

# Hitmotel Press releases *Dolores Park* a novel by Michael Lyons

Michael Lyons has produced a terrific new novel, *Dolores Park*. This, his third novel, explores the group marriage of people in pursuit of enlightenment in San Francisco. One reviewer has called it a "post-sexual-revolution *Ulysses*."

## Short Blurb:

Texas redneck pursues love interest into feminist Tantric Buddhist sex commune. Undergoes changes. A commentary and companion to the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Contains graphic language, poetry, and *explication du texte*.

## About the Book:

San Francisco is still The City of Love and Dolores Park proves it.

Outrageous, hallucinatory and transformative, Dolores Park is the story of a newly arrived Texan and his obsessive, devouring, and doomed passion for Dahlia, a princess of a feminist Tantric Buddhist sex commune in San Francisco. In this 3rd novel from Michael Lyons, humor and

intelligence, lubricious revelation and spiritual eroticism — along with heartbreak and psychological insight — abound. It tells the story of a cult trying to recreate a timeless, feeling, Buddhist utopia in 1982, when the nuclear freeze initiative was gaining momentum, and the AIDS epidemic was just starting to surface. A precious time of inner renewal and sexual self-discovery. Set in urban and country wilds of northern California the characters are embroiled in each other's affairs and powerful bioenergy fields occasionally become manifest to show forth the generative source beneath the image.

The book develops from the personal romance of Walker and Dahlia, to group psychology and then to exploring the profound effects on the psyche of group marriage. It



**Title:** Dolores Park  
**Author:** Michael Lyons  
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**Publication Date:** April 2001  
**Price:** \$25.00 (paper trade) **Pages:** 508  
**Available:** Wherever fine books are sold

is also the story of the cheerful barbarism of Texas colliding with the refined and politically correct Californian lifestyle. Most of all, it is a meditation on love—love as liberation and as conduit to the divine. Walker becomes caught in his obsession for Dahlia and in the preoccupations of a willful, beautiful young woman, and her many husbands. With humor, Walker describes how the experiences changed his attitudes, salvaged his sexual life and enriched his spiritual life.

Tormented with the fevered machinations of jealousy in this high compression chamber of love, and set against a landscape of psychological insight and depth — where the factual blends seamlessly with the psychological — Dolores Park is a passionate novel as rich in ideas as it is genuinely moving. Flowing with lyrical beauty, and depicting the sadness at the heart of all attempts to live an authentic feeling life, Dolores Park invites the reader to join this every man on his journey to a deeper understanding of the divine and the human community.

## Book Club Resource Questions:

1. Sitting in the theatre audience for a solo-play from the San Francisco fringe, a man meets a woman who will change the course of his life when she takes a seat beside him. The play is "An American Yoga." The man, Walker, is friends with the director sitting on the other side of him. The woman, Dahlia, sensibly clad in black corduroys and lumberjack shirt is approachable. They end up giving her a ride home in Walker's van after she stays for the cast party. She notices his CB and in talking about it, Walker recalls, though doesn't mention, that his 'handle' used to be Krishna Glass, a brother in JD Salinger's Glass family. What does this allusion portend for the rest of the book? What makes a yoga American?

2. Walker and Dahlia are both refugees: physically he from Texas, she from Hawaii and mentally from their culture. In the course of Dolores Park he becomes an interloper in a group marriage and involved in the mental landscape of Buddhism. How does his outsider nature shape his responses to the book's other characters and their responses to him? To what extent is San Francisco and the commune a refugee's America? In what ways is Walker's foreignness a corollary of his isolationist defense mechanism? Is it possible to see Dolores Park as a meditation on the attraction of belonging through therapy as deliverance from one's own self-imposed exile?

3. In Chapter 2 the structure and workings of the House, a commune /religion are briefly introduced, — in particular the sexual practices. What is the role of the Church of the Divine Couple in the commune's life? What does Dahlia's questions continued, top pg 3 -->



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## Publisher's Comments:

Michael Lyons has produced a terrific third novel, Dolores Park. It is the third novel about the character Walker Underwood. It explores the group marriage of people in pursuit of enlightenment in San Francisco.

Dolores Park records the poignant year that began in the fall of 1982, when the nuclear freeze initiative was gaining momentum, and the AIDS epidemic was just starting to surface. A precious time of inner renewal and sexual self-discovery.

The story uses the situation of the cult to explore robust experiments with religion, psychology, sexual generosity and life-style. We follow the main character, Walker, and watch as his mind grows in psychological depth and sophistication while his western ego crumbles under relentless onslaught of sexual ecstasy and group confrontation and spiritual insights.

The story of this romance is one of the most excruciatingly poignant and humorous to ever flow through an observer of human longing. It captures the grace and lively loveliness of a woman's mortal beauty. We become involved with the couple struggling against odds to be together: he does everything he can, - including writing poetry, becoming Buddhist, sleeping with men! to be with her - while she struggles with the psychological dictates and her position as a princess in her tribe.

