way of saying it is smut. But the mere fact that they reviewed it is remarkable. Same with *The Navy News Review* in San Diego which maintained an unusually open mind, considering the times: "We can understand why many persons could find the book shocking, but we feel it is the subject that is shocking — definitely not Jay Little's frank, uncompromising description of it. To mince words and hint at the subject would have weakened the force of his message. It is a book adults should read if they truly want to know more about one of the little known segments of the human race." Clearly the Navy then, at least in print, didn't see homosexuality as a threat to military readiness, as it does today.

But not everyone was as comfortable with the subject matter. Donald Webster Cory (the pseudonym of Edward Sagarin), a criminologist who joined the Mattachine Society and wrote the ground-breaking books *The Homosexual in America*, and *Homosexuality: A Cross Cultural Approach,* felt that Jay Little's book was too hot to handle. He refused to carry it in his influential Cory Book Service, which handled homophile books. In a 1953 letter to "Jay Little" he writes that he considers it "a very fine piece of work," and that he is going to review it, which he hopes will "help to sell it." But he adds, he can not carry it. "We have not only been advised, but ordered by our lawyers, not to use your book." Perhaps the lack of guilt in Little's book scared Cory. A deeply conflicted man, he later became one of the most outspoken detractors of the more blatant aspects of the gay liberation movement.



Little's books were republished in the 60s by Paperback Library, and were marketed as gay pulps. Many readers wrote him fan letters, which he saved, including a clerk at United Artists who said that "at times I feel that life is cruel, and then again I feel it is wonderful, moreso since I've read your book." One of those fans was Lance Horner, co-author, with Kyle Onstott, of the highly controversial Falconhurst slave novels that began with *Mandingo*. Horner also wrote *Child of the Sun*, a lurid look at the gay emperor, Elagabalus. He wrote "Jay" sporadically and seemed to rely on him for support during times of "extreme depression and nervousness." Lance Horner died in 1973. Clarence Miller also remained good friends with Jon Pinchback, the illustrator who had done his book jacket portrait. The original now hangs in Ray's house.

Apparently Clarence Miller had finished a third manuscript, title unknown. Seth Richards, Pageant's editor in the 60s, was eager to publish it. In a 1964 letter to Clarence L. Miller, he says he has asked "innumerable times to see it," but for some reason Tex didn't send it. Perhaps he hoped to land a contract with a more established house, or wanted a real advance. Ray says the book was sent out to editors later in Tex's life, but was rejected by publishers who found, Ray says, "that it wasn't racy enough."

Very few people, aside from his close circle of friends, knew that Clarence Miller had written any books at all. His parents, Ray is sure, did not. Tex's father died in 1960. By then, he and Chuck had already moved back to Houston where he ended up buying the house at 235 Hathaway. His mother moved in with them. Chuck died in 1973 from a heart attack. Elsie died in 1977, in her

late 80s. Tex remained in the house until his death, ably served by a sassy African-American maid named Valda who became one of his closest friends. He left her a good deal of money in his will.

When Tex died in 2001, his two books were mentioned in his obituary, as well as several telling accolades. “Tex may have been slight in stature,” the notice said, “but he was a giant when it came to humanity and compassion. He made friends easily, and people of all ages were attracted to his inimitable brand of wit and the fact that Tex himself remained ageless.” He was honored with a lavish wake. “They broke the mold when Tex was born,” Ray’s partner Marc says. “You should have seen his funeral. It was amazing the number of people who showed up.” But outside Houston circles, his legacy was essentially unknown.

Perhaps now, with greater acceptance of popular literature in academic circles, with the rise of smaller presses thanks to the internet, and more interest in celebrating milestones of gay history, Jay Little’s work will be reprinted, and will continue to enthrall, titillate, scandalize and amuse a new generation.