

國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班碩士論文

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"留意這腐爛帶蛆性行為"：論艾德蒙·懷特〈已婚男人〉

深刻書寫的性愛、疾病、死亡議題

"Alert to even the grubbiest sexual possibility": The Immersive Writing of Sex,  
Disease, Death in Edmund White's *The Married Man*

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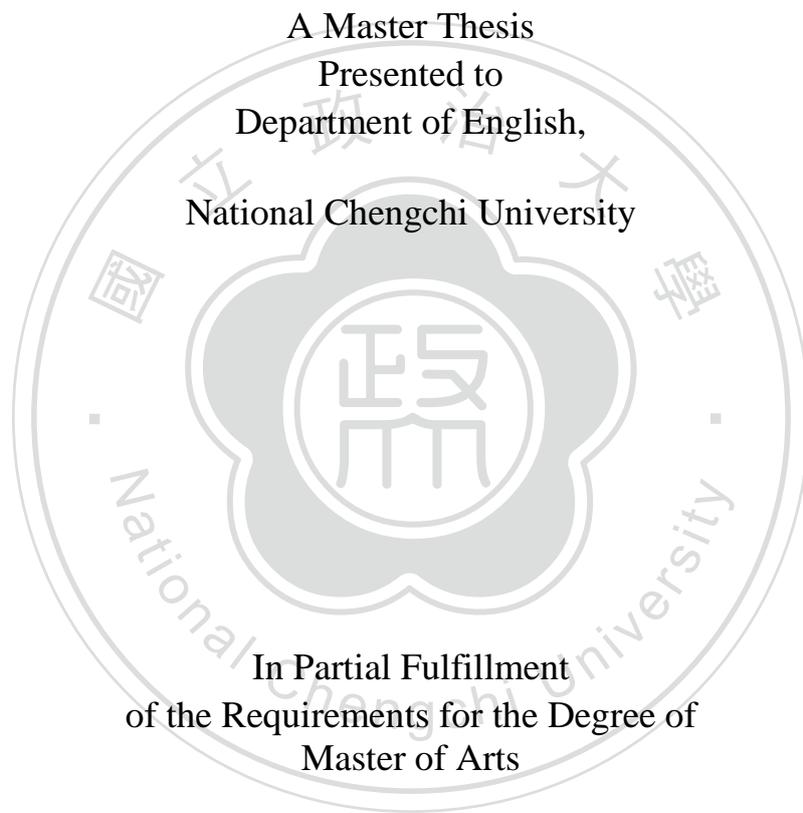
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by

Name : Daniel Chia-Ming Hu

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To Eva I-Yin Chen

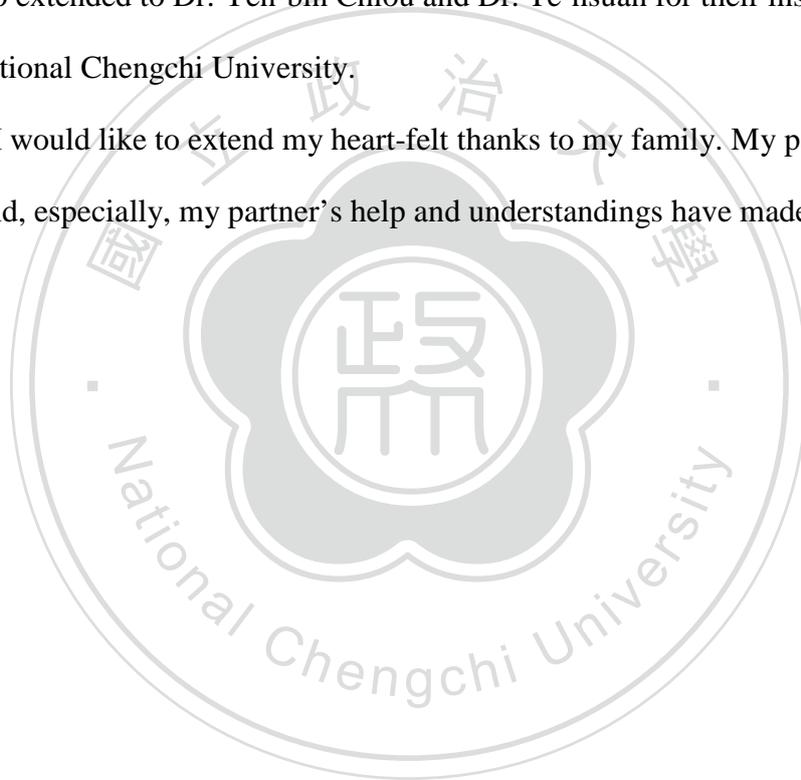
獻給我的恩師陳音頤教授



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碩士論文提要

論文名稱："留意這腐爛帶蛆性行為"：論艾德蒙·懷特〈已婚男人〉

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指導教授：陳音頤 教授

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論文提要內容：

本論文藉由艾德蒙·懷特愛滋小說《已婚男人》裡、對男同志性愛/死亡在愛滋年代的辨證關係，探討愛滋文學所能扮演的文化功能。第二章、利用傅柯式圓形監獄概念衍生下主體自我內化規訓，討論男同志性愛原先具有的顛覆本質，如何隨著 80 年代、HIV 病毒出現，在生物醫學論述下對男同志進行"再次病理化"的辨證關係。

