



The Drink Tank

Over the years, I've tried to do this issue, and the best I've managed is an article that I shuffled in with the deck of another issue. I love, whole-heartedly, *Tales of the City*, in all its forms. I'm happy to say that this issue features a love letter not only to the books and television series, but also to the City it gives so much honest, brutally honest, love to.

I also want to say I love Armistead Maupin, and I found his mailing address and this issue is being sent him way... even though he'll probably never read it!

Other news! I'm working at a group that is attempting to bring attention to the writing of William Saroyan. It's a fun job! I get to write! I get to use spreadsheets! I get to hang out with documents and books!!! Is good!

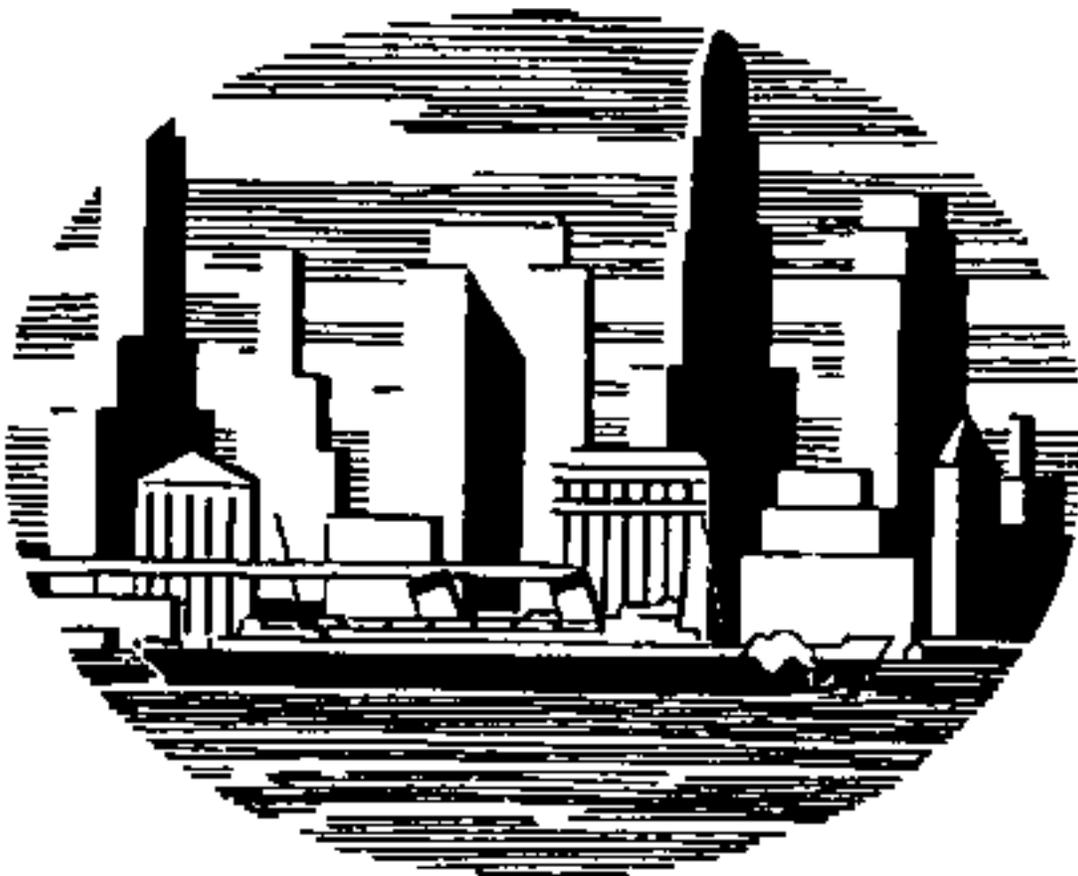
I'm also excited to say that now as we're on that final hump that tosses one last time into the air before the roller coaster car dives into the station, we're doing OK. Life has been weird, and looking back at what we managed to put out last year, I'm pleased we got so much done!

We're taking things a little slower for the rest of the year, with the next issue being dedicated to *Dark Shadows*. The deadline there is September 1st. After that, for the middle of October, is the issue I've wanted to do for so long - LEGO!!!!

Also, I just read that Ed Meshkeys died. I'm crushed. He was a large part of why *The Drink Tank* exists, and *Niekas* is an absolute gem of a zine. I feel incredibly lucky that I got to meet him and spend time at cons together, starting with LACon IV, which was an absolute treat.

No more dying, people. I need you all.

Chris.