Following in romantic pursuit, we are brought through shifting points of view into the lives and programming of the people of the commune and the Group Mind at the center of Tantric Buddhist spiritual practices. The book develops from the personal romance of Walker and Dahlia, to group psychology and then to exploring the profound effects on the psyche of group marriage. With humor, Walker describes

how the experiences changed his attitudes, salvaged his sexual life and enriched his spiritual life. Rich in psychological insight, flowing with lyrical beauty, and depicting the sadness at the heart of all attempts to live an authentic feeling life, Dolores Park invites the reader to join this everyman on his journey to a deeper understanding of the divine and the human community.

## Author's Comments:

The book teaches the reader how to read itself gradually, as it develops the literary convention of Point Of View shift into a perfect vehicle to reflect the subject matter of the book —group processing. This simple principle generates a wholeness that at once hides, reveals and contains the

energies of an ordinary man's unconscious.

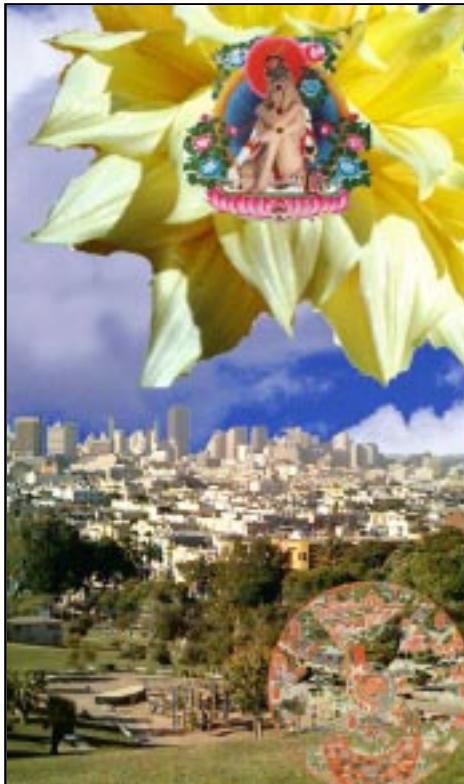
Dolores Park is a western man's meditation on how our attraction to images causes us to substitute our experience for knowing our own nature.

Dolores Park is a celebration of the concept of the group both as the basis of our description of the physical world and as the basis of our psychology, religion and in our art. What emerges is a unified gestalt of a modern mind: a mind imbued-in, trusting and enriched by penetrating abstraction into our physical reality, a mind striving to belong to ourselves and to others. The modern consciousness reflected in the book is informed by at least these three areas: the description of how the laws of space and energy are invariants derived from transformations of symmetry; Piaget's account of human consciousness growing in stages from the inter-figural, intra-figural, and trans-figural relations; and

transpersonal psychology's maturation of object relations, self-psychology, and group psychology. This is the structure of Dolores Park, seen in its sections: Individual Romance, Group Mind and Group Marriage; it is the story it lives and its meaning.

A note on some of some of the imagery, some themes and the text objects in Dolores Park.

The point of view shifts are accomplished both in the narrative by going into the internal monolog of some of the characters and by examining the diaries of various characters. The theme and imagery of Buddhism you will see is an expression of modern American youth's feeling the need to overthrow the tyranny and isolation of their narcissism and feel something about belonging to the universe. The transmigration of Buddhism into the culture of the beat and hippie generation is a very significant contribution to the quality of life.



Various text objects -- poems, lyrical stream of consciousness riffs, a screen play, the write-up of an experiment, *explication du texte* are like nodes in a space that anchor and radiate energy requiring a point of view shift in the reader. They point to creativity in science and art as on equal footing — that they are both a kind of language or mythology for finding ourselves in the universe. A modern spirituality is not diminished by knowing something about radio astronomy or DNA but deepened. The use of the imagery of magnetism is about the attraction and seduction of the Image, which is the tool of the artist and the Buddhist but which must also be transcended. (Sort of like Undergoing being attracted to the image while knowing about attraction (beneath the image.)).

## Discussion Questions continued:

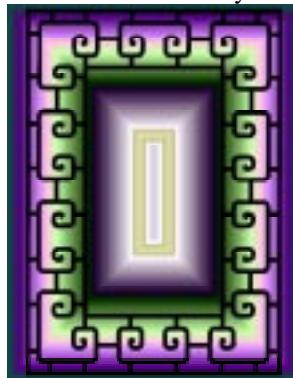
recollection of House orgies in Hawaii [in Chapter 9, “A Night to Remember”] say about the islanders’ culture, their character, and their religion? Does the palpable presence of jealousy, competition, and psychological wounds in the verbal struggles of group encounters enrich the communard’s group tonicity or dilute it?