第三章參考喬瑟夫·凱迪在 1993 年發表的文章、分類愛滋書寫為深刻書寫和反深刻書寫，討論〈已婚男人〉裡愛滋深刻書寫裡、藉由呈現詭異疾病身體來製造驚嚇感、引發讀者對於愛滋議題另一層次的反思。第四章、則是探討〈已婚男人〉呈現無病徵的衣櫃身體、其造成主體／客體在視覺上/心理上、介於有病/無病的模糊詭譎狀態，可以被視為愛滋文學、一種提供讀者在愛滋年代裡、在絕望中仍可懷抱希望的正面力量。透過以上探討、艾德蒙·懷特〈已婚男人〉豎立愛滋書寫之中、呈現男同志文化與愛滋病複雜關係的傑出作品。

## Abstract

This study discusses Edmund White's AIDS writing in his *The Married Man*, a fiction that depicts the issue of gay sex and death in the age of the Epidemic. In chapter two, I intend to discuss about how biomedical discourse of HIV/AIDS fosters a Foucauldian apparatus of panoptical surveillance and self-discipline in relation to gay sex. With the advent of HIV virus, the once subversive lifestyle of gay sex becomes more problematic. In chapter three, I attempt to employ Joseph Cady's definition of AIDS writings as either immersive or counter-immersive, and argue that Edmund White's *The Married Man* should be viewed as an immersive AIDS writing wherein the ugliness of the grotesque body is used as a literary weapon to engender its readers a sense of shock. In chapter four, I contend Austin's HIV asymptomatic/closet body in *The Married Man* should be viewed as an ambiguous symbol wherein a Hegelian dialectics between hope (future) and despair (no future) is discussed. To conclude, Edmund White's *The Married Man*, a subversive text as it is, stands as a masterpiece of AIDS writing not only giving a vivid portrayal of the history of HIV/AIDS but promising its gay readers a potentiality of hope and future to go forward.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The main issue for today's gay writers is perhaps not whether they can write about homosexuality or about their experience and feelings of gay men, but how gay fiction actually reflects upon the macro-politics related to the gay issue in the age of Post-Stonewall.<sup>1</sup> Edmund White is such a gay writer whose literary works demonstrate how the enactment of the macro-politics has a great impact on the micro experience of gay men in their daily life. It is not until the 1980s that Edmund White published his first two gay novels—*A Boy's Own Story* (1984) and *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*<sup>2</sup> (1988)—expressing how the homosexual characters are forced to confront people's antagonism after identifying themselves as gay in a homophobic context. Given the presence of biomedical narratives<sup>3</sup> of AIDS alongside the issue's attendant representation by the media in the 1980s, Edmund

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<sup>1</sup> Stonewall Riots refers to the first event of gay protest against the police violence in 1969, New York City. This event is later marked as the start of the gay rights movement in America and around the world. See Barry Adam's "The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Movement" for further information of the history about the Stonewall Riots (3-10).

<sup>2</sup> Together with *The Farewell Symphony*, these three novels are recognized as the trilogy of the life of one homosexual character through his coming-of-age to his later adulthood.

<sup>3</sup> This term generally refers to knowledge derived from the fields of human medicine and other bio-technology. Cf. Donna Haraway (203-30), Michel Foucault (56-72), and Catherine Waldby etc. in discussing how the bio-discourse of HIV/AIDS has been particularly linked with the homosexual body.

White has reflected his concern over how the emergence of the HIV virus has posed a threat to the unity of gay community in his two later novels—*The Farewell Symphony* (1997) and *The Married Man* (2000).<sup>4</sup> While the former spans the gay hedonist era of the 1970s as well as the AIDS panic in the early 1990s, the latter depicts exclusively how the shadow of the AIDS/HIV crisis has altered the life of gay men in the late 1980s. Yet, one critic maintains Edmund White's *The Married Man* is not so much a novel relates to gay desire/sexuality as that whose issue of the same-sexed friendship is more privileged (Purvis 294). Gregory Woods—a famous critic of gay literature—holds that as the language of HIV/AIDS has been sexualized by either bio-scientific discourse or media representation, “AIDS and homosexual are considered to be synonymous,” an issue that has become crucial for each gay writer to either reflect on or confront in their works (372). Clearly, Edmund White's *The Married Man* is such a significant novel dealing with the topic of HIV/AIDS, which seeks to problematize the legitimacy of the biomedical discourse in relation to gay identity by exposing the ambiguous attributes of the HIV virus.