Tell Me More: The Setting of the Scene

by Christopher J. Garcia

Here's the biggest lie from writing teachers: show, don't tell.

Bull.

Shit.

The human animal lives on telling stories. Campfire tales are the origin of literature, everything flowing from Ogg's recounting of his encounter with a sabretooth >THIS BIG< and then eventually Thog-a-Ogg figuring out a way to put it down more permanently. The very essence of all fiction is telling the story, and along come teachers and writing groups to try and tell us that we shouldn't be telling but showing?

Garbage!

The fact is telling is so much more understandable than showing because it's what us humans do, and nowhere better shows this fact than the opening chapter of *Tales of the City* where our heroine, Mary Ann Singleton, calls her mother.

Okay, let's start simple. We're SHOWN that Mary Ann, in a bar, decides to stay in San Francisco because of her mood ring staying blue. That's a great detail, and it shows us a lot about the woman. She's not entirely flighty, but she's always looking for a sign that confirms her actual desires. It's not the mood ring that makes her want to move to San Francisco, but she's been thinking on it and this was the raindrop that burst the dam.

She calls her mother.

"Hi, Mom. It's me."

"Oh, darling. Your daddy and I were just talking about you. There was this crazy man on McMillan and Wife who was strangling all these secretaries, and I just couldn't help thinking . . ."

So, here you see a mother being a mother. Everything is a portent towards doom, she's not there to protect Mary Ann, and thus she's already exposing her fear. San Francisco obviously scares her.

"Mom . . ."

"I know. Just crazy ol' Mom, worrying herself sick over nothing. But you never can tell about those things. Look at that poor Patty Hearst, locked up in that closet with all those awful . . ."

"Mom . . . long distance."

Okay, this is actually exceptionally blunt in the telling. Maupin has given us the idea that her mother sees San Francisco as the home of bad things, and probably Maupin wants us to think she's maybe just a little bit racist. Every one of these stories, originally, are being run in the paper, and the pages of these same pages would be filled with the news of the Symbionese Liberation Army and they would know exactly what kind of people had taken Patty Hearst captive. The fact that she latched on to the Hearst story is a sign of how she fears the place.

"Oh . . . yes. You must be having a grand time."

"God . . . you wouldn't believe it! The people here are so friendly I feel like I've . . ."

"Have you been to the Top of the Mark like I told you?"

"Not yet."

"Well, don't you dare miss that! You know, your daddy took me there when he got back from the South Pacific. I remember he slipped the bandleader five dollars, so we could dance to 'Moonlight Serenade,' and I spilled Tom Collins all over his beautiful white Navy . . ."

Now, it's here that things get really interesting. Top of the Mark, the rooftop bar in the Mark Hopkins hotel, is a legendary place in San Francisco. It's a fancy-schmancy place, and one that a young woman, alone, would probably go to, as it's probably the most old-fashioned, romantic place in the City. This also indicates Mary Ann's mother's fear. She wants to ensure that Mary Ann is at a place that she knows is "safe" for her, even without her being there. She's attached it to the memory of being there, but also that's the only positive thing she attaches to the City. And she is demanding her daughter be there.

"Mom, I want you to do me a favor."

"Of course, darling. Just listen to me. Oh . . . before I forget it, I ran into Mr. Lassiter yesterday at the Ridgmont Mall, and he said the office is just falling apart with you gone. They don't get many good secretaries at Lassiter Fertilizers."

"Mom, that's sort of why I called."

"Yes, darling?"

"I want you to call Mr. Lassiter and tell him I won't be in on Monday morning."

"Oh . . . Mary Ann, I'm not sure you should ask for an extension on your vacation."

"It's not an extension, Mom."

"Well, then why . . .?"

"I'm not coming home, Mom."

Simple, right? Maybe, but look a little deeper. There is no way that her mother hasn't thought this could happen. She brought up Mr. Lassiter to remind her of her responsibilities, and then pointedly mentions that she shouldn't ask to extend her "vacation." She needs to remind Mary Ann that it is a vacation. She can't be allowed to think she can just up and move.

Silence. Then, dimly in the distance, a television voice began to tell Mary Ann's father about the temporary relief of hemorrhoids. Finally, her mother spoke: "Don't be silly, darling."

Here's an easy one. She's trying to make her feel that mother-daughter thing at the molecular level. Here, Maupin does a little showing, he uses "Silence" a lot, which is showing and telling!

"Mom . . . I'm not being silly. I like it here. It feels like home already."

"Mary Ann, if there's a boy . . ."