4. In Chapter 3, “Group Wedding Portrait,” we encounter the first of several occurrences of characters speaking directly from their own Point Of View. What is the significance of the entries for Natasha, Byron, Morey, Pia, and others — in particular of Chase, the house guru. In what ways do their names, and mini-bios, lend verisimilitude to the group space and prefigure the novel’s subsequent developments?

5. Why do you think Lyons chose to make his romantic hero a writer? How does the main character Walker think of writing? What use does it have for him? What significance does Walker’s writing compositions: a poem: “for you from Venus and I and i”; the numerous diary entries; the poetic reveries in “Nimrod” while standing in front of the kitchen window and “Tara the Bodhisatva of Compassion Rising . . .” while looking out a car window; the stand-up monologue theatre piece in chapter 30 “Feeling 18 when you are Thirtysomething”; the *explication du texte* of the Buddhist prayer in the chapter “Deconstructing Sutra”; the movie screen play in chapter 38 “Night Movie in the Long Body of the Dream”; the write-up of an experiment on Somatoluinescence in “Moving Seed Syllable Experiment” in the chapter “Reconstructing Sutra”; and others, carry within the narrative?

6. In many chapters Lyons provides us with texts that voice the concerns, longings, and triumphs of other characters. In Chapter 13, “Diary of a Commune Nympho,” Dahlia speaks directly about the sex practices of the commune. What insight does this appellation she uses for herself give us about her character? Where else in Dolores Park does Lyons provide us with texts that seem to lend verisimilitude to Walker’s narrative and at the same time make us question the consensus reality of the world in which it is set? Compare and contrast the texts written by experienced commune members about sex and those written by the conflicted, frightened Walker.

7. Lyons offers a vision of the dual nature of things and feelings. It seeks to capture their nature in abstract scientific description attempting to penetrate beneath the surface to energy and delight. These manifestations occur in the novel expressed in the muscular movement of the prose and in the humor. On one hand this novel is rooted in physical reality while pushing through it to the grid of energy behind it. On the other hand his descriptions of emotional reality float free. Why does Lyons describe physical things in scientific / engineering terms, for example in the analogy between a car’s tail lights moving



along a complex freeway in the evening to being like electrons moving in an integrated circuit. [p 35]: ( “He was traveling in one of the many traces of an integrated circuit and he is wired with radio and neon lights. The city is a microprocessor. Each house or apartment in the city is a transistor in the integrated circuit. They convert the utilities into information. . . . Getting ready to change lanes he thought about how in a traffic flow the spaces between cars are Poisson distributed. There ought to be a way to sample data and exploit this mathematical phenomenology in real time. That coupled with radar sensing of other cars, and circuitry embedded in the roads or the side of the roads ought to lead to smart roads where people could move at high speeds all watched over by benevolent time series of bump car field hubris. That would be cool, wouldn’t it?”

On the other hand why does Lyons describe emotional reality in fast-moving, breathy run-on free-floating passages like in this one from Chapter 20, “Make love as if it is the last time,” where Walker makes love with Dahlia before she is to undergo a dangerous operation. [p.207]: “This is what came to him, and he longed to whisper it in her ear, to tell her out loud, but he dared not. / For it is at night that we are totally engulfed by sex, the poor man’s tantric heaven, heavy breathing and deep hugs. We open and are filled. / Sex carries on its surface a gush in the form of a double helix which reminds us that we are involved in the tournament of matter. / He cruised his longevity, and fell through a hole in the earth just larger than the size of his body, and in this cavity began the long voyage through the void. The body was quickly forced to stand, sailing as though the earth suddenly became fluid. Transparent fluid. Having sex pushes through the front that we represent. / For Dahlia had eyes in her hands and in the soles of her feet, all of which he touched as well as her vulva, and she his member just to see if they

could make the fluid flow.” How do such different kinds of description techniques deepen and reinforce the themes in the novel?

8. In the first part of the book Walker is still caught up in the conventions of “courtly love” – see his thoughts on the Love Poem. Later he says outright “I have come here in some kind of preliminary courtship procedure” [p.70]. What is the theory of courtly love? This book puts forward a theory of love based upon trying to reach the divine through the spiritual marriage. As opposed to the trappings and ministrations of feeling that is courtly love. Is Dolores Park a kind of a travesty or attack on courtly love?

9. Though Lyons employs two main points of view and voices in the novel, that of the main character Walker and the 3rd person omniscient narrator, he often shifts POV going beneath dialog into the interior monologue of several characters. Does the frequent POV shifts serve the subject matter of the novel — group processing?

10. In Chapter 8, “The Strawboss of Skillful Means,” the daily household work routine of running a sex commune

is described in enough detail to use as a blueprint for doing it yourself. Does this lifestyle appeal to you? What role does this chapter play in the novel in regard to its pace? Skillful Means in Buddhism are thoughtful ways, — actions, practices of generosity, in living with others — group processing.

