



## Indiana, Gary (b. 1950)

by Craig Kaczorowski

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The prolific and pseudonymous writer Gary Indiana is the author of numerous nonfiction prose pieces, several plays, two short story collections, and seven novels, notably a three-volume series based on real-life crimes that explores the way victims and criminals alike are often distorted and exploited by the mass media.

As a social commentator and critic of popular culture, Indiana has been described by reviewers as acidic, unstinting, scathing, and vitriolic. Indiana himself revealed in an interview, "My tendency as a writer is to amplify the negative."

### Biography and Early Career

Born Gary Hoisington in Derry, New Hampshire in 1950, the writer attended the University of California, Berkeley in the late 1960s, but left without graduating. He then moved to Los Angeles, where, in his early twenties, he changed his name to Gary Indiana and began his career writing for underground and alternative publications.

Indiana remained in Los Angeles until the late 1970s, when he moved to New York. He wrote, directed, and acted in plays, including *Alligator Girls Go to College* (1979) and *The Roman Polanski Story* (1982), which were produced in small New York City venues such as the Mudd Club. Another play, *Roy Cohn/Jack Smith*, was later filmed by Jill Godmillow in 1994.

From 1979 to 1985, Indiana also appeared as an actor in experimental European films directed by Dieter Schidor, Ulrike Ottinger, and others.

### Essays

Indiana has been a prolific essayist, covering a variety of topics, including art, literature, film, politics, and the media.

Beginning in the early 1980s, despite a lack of formal education in art theory or practice, Indiana launched his name in art writing with the publication of several well-regarded essays on mid-century art in the magazines *Artforum* and *Art in America*.

These publications led to a three-year tenure as the art critic for the New York City alternative weekly newspaper the *Village Voice*, a position he held from 1985 to 1988. His lucid prose style, along with a distinct interest in the commercial and social context of art, set his work apart from much of the art writing of the period.

After leaving the *Village Voice*, Indiana mainly concentrated on his fictional work, but has occasionally returned to journalism, contributing articles to such periodicals as *Details*, *Rolling Stone*, the *Los Angeles*

*Times Book Review*, and the *London Review of Books*.

A collection of his nonfiction prose, *Let It Bleed: Essays, 1985-1995*, was published in 1996. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called the collection "funny, smart, mean, self-examined," and noted that "Indiana's vicious descriptions are on the mark."

He has also written essays for photographer Aura Rosenberg's *Head Shots* (1996), artist Nancy Chunn's *Front Pages* catalogue (1997), and for the exhibition catalogues of Roberto Juarez, Barbara Kruger, and Christopher Wool.

### **Early Fiction**

Indiana's first published book was the story collection, *Scar Tissue and Other Stories* (1987). This was followed a year later by a book of three short stories, *White Trash Boulevard* (1988).

His debut novel, *Horse Crazy* (1989), is a formally inventive account of obsessive love set in the early years of the AIDS crisis. The narrator, a nameless art critic for a New York newsweekly, becomes self-destructively infatuated with a handsome, though deeply manipulative, younger man who also happens to be a heroin addict. In its review, the *Advocate* noted that the novel "chronicles the sexual and emotional obsessions that play havoc with--as well as give meaning to--our lives."

Indiana followed that novel with *Gone Tomorrow* (1993), constructed as two linked novellas told in a self-consciously cinematic style by a narrator who reminisces about a gay German filmmaker who has just died as the novel opens. "Death, violence, hedonism--and their physical and psychological consequences--are Gary Indiana's ambitious themes," observed a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

A year later his third novel, *Rent Boy* (1994), was published. This brief but offbeat and darkly comic novel concerns the hectic days and nights of a 25-year-old male prostitute, architecture student, and part-time waiter who finds himself implicated in a plot to steal human organs for transplanting. Although one of the more critically dismissed of Indiana's works, the novel was described by a reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* as "a diverting tour: the eye is sharp, the style is loose, and the sex is notably well-written."

### **The American Crime Trilogy**

In 1997, Indiana published *Resentment: A Comedy*, the first in a series of three books based on real-life crimes that has become known as the American Crime Trilogy. This critically acclaimed novel is a heavily fictionalized retelling of the notorious trial of Lyle and Erik Menendez, two brothers of privileged background convicted of brutally murdering their parents.

Told primarily through the voice of Seth, a disillusioned gay freelance writer in Los Angeles on assignment, the novel frequently and kaleidoscopically fragments its viewpoint among some dozen different characters, offering a satiric and savagely astute attack on the media, the U.S. justice system, and the manners and mores of Southern California.

In an interview, Indiana explained his objectives for the novel: "The intention of the book was not to make some statement about actual famous persons, but to interpret the kinds of roles that certain people play in this media configuration and how they affect things. . . . I didn't feel in many cases that I was writing about actual people. I felt I was writing about images. . . . My mental position while writing the book was that I was translating a lot of images that were coming through the television, magazines and newspapers."

Two years later Indiana published *Three Month Fever: The Andrew Cunanan Story* (1999), a "nonfiction

novel" concerning the three-month, cross-country killing spree in 1997 by a young gay man, which culminated in the murder of fashion designer Gianni Versace.

In his book, Indiana considers Cunanan from the outside, through FBI and local police reports and interviews with the young man's childhood friends and adult gay acquaintances, but he also contemplates Cunanan from the inside through fictional reconstructions of dreams, journal entries, and sexual fantasies.

This skillful fusion of well-researched reportage, caustic social commentary, and creative invention, exhibits, as Alexander McCartney observed in the *Lambda Book Report*, "a refreshing skepticism as to the validity of traditional journalistic technique when writing about a case as complex as Cunanan's."

Indiana's final installment of his trilogy is *Depraved Indifference* (2002), a story based in part on the mother-and-son team of con artists and convicted murderers, Sante and Kenneth Kimes (here known as Evangeline and Devin Slote).

The *Library Journal* noted that this "acidly satiric" novel "sets its sights on exposing both the 'depraved indifference' of the Slotes and the larger society that breeds and abets them."

In an interview, Indiana commented that "the corruption of money, the obscenity of money" is the thematic concept that links the narratives of his trilogy. "All three of these stories are deeply engaged in a discourse about money," the writer explained. "Who should have it, who shouldn't, what the right way to get it is, what's the wrong way."

### **Other Works by Gary Indiana**

Indiana's most recent novel, *Do Everything in the Dark* (2003), follows a group of middle-aged, Manhattan-based artists and friends, both gay and straight, during the summer of 2001 as they confront their aging bodies, personal disappointments, and failed professional ambitions.

Told in a series of intense, short chapters, the novel is, as Michael Cornelius observed in the *Lambda Book Report*, "perhaps [Indiana's] darkest and bleakest human portrait to date," although a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* also found the novel "surprisingly compassionate and attuned to the inner lives of its characters."

In 2005, Indiana published *The Schwarzenegger Syndrome: Politics and Celebrity in the Age of Contempt*, an account of the former bodybuilding champion and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger's election to the governorship of California and an investigation into its broader cultural and social implications.

Indiana is also the author of the British Film Institute's guide to Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 film *Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (2000), and has edited an anthology of writings on animals, *Living with the Animals* (1994).

He currently divides his time between New York and Los Angeles.

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### **About the Author**

**Craig Kaczorowski** writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.