"There's no boy. . . . I've thought about this for a long time."

This one is interesting. Her mom seems to be trying to tie her down and figure out a track that leads her to break through. We don't get to know much about what Mary Ann's life was like in Cleveland, if there was a pattern of boys and relationships that Mom's trying to exploit, but this is the beginning of the end, and it feels like she knows that she's lost, Mary Ann has won.

"Don't be ridiculous! You've been there five days!"

"Mom, I know how you feel, but . . . well, it's got nothing to do with you and Daddy. I just want to start making my own life . . . have my own apartment and all."

Here, Mary Ann is doing the smoothing over, but she's actually doing something even smarter. She is trying to make her life seem like an extension of the good upbringing she received. She's also trying to make it look as if her decision is not a reaction to home, but a discovery of a new life.

"Oh, that. Well, darling, of course you can. As a matter of fact, your daddy and I thought those new apartments out at Ridgemont might be just perfect for you. They take lots of young people, and they've got a swimming pool and a sauna, and I could make some of those darling curtains like I made for Sonny and Vicki when they got married. You could have all the privacy you . . ."

This is very telling, because her mother is bringing up the things that she *thinks* drive Mary Ann. Or maybe it's that she hopes drives Mary Ann. She's very mid-west, of course, but there's more to it, of course. She's bringing up things like her own privacy, as if she's saying, "I'll leave you the hell alone" and that there are young people, and that she'll have curtains, and she brings up marriage, as if reminding her that there are rewards for marriage. It's a very mom thing to do.

"You aren't listening, Mom. I'm trying to tell you I'm a grown woman."

"Well, act like it, then! You can't just . . . run away from your family and friends to go live with a bunch of hippies and mass murderers!"

"You've been watching too much TV."

Now, here she's hit the wall. She knows the war is lost, but she can at least salt the earth a little. She might have been trying that first "well act like it" in hopes that shaming her would snap her out of it, but she must know it's weak sauce. Again, she goes to the San Francisco that exists in her head, and specifically from TV. Hippies and mass murderers. Which leads to . . .

"O.K. . . . then what about The Horoscope?"

"What?"

"The Horoscope. That crazy man. The killer."

"Mom . . . The Zodiac."

Let me be incredibly clear about something: The Zodiac was a big deal. Huge deal. While San Francisco life went on, it wasn't the same after Zodiac. The city changed, and where did Zodiac play out? Well, the murders were all over the place, but nowhere was more the home of the Zodiac than the papers, especially the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*. And there is also where we experienced *Tales of the City*, which I am certain Maupin knew and wanted to give that playful wink.

“Same difference. And what about . . . earthquakes? I saw that movie, Mary Ann, and I nearly died when Ava Gardner . . .”

There’s an idea. The cities we do not really know are defined by the popular culture that surround them. This is true for all time. The number of kids who came to San Francisco in the early and mid-1970s because movies were still portraying it like 1967 five years later is depressing . . . largely because they became tech folk.

“Will you just call Mr. Lassiter for me?”

Her mother began to cry. “You won’t come back. I just know it.”

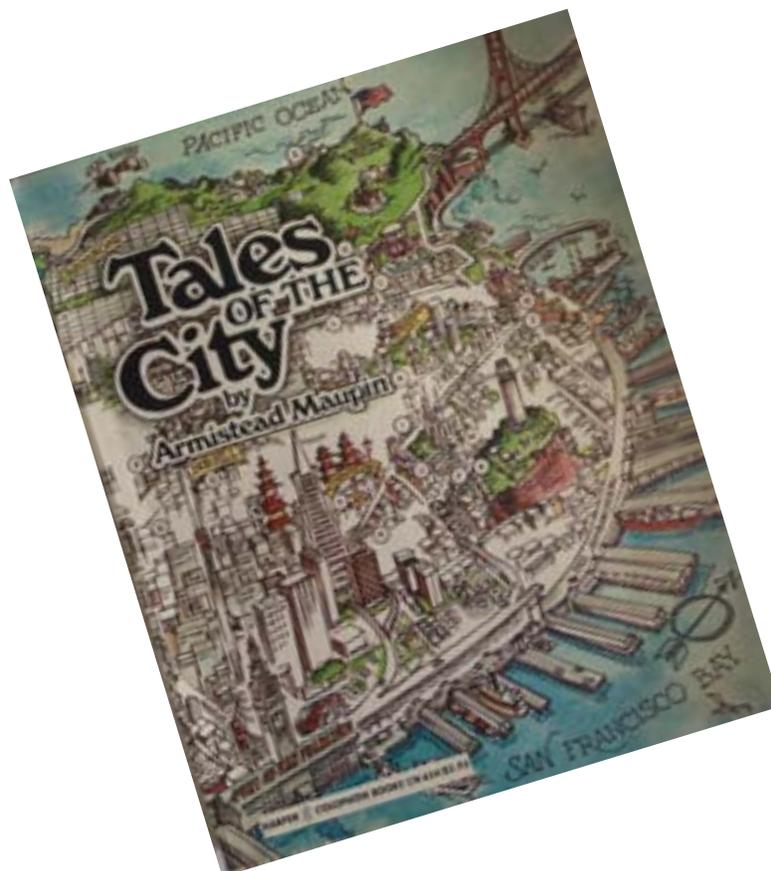
“Mom . . . please . . . I will. I promise.”