Groups influence behavior. Think of the lines of force that regulate group behavior, in the family, army, region etc. that reach out and control behavior in the other person, the social self. In Buddhism these control rays are described as rays of attraction. Do you think this imagery of Buddhism is a good visualization of group dynamics? How do Buddhist regard action and work.

11. How important is Tantric Buddhism to the cult, and how have they adapted its philosophic / aesthetic concepts like samsara, dhyana, kundalani to their own needs in late 20th century urban America. What interpretation do the more rationalistic characters such as Morey and Pia give to the theory of bioenergy and interoceptive lights?

12. What was your view of Natasha as she speaks for herself in the Group Portrait in chapter 3, and then as you learn more about her in other chapters when you hear of her again? Do the earliest references and asides about her illuminate her role in the novel later?

13. Dreams are the prime indicator of living in analytic philosophy. Discuss the importance and use of dreams and waking reverie in the novel. Does the screen-play style in Chapter 38, “Night Movie in the Long Body of a Dream” help with entering the dream.

14. Walker’s story as he writes it himself in his own journals and diary is written in an extraordinary language. It is by turns hip, scientific, psychological, religious, pornographic, scholarly, florid, furtive and innocent. It is studded with technical terms and concepts, drug expressions, associations across disciplines, and allusions to modern authors including Borges, Burroughs, Bukowski, Kerouac and Joyce. Is this language merely an extension of Lyons’ own—which some have called ‘lyrical drift’ —or is Walker’s language appropriate to his circumstances and motives? Walker is conflicted between his actions to serve his needs and his morals and argues with himself in different voices and writings. At one point he calls it ‘the management of spoiled identity’ (see sociologist Irving Goffman, *Stigma*, UC Berkeley Press, 1965.) In what way does his language obfuscate as much as it reveals? Do you trust his interior monologues more than his writings? As the story progresses, does Walker’s voice (in his journals and group sessions) change? If yes, how and why? And if Walker’s prose is indeed a veil, what is it meant to hide, what does it show us about the ability to keep things from ourselves and at what points is this veil lifted and what do we glimpse behind it?

15. Can the people of the House ever be said to “love” the other people they are in a group marriage with? Do people really “love” their therapists. For Walker, Dahlia, begins to be something of the representation of his own feminine side. Freud says we love in the other what we perceive as missing in ourselves; Jung says we love the other as we recognize the beloved in our selves. Does Walker ever

perceive Dahlia as a separate being or is she always the introjected ideal? Is the reader ever permitted to see her in ways that Walker does not? Do you think Dahlia really liked Walker as she said or do you think she was using him to escape the rigors of group therapy / marriage back into romantic fantasy. Similarly we follow three people around town throughout their day, [in chapter 35 “The Analyst at Work”] as they are trying to loose their sorrow for the loss of their charismatic leader in work. Are they mourning the loss of a loved other or the loss of an introjected ego ideal? In that chapter there is an extraordinary scene, at once ecstatic, repulsive, and perplexing, in which Natasha engages in ‘dirty sex’ with her therapist. Should therapists cross boundaries and have sex with their patients? In light of Natasha history, would the action of her therapist have

broken through her ingrained experience of sexual abuse? How is this scene representative of Chase’s character and technique?

16. Walker, through his need to use abstract writing to enable his intelligence to ward off feelings that are threatening to his mental hegemony — the classical narcissistic position, keeps several extended scientific tropes going, in particular hysteresis and its associa-

tions with magnetism (to reflect the Buddhist preoccupation of being attracted to images). Do ‘scientific metaphors’ become archetypes of perception? In Chapter 18, “The Ineluctable Reluctance of Permeability,” Walker thinks about magnetism and begins dabbling in a theory of personality of his own invention based on the idea of hysteresis — “hysteresis” being the time lag of a body experiencing forces, and the shape a body gets deformed into defining its reaction to further force. What is the meaning of the sentence, “Destiny is like magnetic flux.” p [195]? He goes further into it again in Chapter 49 “Feeling/ Defending” developing analogies to economics, in particular the derivative on the manifold to describe how people become defensive when over-stimulated with feeling. In that chapter he writes a mini-essay called “Hermetic Magnetism, Poetry and the Permeability of Mind.” Is this a valid analogy between permeability and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness? He also writes a slightly longer essay, “Buddhism, Taoism and the Perennial Philosophy as a Sensual Intuition into Electro-Magnetism.” This essay brings together Buddhism and Kant. How do these essays also serve to forward the meaning of subject matter of the story?

17. Find references either direct or indirect to the “canonical minds,” the generators of modern culture, on the back cover. How many can you recognize?

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“Being attracted to images, we substitute our experience for knowing our nature.” —M. Lyons