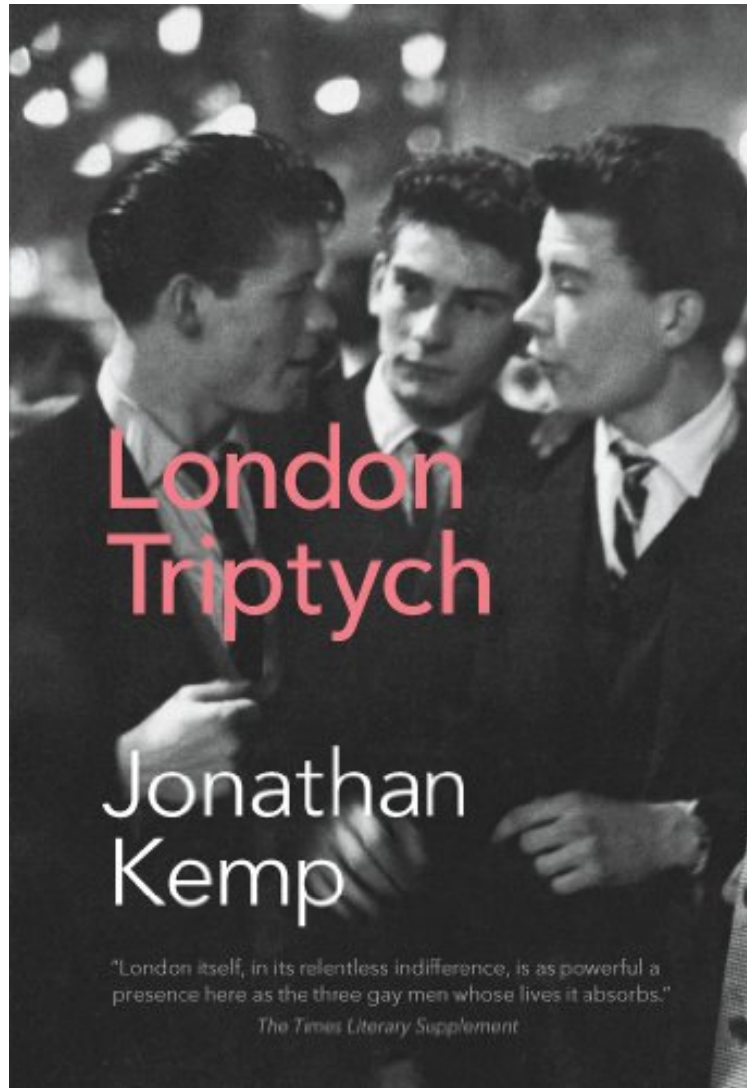


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London Triptych

Jonathan Kemp

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Jonathan Kemp : London Triptych before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised London Triptych:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Complete Work of ArtBy Terrance Aldon ShawJonathan Kemp's 2010 debut novel comes as close to what I would call a complete work of art as anything I have encountered so far this century. 'London Triptych' is a at once a poignant and sympathetically observed character study, a compelling work of historical fiction comprising trenchant social critique, and a vivid evocation of the eternally-unfinished, perpetually renewed and renewing city of its title. Here, the stories of three gay men from three different times play out and sometimes overlap; Jack Rose, a young rent boy in the late Victorian period, Colin Read, an artist in the cruelly

closeted 1950s, and David, a male prostitute, writing a letter from his prison cell in 1998. Jack's search for pleasure and profit lead him into the shabby and exuberant demimonde of queer life in 1890s' London, where he eventually meets an aging Oscar Wilde. Lonely and still deeply naïve at fifty-four, Colin lives a severely buttoned-up existence, in constant fear of being found out, only to be coaxed out of his shell by, Gregory (Gore) a beautiful young model. Growing up in the 1980s, David escapes the stifling conformity of small-town life to seek fortune and adventure in the city as a prostitute and porn actor. The three stories are neatly tied together by Gore, who, in the 1950s is acquainted with Jack, a man by then in his seventies. Gore goes on to become one of young David's clients in the 1990s.) The stories may be as striking for their similarities as their differences: each of these characters makes the ultimate mistake of falling in love where love is forbidden or simply foolish, inevitably leading to betrayal and desolation. There are no happy endings, but only life continuing for better or for worse—fiction is seldom more real than this. As readers have come to expect, Kemp's writing is gorgeous, clear and confident with a rich vein of metaphor, often approaching the poetic, yet never becoming overly effusive or strained. Seldom has a debut novel been so well organized or cleverly thought out with such near-perfect economy of expression, eschewing the inessential so as to evoke a world like no other. Wholeheartedly recommended!