“But you won’t be . . . the same!”

“No. I hope not.”

Here, they’re both just throwing thought bombs, maybe not trying to hurt the other, but trying to leave an impression. Mom cries, because she knows all is lost and that she’s not really trying to get Mary Ann to change her mind, but to remember that she did this to her own poor mother. Mary Ann, in perhaps the best of all possible ending lines, tells us what the story is going to be: her becoming the woman she wasn’t when she picked up the receiver.

That’s the power of telling. In audio book format, it’s even more obvious, not because Frances McDormand (and if you’re going to listen to any version, that’s the one!) is great at inhabiting the voices, but because the writing indicates the scenario so well. Maupin’s reading of it, good, with more determinate emphasis on specific passages, is good as well, which only speaks to the power of the piece.



From the Tony Award-winning creators of *Avenue Q* and the musical minds behind the glam-rock phenomenon *Scissor Sisters*.

ARMISTEAD MAUPIN'S

Tales of the City

A New Musical



Tales of the City, The Musical Reviewed by Chuck Surface

To celebrate Pride 2021, the American Conservatory Theater (ACT) streamed its production of *Tales of the City, the Musical*, based upon Armistead Maupin's literary phenomenon of the same name. I had no idea that this existed, but as a diehard fan of the novels I couldn't wait to see how this would work especially since the score was done by Jake Shears of Scissor Sisters and John Garden, with a libretto by *Avenue Q*'s Jeff Whitty, and I wasn't disappointed. Joining them were director Jason Moore and choreographer Larry Keigwin. Originally staged in 2011 and filmed for archival purposes, *Tales of the City* became ACT's highest-grossing musical. How had I never heard of it? According to ACT artistic director Pam McKinnon when announcing this tenth-anniversary online release which ran from June 21-27, "This is a show that deserved a longer life. We are grateful to have this simple but beautiful archival capture that represents the city, where we are, and who we can be."

Reviews from 2011 offer possible answers about why the show didn't enjoy a longer life. *The Guardian* notes:

As a portrait of the city at a particular time, however, *Tales of the City* is superficial. Douglas Schmidt's nondescript set depicting the back of an apartment building doesn't give us many clues about 70s San Francisco. A couple of Hari Krishna devotees floating across the stage in the middle of Mary Ann's opening number help confirm the location, but from that moment onwards the musical piles on stereotypes. Bare-chested male performers cavort in a steamy bathhouse; a trio of trannies do an empowerment dance; characters in colourful, shapeless clothes consume illegal substances. Only Homosexual Convalescent Centre – a show-stopping number staged under pink lights about what it means to be old, gay and entitled – challenges our expectations of the city's underground culture. There is a lot more variety and depth to Maupin's vision of San Francisco than this musical conveys. If it is to have anything near as wide an appeal as the books, or even the chance of a future beyond the west coast, this adaptation may need to heed its own message about change and transform its depiction of the city by the bay.

Robert Sokol of *Theatermania.com* agrees but cuts Schmidt some slack given how large his task was: The biggest challenge they face is simply the enormous amount of story to tell. Maupin wrote densely plotted, multi-character stories, and librettist Jeff Whitty gamely tries to fit them all into his three-hour tour of 1970s San Francisco. To his credit, he ably balances Maupin's intersecting plot lines with just

enough insider references to please the books' hardcore fans -- which are sprinkled through dialogue that is crisp and witty enough for all.

