

Post-war literature, Paris, Washington Heights and a cat

by Sherry Mazzocchi

When Matthew Galloway was trying to interest literary agents in his manuscript, he described it as the kind of novel that David Foster Wallace would have written – if he were a drag queen. Wallace, author of sublime works like “Infinite Jest” and “Consider the Lobster,” recently took his own life after a long battle with depression. But he probably would have chuckled at Galloway’s characterization of his soon to be published novel, “The Metropolis Case.”

A Washington Heights resident for 10 years, Galloway worked on his novel for roughly the same amount of time. Even though the original manuscript was 1,000 pages long and written by an unknown, first-time author, it wasn’t long before it was snapped up by the William Morris Agency. After conversations with his agent and a few re-writes, the book trimmed down to its current fighting weight of 500 pages and will be published by Crown in the spring of 2010. Set in Paris, Vienna, Munich and Washington Heights, it is an epic novel with traces of magical realism, lush operatic imagery, emotional awakenings and cats.

The novel, “The Metropolis Case” was partly inspired by the lack of post-World War II gay literature. Writers like Henry James, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust were titans of their literary era and possessed a gay sensibility, but Galloway says no comparable voices exist today. “If you were an alien coming



Author Matthew Galloway spent 10 years writing his book, “The Metropolis Case.” Beatrice, the cat, was a key character in a short story by Galloway.

from outer space and dipping into post-war American literature, there’s a good chance that you wouldn’t know that gay people existed,” he said. One reason for the void is because the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s decimated a generation of men. The novel was also written for those that are lost and dead.

Contemporary gay fiction often deals with coming-out stories or graphic sex. Galloway veers away from traditional gay stereotypes. “There are all sorts of



themes I tried to reflect in the book. I dislike the word bisexual but I tend to believe in it as a concept. It’s not how I would describe myself, but people should be able to define themselves however they want,” he said. “It would be nice if society could respect those kinds of decisions and not have so much torment around gender identification and sexual orientation.”

Galloway takes his cue from a writer of another era, J. K. Huysmans, author of “A

Rebours,” or “Against Nature.” Huysmans moved from Paris to the countryside and wrote about his obsessions with plants, gems, perfumes and literature. His philosophy embraces the idea that art is the only thing that truly matters in life. “He’s a huge queen in the best sense,” says Galloway. “His writing is so lush and so over the top and it’s a big inspiration for me.” Huysmans’ writing also inspired the Decadent Movement in France and authors like Oscar Wilde.

The title of the popular blog that Galloway writes, “The Gay Recluse,” is a direct homage to the French author. One of the blog’s posts, simply titled “Beatrice,” gives a taste of Galloway’s huge writing talent. The real-life Beatrice is an adopted stray cat, who charms and captivates her new companions as she slowly learns to trust them. She bestows them an ephemeral love before tragically falling ill and dying.

But Beatrice has a literary afterlife. In the portion of the “Metropolis Case” that is set in Washington Heights during the backdrop of the September 11th terrorist attacks, a man adopts Beatrice. Her fleeting but indelible presence in his life allows him to realize how emotionally crippled he has become. “His love for Beatrice opens up something in him emotionally,” said Galloway.

The unexpected healing properties of animals are a big theme in the novel. Galloway says loving cats was his second coming out: “I came out as a gay man first and then as a cat lover.”