The body, as Pamela Gilbert argues, constitutes a metaphor where the discursive difference between self and other is written and read (2). Gilbert further discursively extends this metaphor of the body in relation to the organization of the

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<sup>4</sup> White has also publishes three other short stores related to AIDS/HIV— *An Oracle*, *Palace Days*, and *Running on Empty*, all of which are collected in *The Darker Proof* (1988).

whole society. As she puts it, the body as a metaphor is “extended throughout human experience of difference-within-unity,” a signifier which can not be viewed independently from the perspective of macro-politics (44). In the same vein as Gilbert’s assumption that the body should be grasped as a socially constructed, irreducible physical space of the self corresponding to the outer discursive society, Peter Brooks argues in his “Narrative and the Body” that the body should be recognized as a nexus upon which gender identity and its attendant sexual desire are incorporated, a site which is permeable of linguistic signifiers from within the social regime—“the sign imprints the body, making it part of the signifying process” (3). The body should be thereby recognized as a nexus of linguistic/political narrative implicated in the embodiment of the scenario/structure of gender politics, a narrative that associates man and woman with public and private, respectively. Given that the linguistic signifiers imprinted unto the body of the homosexual tend to be privatized and debased by the modern regime of instrumental reason, such a body, as Lee Edelman suggests, “becomes subject to a metonymic dispersal that allows it to be read into almost everything” (7). Edelman sees this inscription unto the body of the homosexual as homographesis, an inscription as “cultural mechanism by which writing is brought into ....conceiv[ing] the gay body as *text*, thereby effecting a far-reaching intervention in the political regulation of social identities” (10; emphasis

mine). Not only does the body of the homosexual in literary works thereby manifests, as Brooks suggests, the object of linguistic signifiers, but it is also an object inscribed often in deviant ways against the dominant discourse, in that such a body—as represented in the biomedical discourse since the mid-nineteenth century—has been pathologized, against which the normality of the heterosexual identity can be justified (128). Most historians of sexology suggest the homosexuals—an identity that is popularly conceived as sexually excessive and promiscuous—have been regarded as the carriers of sexual diseases, a scapegoat who is responsible for the social death (Dollimore 135; Weeks 301).

With the rise of AIDS/HIV narrative since the early 1980s, the homosexual body has been further recognized as a diseased other, by which the organic whole of healthy (heterosexual) self is threatened (Crawford 1348). In the legitimate language of the bio-scientific, says Donna Haraway, the enhancement of one's immune system is constructed as the key for health, whereas the HIV virus—a retrovirus that is said to kill the cells of the immune system—is conceived as a tremendous threat to the healthy self (221-23). Following Foucault's genealogy, Catherine Waldby aspires to challenge the legitimacy of biomedicine in relation to HIV by virtue of denaturalizing the perception of retrovirus as that which breeds exclusively within the body of the homosexual, thereby revealing the intervention of the power relation in such an issue

Biomedicine is a useful discourse of governance precisely because of its capacity to translate social relations into ‘neutral’ technical discourse, and a set of practices and techniques which limit the effects of contagion and epidemic. This capacity enables it to intervene in detailed ways in a social field, to practice a micropolitics of the body and a macropolitics of the body politic, subsuming both domains of intervention under the flexible rhetoric of health. (141)

Even though Waldby has provided a means for challenging the legitimacy of the biomedicine discourse concerning AIDS/HIV, what has often proved more powerful is the mourning portrayal of AIDS patients in the literary writings.

Thus, the HIV virus is *always already* sexually transcoded into a scientific linguistic metaphor complicit with the mechanism of misogyny and that of homophobia.<sup>5</sup> As such, the body of the homosexual has been fantasized as a compromised and diseased other, transgressing the prescribed border of normality.

Insofar as the representation of AIDS in media<sup>6</sup> tends to echo this bio-scientific myth

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Kruger draws upon a bio metaphor in relation to gender narrative to account for how the retrovirus of HIV has been coded as the alternative, perverse masculinity as opposed to the proper masculine expression of DNA, a metaphoric virus linked gendered-ideologically with the homosexual,--“the [HIV] retrovirus represents a *perverse* threat to the coherence of linguistic process imagined at the cellular level” (38 emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> See Simon Watney’s *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*, in which Watney relates AIDS to “a crisis of representation” whereby this disease and its carriers become stigmatized and demonized by the media itself (9). Also, Paula Treichler in “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical

so as to fortify the symbolic boundary between the healthy (heterosexual) self and diseased (homosexual) other—now a HIV other—, this Hegelian master/slave dialectic serves to justify the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency.