Challenging indeed. The musical contains elements from Maupin's first two novels. At the time this musical was performed Maupin had written eight *Tales* novels. Today, the series stands at nine. Central to the plot is Cleveland transplant Mary Ann Singleton and her relationships with the heterogenous residents of 28 Barbary Lane. But beyond this the series features an additional character: San Francisco. Compared to other urban centers, San Francisco's not physically that big. But reading the books we move from Russian Hill to Nob Hill to the Castro to the Financial District to North Beach to Hillsborough through newcomer Mary Ann Singleton's eyes, Anna Madrigal's vastly experienced eyes, and even Maupin's eyes (since the novels read like his love letters to the City) we experience its vast diversity. How do you bring such cultural range to a small stage? My heart shivers, since I would find this more daunting than depicting Paris for *Les Misérables* or Chicago for, well, *Chicago*.



I attempted this task at Ternopil National Economic University, when I began my tenure with Peace Corps Ukraine (Teaching English as a Foreign Language Group 35: 2008 – 2010). The administration set up a presentation so I could introduce myself to students and colleagues. I included a PowerPoint with ten slides, each a photo of particular city scenes. Upon showing them one after the other, I asked, "Which city is this?" They replied verbally while I shifted from scene to scene.

"Shanghai? Hong Kong?"

"New York? Los Angeles?"

"Mexico City? Buenos Aires?"

"Rome? Milan?"

Of course, all were San Francisco: Chinatown, the Financial District, the Mission, and North Beach. I also shared images of the Castro, the Richmond, the Sunset, and other distinct sub-communities. Representing any diverse city is tough, but San Francisco? What a wonderful global microcosm. Yes, I'm prejudiced. I love San Francisco . . . although I'm actually from San Jose, an enormously multicultural center itself.

Betsy Wolfe (Mary Ann Singleton) and Judy Kaye (Anna Madrigal) don't clear the bars set by Laura Linney and Olympia Dukakis, but those bars are so high we'd need the Hubble telescope to

spot them. New rule despite any actor's talents: From now on only trans female actors can play Anna Madrigal. So let it be done.

A personal favorite is Mary Birdsong (Mona Ramsey). One nice scenery moment involved the mural-sized Janis Joplin poster adorning her apartment wall along with her floor festooned with bean bags and the bong resting on her coffee table. These touches capture Mona Ramsey's essence, the mid-1970s woman still attached to the late-1960s. Birdsong does well with that characterization and with her singing. The pipes on Birdsong. Wow.



The show stealer? Diane J. Findlay playing the awesome brothel madam, Mother Mucca, dropping f-bombs while swinging her hanging breasts with deadly intent. I want to believe that the only reason the writers included the second novel was to get Mother Mucca into the mix. How could they resist since her relationships with Anna Madrigal and Mona Ramsey play out so compellingly? Who needs the Chicken Ranch when the Blue Moon Lodge in Winnemucca, Nevada is much closer? For \$19.00 *Tales of the City, the Musical* is worth a lazy Saturday afternoon.

That the creators focused less on San Francisco the city is forgivable – I'll remain kinder than that unnamed critic from *The Guardian*. An acquaintance once compared *Tales of the City* to *Friends*, which equals comparing a fully-loaded sundae to a single-scoop vanilla cone. Hopefully you'll agree if you read the series, watch the PBS and Netflix adaptations, or experience this musical.





The Miniseries and Me

By Christopher J. Garcia

I have been a fan of Laura Linney since the first scene of the PBS miniseries, *Tales of the City*. She inhabits the role of Mary Ann Singleton so perfectly, that it makes it feel more like a documentary at moments than one of the finest literary adaptations in history. In fact, I'd put it in the top five miniseries of all-time. It's also one of the few where the sequels and the re-boot have not been major disappointments. The fact is, the miniseries is highly true to the source material, not only in dialogue (because who could write better dialogue than Maupin?) but in the absolute spirit of the thing. PBS, in the early 90s, could easily have pulled back, shortening the work, taking out some of the more charged material, or simply softening the tone. They didn't, and that's amazing. The work is as close to Maupin as you can get, and what more could I ask for?

The fact is, the work is made by an exceptional storyline and a pronounced reverence for dialogue, but really, if you put this cast in anything, they're going to kill it.

Laura Linney as Mary Ann is amazing, and yes, I know I said that at the very beginning, but dammit, you GOTTA KNOW!!! She has the look of mid-westernism, but more importantly, she can play

less than worldly in a way that is unbelievable. If acting is reacting, Laura Linney is the perfect actor. She has the toughest role to play, because she's got to react as the fish out of water, so reacting to her environment. She's got to play against her upbringing, which she does in things like the initial phone call to her mother and, in a much more complicated way, against Connie Bradshaw, who is of her Old World, but who has become of her New World. Her interpersonal interactions are so smart, especially with Michael and Mrs. Madrigal. She gives a masterclass in reacting since she's basically playing every aspect of a complicated character with equal grace and ease.