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Sex in the City: A Beautifully Written Novel By Foster Corbin Jonathan Kemp's novel LONDON TRIPTYCH is one of the most beautifully-written erotic novels I have read in years. The only book I can think of that contains such comparable language would be another fine novel of several years ago, CALL ME BY YOUR NAME. First of all, the title has a double meaning as it refers to both a painting that one of the characters Colin Read completes as well as the three interwoven stories set in 1895, 1954 and 1998 with the action taking place in London of course. In the section set in 1895 Jack Rose is a callboy who meets Oscar Wilde; we get to see the trial of this literary genius from the eyes of a male prostitute of the time. In the middle section (1954) Colin Read is a sexually repressed artist who paints a beautiful male hustler-type named Gore who says that the only way you can get money is by whoring. In the final section (1998) the narrator is the hedonistic David, who is serving a prison term and addresses his comments to a second person. These three narratives are connected in many different ways. There is the element of sex for hire in all three of them, the police have a presence, the graphic sex-- some of it kinky, some of it aided by drugs, much of it a bit crowded with the number of players-- and finally the aching theme interwoven in all three, that of love that is not reciprocated. Finally, Mr. Kemp connects the three novels in a way that may surprise you. There is passage after passage of language that rises to the level of poetry. David on founding a lump of lost hash: "Yes, I tested it on my teeth like a jeweller. Yes. You ran over and kissed me, leaving diamonds in my mouth." David on making love in a cemetery with the second-person recipient of his prose: "And the sky was made of amethyst, and all the stars were just like little fish. . . When you pulled away, silver webs appeared between us, which dissolved as soon as they were spun. It was suddenly as bright as day and a shoal of stars swam off into this vast sea of light, leaving trails of bubbles that rose and burst. My hands passed right through you. We walked through each other's bodies like walking through corridors, that led to other corridors and other doors." Colin on his model Gore: "He isn't as dim as he first appeared, just inarticulate, incapable of expressing the complexity of what he feels. How do I know? The rapidity with which his moods change, and the colour of his eyes with them; the world-weariness worn like a garment that ill fits the statuesque demeanour. His intelligence is of a different order--an intelligence of the body, if you will. . . He has a scar on his back, just underneath the right shoulder blade. . . His body tells the story of his life." Finally it is refreshing-- at least for me-- to read a novel that is not about politically correct gay men, i.e., the lawyer and architect, who just got married with a ceremony on the Marginal Way in Ogunquit, Maine, who have just adopted a child from South Korea and are your best next door neighbors. (In a recent interview Edmund White tells of a distraught student of his who has just broken up with his boy friend, lamenting that this was the man he expected to have children with. To Mr. White and those of us of his generation, this concept is as alien as the Great Wall of China.) Mr. Kemp in "Afterward: A Government of Whores" writes in several pages of what he is trying to do in this really fine novel connecting all the dots in a narrative that certainly should not be read until you finish the book. The best compliment I can give this haunting novel is that I would reread it.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. How much do you rely on book reviews? By RSRSI can't believe how naïve I was in former times, selecting books to read based (at least partially) on the universally laudatory comments on dust jackets. Now I sample reader comments, paying particular attention to books whose cumulative reviews come in at four stars or higher. Beyond the stars, the reviews tell me whether it's the "kind" of book I might like. For example, I like mysteries, but not thrillers, and reading the reviews gives me a better handle not just on how awesome the book is in general but also whether the content will appeal. The only flaw in this system occurs when there are relatively few reviews. This happened with "London Triptych," with only 19 reviews, most of them five stars. I was so convinced this would be a five-star book that I overlooked the limited response. Not that the book was bad; in fact, it was very good indeed. But I anticipated it would be the best read in years, even beyond five stars, and was a bit disappointed. One reviewer said it was better than Andre Aciman's "Call Me by Your Name," and that threw me into fits of joy, as in my mind, "Call..." is the most erotic, titillating, sensitive book I've ever read. "London Triptych" features a lot of down-to-earth gay sex, but the sex in "Call Me by Your Name" is mostly in the mind of the major character. The reader is constantly on edge, wondering what will happen, if actual overt sex will

occur. Even more important, the agonies and ecstasies of the protagonist are so masterfully done that the reader literally feels his pain. That happens to a certain extent with Colin, the 1950s artist in "London Triptych," and that section reminded me somewhat of the Aciman novel. But it did not have the same wrenching intensity of "Call Me by Your Name." Another reviewer panned the part that included Oscar Wilde. I beg to differ, as that was one of the best features of "London Triptych." I knew certain things about Oscar Wilde's career, but thought this segment filled him out as a real person beyond the caricature I've had in my mind. Another strong point was the comparison of both the public attitude toward gays and the actions of gays themselves over this hundred-year period. We have definitely made progress during the past century, although lives of gays are not yet without special challenges. In general I'm encouraged to read more from Jonathan Kemp, and wouldn't hesitate to recommend "London Triptych" to friends, both straight and gay.

"London itself is as powerful a presence here as the three gay men whose lives it absorbs." —The Times Literary Supplement "Vivid and visceral, London Triptych cuts deep to reveal the hidden layers of a secret history." —Jake Arnott, author of *The Long Firm* Rent boys, aristocrats, artists, and criminals populate this sweeping novel in which author Jonathan Kemp skillfully interweaves the lives and loves of three very different men in gay London across the decades. In the 1890s, a young man named Jack apprentices as a rent boy and discovers a life of pleasure and excess that leads to new friendships, most notably with the soon-to-be-infamous Oscar Wilde. A century later in 1998, David tells his own tale of unashamed decadence from prison, recalling life as a young man arriving in the city in the mid-'80s just as the scourge of AIDS hit. Where their paths cross, in the politically sensitive 1950s, when gay men were the target of police and politicians alike, the artist Colin tentatively explores his sexuality while working on his painting "London Triptych." Moodily atmospheric and rich with history, London Triptych is a sexy, resplendent portrait of the politics and pleasures of queer life in one of the world's most fascinating cities. Jonathan Kemp lives in London, where he currently teaches creative writing at Birkbeck College. London Triptych, his first novel, was published in the United Kingdom in 2010 and won the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award.

"Skillfully woven into the characters' development are atmospheric descriptions of the travails of gay life? witch hunts, police harassment, trials ... Snappy dialogue and unique perspectives make London Triptych a compelling, easy read about politics and pleasure in London." ?EDGE "Elegantly written, this novel, first published in the UK and winner of the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award, is for readers who appreciate period detail and historical context about the gay male experience." ?Library Journal "Prostitution, prison, and the police are recurring themes in Jonathan Kemp's ambitious and intricate first novel ... a fine and finally elegiac book." ?Towleroad