Marco Pustianaz writes that gay writing is characterized by the “biographical homosexual of the author, [the text’s] hidden homosexual codings, its latent meaning, its textual reception, all of these or a variable combination” (146). In addition, Tony Purvis recognizes the therapeutic power of gay fictions as the therapeutic guide for the gay subjects, as they enable “community-building and militancy in periods of homophobic hostility” (298) challenges the oppression of heteronormative discourse. Prior to the 1969 Stonewall Riot, and the emergence of the gay right movement, the very issues with which gay writers deal the most rest on how the gay male characters struggle over his sexual identity. As such, the inside/outside of the closet serves as the most significant metaphor for the early gay fictions (Purvis 304). Edmund White suggests his first two gay fictions—*A Boy’s Own Story* and *A Beautiful Is Empty*—are gay consciousness-raising books, for they reveal how the adolescent protagonists

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Discourse contends that along with the homophobic representation of biomedical discourse, this disease has been transformed into “being a particular kind of person rather than doing particular thing” (44). Regarding AIDS as now “an epidemic of signification” in Western culture, Treichler further holds that certain sexual identity is irrationally, ideologically positioned by “the main discourse” as the scapegoat for blame. See also Cindy Patton suggests how people links AIDS with queer identity, as she puts it, “regardless of how you contracted the virus, you become nominally queer.” (154) As for the historical survey of AIDS in the early 1980s to 1990s see Jeffrey Weeks’ *Sex, Politic, and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*. esp, 300-303.

regard their homoerotic desire as “diseased and inauthentic” (White, *Aesthetics and Loss* 8). Yet with the rise of the gay rights movement and the prominence of the HIV/AIDS issue in the 1970s and early 1980s, gay writers transform their subject matter to either react against the hegemony of the heteronormative values or to record the death from the plague of the AIDS/HIV in the gay community (Woods 368). To some extent Edmund White’s gay fictions mentioned above display the panorama of the gay subjects who “have been oppressed in the 1950s, freed in the 1960s, exalted in the 1970s, and wiped out in the 1980s” (White, *Aesthetics and Loss* 136). Given the wreck of AIDS 1980s onwards, the once natural and artificial body of the homosexual,” says White, has become “feeble, yellowing, infected” (*Aesthetics and Loss* 135).

Nevertheless, most of the early AIDS writings of the 1980s remain homophobic,<sup>7</sup> treating AIDS as “a disease [that] dare not speak its name” (Stambolian 2; Woodhouse 3). As such, AIDS is represented as the “disease of theirs,” an infliction that will not cross the threshold if it is not given access (Dewey 30).

However, Linda & Michael Hutcheon point out in “Opera: Desire Disease Death” that,

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<sup>7</sup> See how Joseph Dewey in “Music for a Closing: Responses to AIDS in Three American Novels” considers these three novels as constituted of logic of withdrawal, which serve to attack AIDS and its carriers as the invaders from within the heterosexual boundary (27). Yet, Dewey accentuates more on Robert Ferro’s *Second Son* (1988) to exemplify this logical withdrawal in relation to AIDS writing. (29-33). Also Woodhouse holds that Robert Ferro’s fictions as that of assimilative literature, a fiction about gay men for straight readers, showing “gay life within the implicit or explicit context of mainstream life, and tacitly appeared to mainstream value.” (3)

given the endeavors of gay activists since the late 80s in fighting against the sexual stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, recently aspire gay authors to draw upon the mode of “countermythology” so as to either disrupt the stigmatized association of AIDS exclusively with homosexuals<sup>8</sup> or to challenge the mis-representation of this disease in media (200-201). Likewise Lee Edelman suggests recent AIDS writings are intrinsic to and implicated in a postmodern mode, serving to destabilize the stigmatized representation by the dominant ideology, a sort of writing that struggles against “the officially sanctioned representations of the epidemic and their intended constitution of a ‘normal’ or ‘healthy’ subjectivity, to naturalize and reposition certain aspects of the ideological structures that inform and produce those noxious representations and oppressive subjectivities in the first place” (13).

Tony Purvis maintains that White’s novels demonstrate how “his treatment of American and gay culture is inseparable from an examination of micro-histories set against the wider backdrop” (314). His portrayals of individual gay characters either conforming to or resisting against the HIV-phobia social context are thus intricately

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<sup>8</sup> Even though its narrative aspires to detach this plague from the homophobic association with gay identity by raising the possibility of heterosexual AIDS, still its narrative parallels with a popular discourse “through certain contradictory impulse, reinfor[ing] the idea that gay men are somewhat most firmly and genuinely bound to AIDS and its origins” (111). As Steve Kruger attempts to defy the ontological logic in which AIDS is subsumed to the debased of the taxonomic system of heterosexual/homosexual, these narrative remains a homophobic ideology that recourses to differentiate the latter as a group of high risk, abjected /scapegoating others, as he puts it, its narratives nonetheless “participate in broader homophobic constructions of AIDS as gay, also reflect a deep ambivalence among many gay men concerning about their relationship to AIDS” (124).