Then there's the immaculate Olympia Dukakis. She has a role that could incredibly easily go into Dunaway-as-Crawford territory, but never does she dare to go that far. She has a grace about her in much of the performance, but then she kicks it into high gear when she is reminiscing about her past, her mother, or most importantly, when she is wooing Edward Halcyon. She's a magical actress, and a tragic loss of the last year. Her performance is incredibly influential on how a biologically-born woman should play transwomen, which you can see as Felicity Huffman's performance in *Transamerica*. Yes, I know that we should be casting trans women to play trans women, but in the 1990s, this was frankly revolutionary.

The role that is the least nuanced, because the writing is completely unnuanced in the best possible way, is Beauchamp. Played by the excellent Thomas Gibson (slightly later the co-star of *Dharma & Greg*) He's a villain, of a type, and he's just not a good guy. At the same time, he's driven only by success, and perhaps it's his look, like he stepped out of a 1985 International Male catalogue, that he's so perfect. We hate him and can see that he's actually an amazing actor when we do get a little tenderness out of him. He's really solid.

Let me start with my thoughts on Donald Moffatt in other work. There's nothing that man could not play. He was amazing in *Popeye*, perfect for the role as the Tax Collector. He plays Edward Halcyon with an amazing amount of vigor, and not just when he's exploring the relationship with Anna Madrigal. He's a son-of-a-bitch at business, and he plays that perfectly. He's amazing as the old-young-man-in-love, and his interactions with Dukakis are fantastic. He's got this sense about him where he is not only always in the moment, but he's always weighed down by his history. That's something they can't teach at acting school. They try, oh my God do they try, but this is an innate ability.

Chloe Webb.

Wow.

There are few women who have made an art out of being quirky like Chloe Webb. Her performance as Mona Ramsey is quirky, and conflicted. She is really given very little to do with the main thrust of the plot (that's actually given almost entirely to Mary Ann's performance) but a lot of the color of the piece lies at her feet. Her relationship with D'Orothea, for example, is one of the most important in establishing the idea that they are living in a time of differentiation, and that there are many different ideas all collapsing on one another. There's the fact that she and Michael Tolliver are beasties that says a whole lot about the kinds of relationships blossomed in San Francisco in the 1970s. Chloe Webb as an actress is so good, and the follow-on miniseries were weaker for not having her energy in them. Because that's what Chloe Webb always brings with her, whether it's *Tales of the City* or *China Beach*. She's pure energy.

You see, with those all providing the means for delivery, it would be insanely difficult for it not to work. They all hit the notes, and a part of that is the fact that each and every one of them is so precisely cast.



A large, ornate, black decorative flourish with symmetrical scrollwork and a central pointed top, framing the title text.

