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# Truth is Funnier Than Fiction

REVIEW BY CHRIS VACCARO

It's hard to explain why I so enjoyed Michael Thomas Ford's latest collection of essays. Life as a gay man is difficult enough without having to be reminded of how many times I felt excluded from modern-day rituals such as proms and college dances and estranged from family and friends during the opening of the closet door during the 1980s.

But perhaps it is the way Ford reminds us that makes *It's Not Mean If It's True* so attractive. Through nostalgic walks through his early years, he never loses sight of his overall goal—to remain humorously sardonic and mildly caustic. In a tone of voice that concatenates with the animated TV character Daria, Ford takes his readers on an autobiographical trip through the gay suburban American experience.

In his satirical sketches, Ford covers most areas that affect gay life today. Looking back to his early youth, he reminisces about his love for MTV and cultural idols Prince, George Michael, and Boy George, who flashed their eccentric hairdos and androgynous dress before millions of clueless viewers. "And I still vividly remember," Ford notes, "the first time I saw Boy George prance across the screen. 'Hey, that girl is kind of pretty,' my father said, and in my heart I knew that George and I shared the same secret from my oblivious dad."

Ford's wry attitude toward American culture forces us to laugh at some behaviors found in straight and gay communities alike, from dating taboos to taking Ecstasy.

In one essay, *Viagra Falls*, he scoffs at our obsession with the hard penis. With brilliant sharpness, he makes a Swiftian modest proposal meant to wake us from our ecstatic dream for hardness through extreme exaggeration. "What better way to commemorate the restorative powers of the century's greatest medical achievement," he smirks, than a monument. As important as the Vietnam memorial, this symbol of our victory over impotence, "a phallic-shaped tower of rare blue-veined Italian marble," would list the names of men saved by this new miracle-cure. "Once every 15 minutes a fountain, cleverly concealed within the monu-

ment, would erupt, showering everyone...with life giving water." Infused within the same sketch is a commentary on our disproportionate interest in reforming health care and curing breast cancer. Talk about putting things in perspective!

Alongside these criticisms of straight and gay culture, Ford places tidbits of intimate autobiographical information, in which he shares with us his thoughts on everything from his own desire to belong to a community to his first and latest crushes.

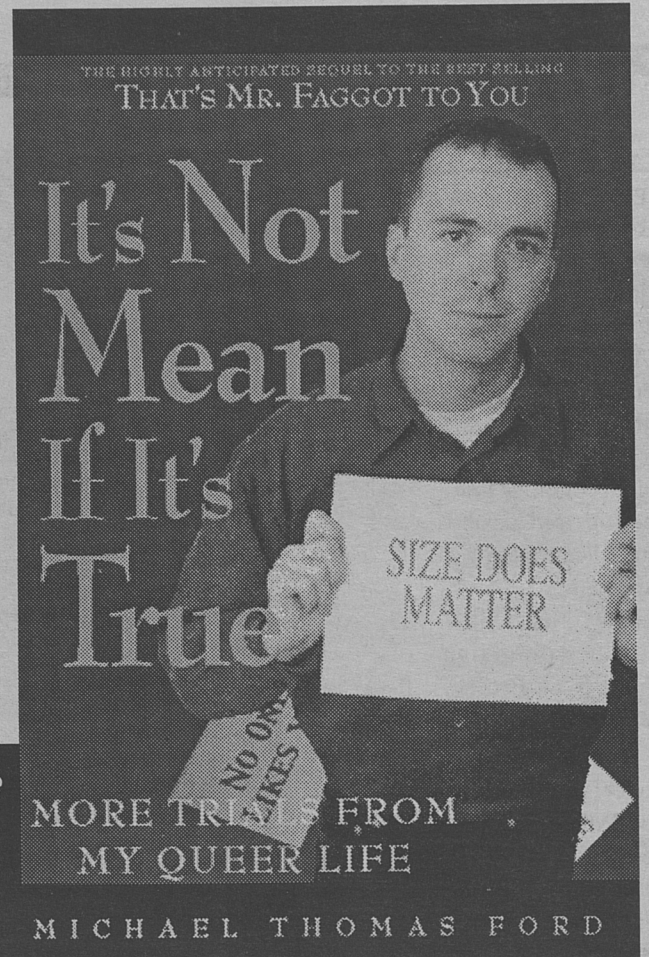
Overall, what is most appealing about Ford's whiny, whimsical, and at times predictably gloomy perspective is its raw honesty. An immediate example is his take on the gym. "People who need an excuse for such things like to pretend they're doing it because it makes them feel more alive, or because having greater strength means fewer back problems, or whatever. These people are liars. The only reason to lift weights is to make

your arms and chest and other important parts bigger. Period."

In the face of such honesty, I can only join Ford in laughing at my own behavior as I prepare myself to go to the Y for some "spiritual invigoration." His attempt to laugh with me and not at me is why I look forward to his new material with eagerness.

Chris Vaccaro is a lecturer at the University of Vermont.

*It's Not Mean If It's True*  
Michael Thomas Ford  
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