linked to the wider background where the gay narrative has evolved. Similarly, Edmund White's own life experiences are also reflected in his novels, often in the form of "disguised autobiography (Cohler 372).<sup>9</sup> White admits himself that "[t]he process starts even before I start writing. I live my life as if it's a book. I observe things that are happening to me knowing that I'll write about them later" (White, *Burning Library* 127). In an interview about his plan of writing *The Married Man*, White defines this fiction as another autobiographical writing about AIDS, mainly because the two HIV-positive characters—Austin and Julian—are based on his own experience with his late boyfriend Hubert during the late 1980s (82). To White, Hubert, who is French and a formerly married architect, is a Julian-like person in reality dying from the complications of AIDS. While his former autobiographical novels often use the first-person narrative, *The Married Man* adopts a third-person narrator, which allows the author to, for the first time, retain an omniscient perspective.

*The Married Man* opens with its main character, Austin Smith, an American furniture scholar living in Saint-Louis of France, falling into a painful dilemma, because of his homosexual desire for another French architect, Julian. Julian's married status is a mystery for Austin, in that he cannot make sure of Julian's sexual

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<sup>9</sup> Similar to Austin's serostatus of HIV positive in *The Married Man*, White himself has claimed to be a HIV positive since 1985.

orientation and whether Julian is indeed in love with him. But most significantly, Austin does not know whether he should tell Julian he is an HIV-positive if they begin to start this relationship. As an expatriate, Austin is aware of the different attitudes toward AIDs. While Americans are blunter toward speaking out their sexuality, French seems to be more reticent as to the very issue of HIV/AIDS:

Americans sat up telling each other horror stories, but they were later astonished when their worst fantasies came true, as if they'd hoped to ward off evil by talking it into submission or by taking homeopathic doses of it. The French, however, feared summoning an evil genius by pronouncing its name. Neither system worked. When the lioness awakened and felt the first hunger pains, she would show her claws. (White, *The Married Man* 39)

After opting for the French approach with Julian, he starts dating with Julian without hiding his HIV secret from his lover. Much to Austin's surprise, Julian not only forgives Austin's earlier reticence of his sero-status, but tells Austin that he determines to stay with him and take care of him as the HIV virus goes full-blown. Even though, Julian divorces his wife, however, their relationship is not as perfect as Austin has expected. As their relationship drags on, Julian's irreconcilable tension with Austin's ex-boyfriend, Peter—a now seriously ill HIV patient—makes Austin

recognize that Austin is rather a self-absorbed partner. Given some successive minor illness, Julian is advised by Austin that he should take an AIDS test in the hospital, and is later informed that Julian has been diagnosed as HIV positive. Since then, Austin and Julian's role has been reversed.<sup>10</sup> While Julian's AIDS-related symptoms gradually wreck his body, Austin's asymptomatic status is far from sliding into full-blown AIDS symptoms—he still looks healthy and actually gains more weight than he can expect. Worried that he might have given his HIV virus to Peter and Julian—who look like living dead—Austin now takes the responsibility for taking care of them out of both his sense of guilty and love. Therefore HIV virus becomes a source that unites these three AIDS positive characters whose lives have turned out to be fleeting and vulnerable. In the final one hundred pages Austin and Julian eventually decide to travel in Morocco as a final trip to remember their once-love and the attendant death. It is in the deep desert of Sahara—a region that the medical knowledge is still ignorant of the treatment of AIDS—that Julian dies, leaving Austin to face his solitude and the unknown future. *The Married Man* ends up with an undertone for the surviving Austin that his future can still be promising if he does not give himself up eventually.

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<sup>10</sup> While Julien is served as a person that takes care of Austin in the beginning of the story, his later succumbing to AIDS renders him a patient that instead needs Austin's care.

Judith Halberstam's "In a Queer Time & Place" defines queer temporality as a time model opposed to the linear frame of "bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance," a time frame practiced and experienced by queer subjects in order to counter the institutions of heteronormative discourse from within the value of capital-family ideology<sup>11</sup> (6-10). Inspired by Halberstam's concept of queer temporality, I mean to suggest contemporary gay novels ostensibly echo this theoretical concept as an alternative time frame not only transcending the value of utilitarianism but responding to the anxiety over the AIDS/HIV experience. To the extent that the Holocaust of AIDS has evoked much panic within the homosexual community, some AIDS literary writings have, on the one hand, become a mode manifesting the nature of queer temporality by embodying gay characters' orgiastic, transient lives, transforming HIV virus into not so much a negative metaphor as a positive theme for their readers (Halberstam 12). On the other hand, such writings employ the biological characteristic of HIV virus in transcoding the infected body into another identity,<sup>12</sup> with which the queer kinship becomes possible.