Five San Francisco Novels

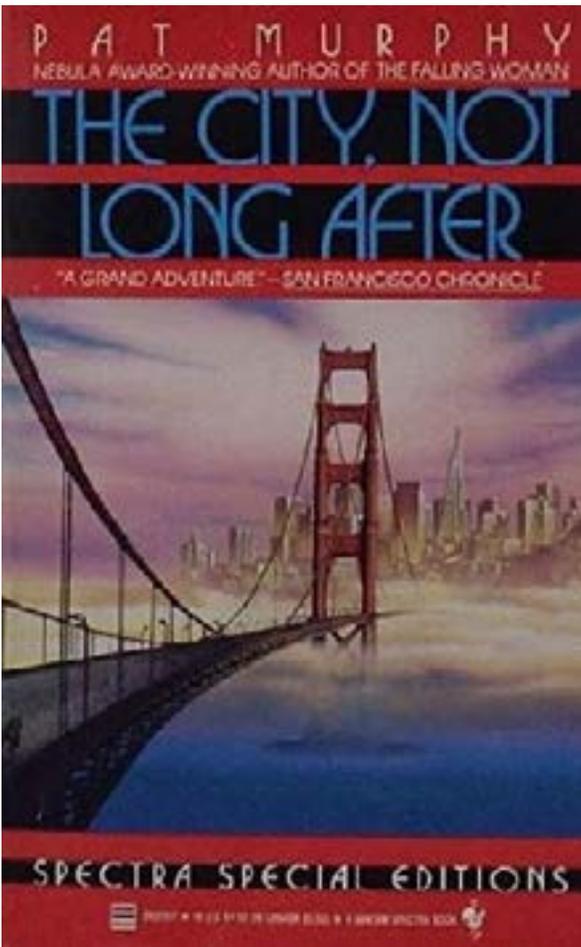
by Chuck Serface

I'm writing this article after reading the first three novels from Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* series. I've learned most importantly that Armistead Maupin loves San Francisco. Only the three novels into a total of nine, and already he leads readers through the City's varied neighborhoods like a romantic obsessive showing off memories and souvenirs related to his hyper-adored paramour. New arrival Mary Ann Singleton moves into 28 Barbary Lane, a San Francisco microcosm really, with trans woman Anna Madrigal, Michael "Mouse" Tolliver always seeking Mr. Right, serially heterosexual Brian Hawkins, 1960s holdout Mona Ramsey, and even Norman Neal Williams who represents the City's most vile possibilities. Maupin also adds the Halycons from tony Hillsborough, who drift among the nobles populating Nob Hill while pursuing and succeeding at careers that define yuppies. Neighborhoods, personalities, even history itself are fair game to Maupin. We meet along the way figures from Mimi Fariña to Jim Jones. Maupin loves it all, but he's not the only one.

Dashiell Hammett, for example, details a wonderfully noir San Francisco throughout *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), even toward the end pinpointing John's Grill where Sam Spade dines on lamb chops, potatoes, and tomato, today called the "Sam Spade's Lamb Chops," a bargain at \$39.95. And, of course, we have the Beats immortalized by Jack Kerouac, William Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and William S. Burroughs, permeating North Beach, now memorialized at City Lights Bookstore, Vesuvius Café, and the Beat Museum, all at the intersection of Columbus and Broadway within a football-field's length of one another. Much earlier, Frank Norris's novel, *McTeague* (1899), now a hallmark of American naturalism and realism, features McTeague, a dentist with a Polk Street office address, an earthy figure eventually destroyed by greed. Norris's work inspired Erich von Stroheim's silent opus, *Greed* (1924). I'll end this introductory and partial literary romp with native son Jack London's *San Francisco Stories*, a 2010 anthology including the entire *Tales of the Fish Patrol* (1905) and London's eyewitness account of the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Armistead Maupin loves San Francisco. Hammett, the Beats, Norris, and London loved San Francisco. I adore San Francisco, and so do the five authors I will discuss now, each writing about very different aspects of where we left our hearts.

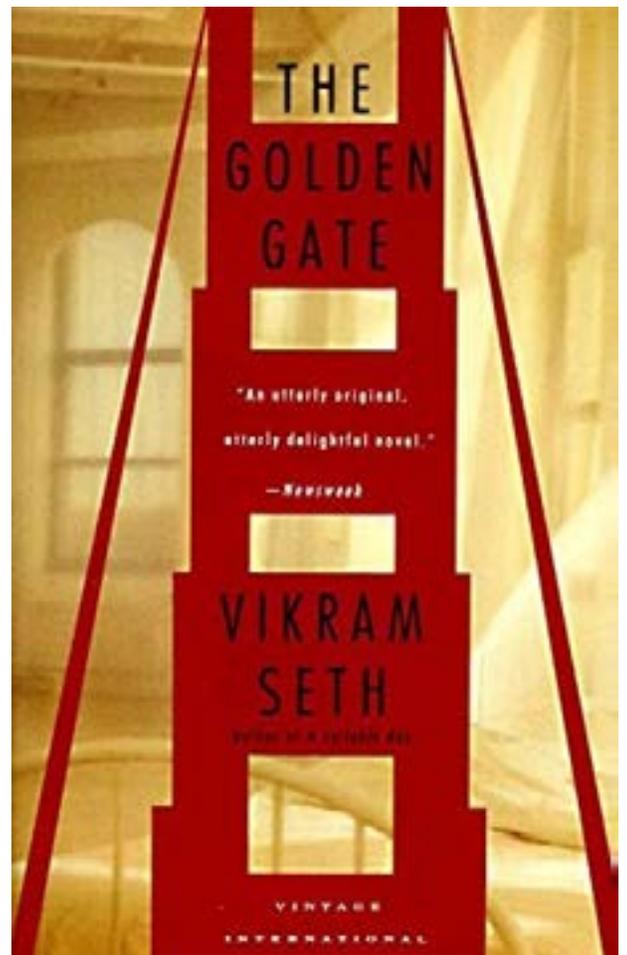
***The City Not Long After* by Pat Murphy**