Anthropologist Roy Wanger contends that with technological development the concept of kinship breaks with the frame of biological essentialism, shifting into a

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of queer temporality, along with its register of non-reproductive mode of sexual pleasure is highly associated with George Bataille's "excessive expenditure" in relation to perverted sexual practices as opposed to the exploit of capital utilitarianism, an association which will be developed in the following section (51).

<sup>12</sup> Unlike other kinds of virus, Waldby argues the HIV virus serves to "replace[s] the human genetic 'identity' of the cells it infects" (19-20).

dynamic process of differentiating relational categories that thereby enables a flow of relatedness among them (qtd. in Carsten 38). The HIV virus, thus, has become a source within AIDS writings to re-invite the “viral consanguinity,” an alternative kinship that is organized by its AIDS homosexual members to share their concern for one another (Dean 91).<sup>13</sup> As such the body of the homosexual with the serostatus HIV should be recognized as a nexus in which the axis of queer time—progressing from sex, disease, to death— and queer kinship is sustained.

With the rise of the HIV/AIDS discourse, AIDS wirings have become one of the most crucial topics subsumed to the gay literature. As Suzanna Poirier puts it, “All writing today is AIDS writing in that it must consciously choose how to respond to the epidemic, whether by direct involvement or evasion” (Poirier 7). White’s *The Married Man* is a disease writing dealing with the topic of HIV/AIDS, a novel whereby White draws on his personal experience to narrate the social context of AIDS in the late 1980s. As such I argue that the subjectivity of the homosexuals in *The Married Man* is intervened by the HIV virus, and that two different types of HIV-positive bodies in that novel are employed as a strategy in which the biomedical

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<sup>13</sup> Dean’s controversial book, *Unlimited Intimacy*, contends that bareback sex can be acknowledged as a subversive strategy for the strength of the gay subculture, in that with the communication of the HIV virus among the gay male body, it is possible that an organic queer kinship can be thus re-invented (89-96). Even though the sex in *The Married Man* is obviously not that of bareback—on the contrary, this novel depicts the moral panic context of the late 1980s into which the regulation of the safer sex is embedded—Dean’s subversive idea is still appropriated here as to argue that the communication of the HIV virus among the characters in this novel can be seen as a source—but not a deliberate strategy—for the establishment of the alternative kinship in such disease writing.

discourse concerning the homosexual body is further complicated. Thus in chapter two I will discuss that due to the emergence of the AIDS/HIV in the mid-80s, the subversive nature of homosexual sex has been problematized and intervened by the policy of safer sex, while the second part will discuss that the ambiguous presentation of the HIV positive bodies in *The Married Man* serves as a literary strategy to challenge the legitimacy of the biomedical discourse in relation to the subjectivity of the homosexuals.

Homosexual sex in White's *The Married Man* will be my focus in chapter two. Foucault argues that with the rise of scientia sexualis in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century the regime of instrumental reason has attempted to deploy the biomedical language as a plausible discourse through which the body of one subject becomes permeable, a subject whose sexual pleasure is displaced under the name of desire, as a nexus for interpretation, regulated by the mechanism of the panopticon –“polymorphous conducts [are] actually extracted from people's bodies and from their pleasure...[to be] drawn out, revealed, isolated, intensified, incorporated, by multifarious power devices” (47-48). To the extent that the emergence of the HIV/AIDS discourse in the early 1980s has exaggerated the regulation of the homosexual body, the HIV virus thereby not only problematizes the homosexual's sexual desire, but renders his body a spectacle to be surveilled by the gaze of the biomedical discourse (Crawford 1348).

Such surveillance emphasizes that safer sex among gay community is the best policy for the prevention of AIDS/HIV. Related to this issue, Elizabeth Grosz holds in her “Sexed Body” that the exchange of bodily fluids is the most natural gesture to breach the physical boundary between people, “a borderline state, disruptive of the solidity of thing, entities, and object. . .tracing the paths of entry or exist, the routes of interchange or traffic with the world” (192). Yet, bodily semen, says Grosz, is a fluid recognized by the heterosexual male as a substance that is bound only to be discharged from his body border as a way to ‘extend’ his privileged sexed territory by disseminating this seed unto the female body. As such, bodily semen, for the heterosexual male, is mere fluid to be ejaculated out of his body border, not something which he incorporates. By so doing, he keeps his body orifices closed and static, constituting himself as “as active agent in the transmission of flow,” a subject who is only to give but never to receive (Grosz, 201). As opposed to the heterosexual male’s static body orifices,<sup>14</sup> the homosexual male conceives his body orifices as dynamic entries for exchange of the body fluids which is “prepared not only to send out but also to receive,” a substance which is “permeable, that transmits in a circuit, that opens itself up rather than seals itself off, that is prepared to respond as well as to initiate” (Grosz 201). Yet with the emergence of the AIDS crisis, the openings of the

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<sup>14</sup> Similar to Grosz’s contention, Catherine Waldby considers the male heterosexual body as the “idealised phallic body,” a body whose orifices are neither to take nor give (AIDS) infections (13).

homosexual male body are problematized, and their seminal rendered so ambiguous that the autonomy of his body is further questioned within the discourse of safer sex policy.

Yet, with the emergence of the HIV/AIDS narrative, this once golden age of hedonist and promiscuous lifestyle in gay culture between the late 1960s and the early 1980s—a lifestyle of which some gay theorists of the Pre-AIDS era consider as the most effective strategy to undermine the politic of heteronormativity—has been problematized by the policy of safer sex since mid-1980s. The very nature of gay excessiveness has been discouraged and distorted, thereby transforming their subversive practice into self-surveillance and autoeroticism. Thus, *The Married Man* is such a text in which the excessive nature of gay sex is problematized by the threat of HIV virus and its attendant policy of safer sex. In chapter two I will discuss with the emergence of HIV virus Austin represents the hedonist generation of 1970s who is caught in the overlap of the promiscuous past and the safer sex at the present, recognized as thesis and antithesis, respectively. It is from this Hegelian dialectics that eventually leads Austin to learn the very synthesis of love and responsibility for not only for himself but others in time of AIDS.

In chapters three and four, I will discuss how the two distinguished types of HIV positive bodies—the grotesque body and the closet body, respectively—depicted in

*The Married Man* are used to either arouse empathy from its readers toward the issue of HIV/AIDS or to invert the HIV narrative by blurring the biomedical boundary of healthy/diseased body. The grotesque body, as opposed to the classical body situated as high, inside, homogeneous, and symmetrical, marks the marginal, the low and the outside. Such a body, says Bakhtin, serves the purpose of turning the symbolic hierarchy of high and low upside down through its strength of “lower bodily stratum” and the openings of the body orifices (317). As Stallybrass & White put it, such grotesqueness emphasizes “the gaping mouth, the protuberant belly and buttocks, the feet and the genitals... as a mobile, split, multiple self” (22). To Bakhtin, it is due to the openings of the body orifices that this grotesque image transcends beyond the social constraints, making itself a social body:

The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world...it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgressing its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world...which the body itself goes out to meet the world. (26)

Yet, this Bakhtinian grotesque image is quite contrary to that of the serostatus homosexual, whose body orifices are both discursively regulated and gazed at by the biomedical discourse. Laughter, for them, is such an extravagant expression. In contrast to the Bakhtinian grotesque body—an image of life-affirming—the other type

of grotesque body is essentially “the sphere of the unfathomable, a familiar world in the process of dissolution or estrangement, diffusing an aura that instills insecurity, revulsion, and the terror and causes the disintegration of our sense of soundness, symmetry, and proportion” (Meindl 15). While the Bakhtinian grotesque image emphasizes the effect of laughter, what this Kayserian grotesqueness evokes is anxiety.

Wolfgang Kayser argues that the grotesque is a fundamentally ambivalent thing, as a violent clash of opposites, embodying the problematical nature of existence (3). As he puts it, the image of the grotesque is “constituted by a clashing contrast between form and content, the unstable mixture of heterogeneous elements, the explosive force of the paradoxical, which is both ridiculous and terrifying” (53). Such grotesqueness, says Philip Thomas, will become the prevalent topic in certain societies and eras “marked by strife, radical change or disorientation” (11). Given its visual effect of shock and terrifying, this grotesque body tends to be recognized as an aggressive *weapon* for de-familiarizing, as well as disorienting people’s perspective of the normal contour, a body which is conceived as both aggressiveness and alienation in the sight of its spectacle (Thomas 58-59). The AIDS period is such a radical era that the contour of human body has become *grotesquized*. Therefore, the HIV body with distinguished AIDS-related symptoms on their face or body should be recognized as a grotesque image, a pathologized body that is metaphorically conceived as distortion

and chaos, as opposed to the organic, healthy body of the heterosexual self (Brouwer 363). Given its aggressive look, such a diseased body is nevertheless endowed with the weapon of “rhetoric power” for provoking its audience to gaze and to be shocked (Hauser 135). Therefore, I consider the bodies of Peter and Julian in White’s *The Married Man* that are invested with distinct AIDS-related syndrome—Kaposi’s sarcoma and lymphomas—should be recognized as the grotesque body. By adopting the immersive writing style<sup>15</sup> in depicting the horror of AIDS in *The Married Man*, Edmund White uses these grotesque body images as a literary weapon to accuse the legitimized self—be that heterosexual or the non-AIDS homosexuals—of the ignorance, detachment or homophobic hostility toward the issue of AIDS/HIV and its victims.