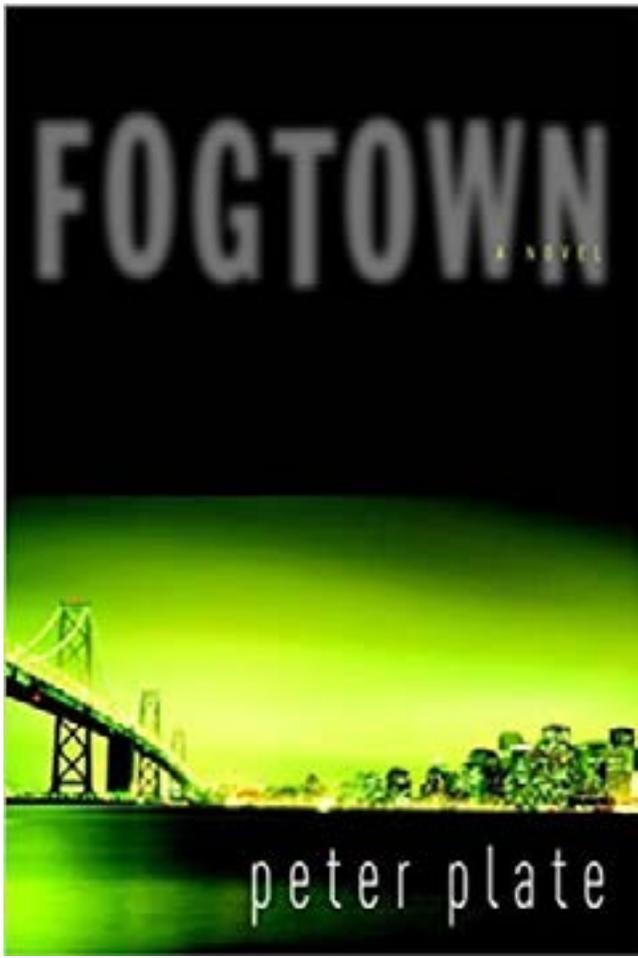


Published in 1988, *The City Not Long After* takes place twenty years after a plague greatly reduces the world's population. San Francisco now stands as an artists colony, where survivors spend their days working various crafts. The Machine, called so because he believes he is a machine, builds robots. Mrs. Migsdale writes newspaper articles that she places into bottles and releases into the Pacific Ocean. Lily fills store windows with her skull collections. Finally, Danny-Boy hopes to paint the Golden Gate Bridge blue. But all is not peace, love, and understanding. General "Four Star" Miles plans to invade the City from the Central Valley where he's established his stronghold, to bring dissidents under his control and to gain control over that bridge. Jax, the main character, arrives to warn the San Franciscans about the General. What will become of the Baghdad by the Bay? Read and find out for yourselves. You'll also encounter not only a few ghosts from San Francisco's past along the way, but parallels from 2021 given how things have developed since Murphy first wrote her novel.

***The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth**

With *The Golden Gate*, Seth emulates Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, employing complicated Pushkin sonnets or Onegin stanzas to relate the stories of four City yuppies, each financially successful, so their struggles stem mostly from romantic or philosophical bases rather than physical survival needs. The characters encapsulate types popular during the "always on the move" era during which I grew up – a computer engineer, a Stanford-educated trial lawyer, and, because it's San Francisco, a sculptor who's the drummer for a band called Liquid Sheep. John Brown, our lonely computer engineer, advertises in *The Bay Guardian*, seeking a relationship. This surfaces our trial lawyer, Liz Dorati, and the pair hit it off. We then move toward explorations involving them, their friends – both straight and gay, from different professions – very much a period piece surrounding 1980s tropes. Published in 1986, Seth's verse novel contains 590 stanzas, quite a standout compared to Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, and other writers from that time who tackle similar themes.





Plate's San Francisco out-noirs Dashiell Hammett's and out-naturalisms Norris's mightily, its streets teeming with marginalized figures: owners of flop-house hotels, street hustlers, drug dealers, and even a widow who converses directly with God. All this bleakness surrounds petty criminal and perennial loser Stiv Wilkins, who hallucinates about a nineteenth-century Mexican bandit haunting the halls of the already-mentioned hotel in which Stiv lives, and a plot centered on a crashed Brinks truck and several millions then scattered into grimy or disenfranchised hands throughout the landscape. Plate himself spent seven years living in abandoned buildings and at one point was named a Literary Laureate of San Francisco. Talk about your highs (however you define that term); talk about your lows