The second type of the positive HIV body in *The Married Man* is the closet body. The closet body is sustained by the ambiguous attribute of HIV virus that serves to question the biomedical discourse in defining our body boundary. Therefore, the metaphor of closet can be recognized as an image to exemplify Austin’s ambiguous body—an asymptomatic carrier body which shows *no* AIDS-related syndromes on its physical contour— which is *interiorly* similar yet *exteriorly* different as compared with that of the grotesque, a body that is *both* exteriorly and interiorly entrapped

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<sup>15</sup> See Joseph Cady’s definition as to the immersive writing in relation to AIDS/HIV (258-62).

under the biomedical narrative of HIV/AIDS discourse. As such, Austin's closet body can be served as a mediation to further problematize the biomedical border of health/disease in relation to AIDS/HIV discourse, a body that blurs readers' boundary of consciousness between hope and despair, future and no future.



## CHAPTER 2

### Dialectics of Gay Sex in Edmund White's AIDS Writing

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, when medicine acquired the powerful status of science, the health/disease dichotomy has become one of the prevailing metaphors for such symbolic boundaries between an ordered inside and an abject outside. Today, the AIDS crisis, affecting primarily categories of people already constructed as diseased has been seen as a brutal reinforcement of this metaphor. Given this symbolic boundary within the language of bio-medicine, gay men are rendered the abject other, a group that has become the helpless mice whose subjectivity is relinquished to the medical profession (Lynch 40).

Though attacked by Larry Kramer and Reed Woodhouse as too explicit in depicting gay hedonist freedom in his fiction during the time of the Epidemic,<sup>16</sup> Edmund White responds to Kramer's attack that as an insider to the gay community,

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<sup>16</sup> Attacking on White's celebration of promiscuous life-style written in *The Joy of Gay Sex*, both Larry Kramer and Reed Woodhouse use their moralist standard to fault White's "bad timing" in promoting the sex freedom for his gay community in the time of AIDS (Kramer, 17; Woodhouse, 3).

a vivid writing of gay life experience should not be ignored, because the theme of love and death should be most obviously discussed in the time of the Epidemic. Thus his AIDS writings not only depict people who suffer but also the panorama of the gay hedonist lifestyle (*Burning Library* 237). Les Brookes gives Edmund White's gay stories and AIDS writings a positive criticism, primarily because he considers the conspicuous portrayal of gay sex in AIDS writings serves to challenge the homophobic discourse in the time of the Epidemic, a writing strategy that has wrought a political agenda against a discourse in which the gay subject is *always already* disease:

These stories of Edmund White are not assimilative in the sense of seeing AIDS as a reason to abandon gay political agendas in surrender to moral panic. On the contrary, they suggest a reassertion of gay identity as part of a broadly radical stance given new energy precisely in face of the threat of AIDS. (7)

These AIDS stories, as Brookes contends, pose a challenge to previous AIDS writings wherein AIDS becomes a sensational and hilarious parody, drawing on an approach that resists paranoia and apocalyptic brooding, while remaining sensitive to the change, personal suffering, and loss the epidemic has brought (159). Recognized as the most influential writer among critics whose autobiographic novels touch exclusively on the out-come story and AIDS writings, Edmund White achieves his

best, as David Bergman holds, in his *The Farewell Symphony* (1997) and *The Married Man*, the last two novels of his terrorology (237).

This thesis discusses Edmund White's *The Married Man* as a text that represents how its gay characters are confronted with the biomedical gaze of AIDS and argues that White's AIDS writing has always been a space wherein the subjectivity of the characters has been regulated by the regime of safe sex, and wherein the dialect of sex/death becomes more contradictory and ambivalent than his previous gay/AIDS writings, *The Farewell Symphony*, a narrative that depicts its characters' struggle over the rupture between the promiscuous/hedonist past and safe-sex/ascetic present.

#### Social Making of AIDS

Viewed from the lens of sociology, as a nexus where multiple meanings, stories, and discourses intersect, overlap, reinforce, and subvert one another, AIDS has been incorporated into a narrative of bio-medicine that draws on its scientific language and political interest wherein certain gendered and sexualized bodies have become the materials for imaginative interpretations (Waldby 2-10). As Lorna Rhodes argues, AIDS has been subject to an aura of factuality in terms of bio-medicine, an abstract notion that is guided by a confident conceptualization of AIDS as a distinct, discrete and disjunctive entity that exists within individual bodies (172). This biomedical conceptualization has made AIDS not so much a naive disease as something of social

making, subject to a power relation.<sup>17</sup> The bodies of these heightened risk groups with their dangerous permeability, according to biomedical intervention, refer especially to those of IV drug users, and male homosexuals, an discursive dichotomy that takes on ambiguity, homophobia, stereotypes, double-thinking, them-versus-us, blame-the-victim, wishful thinking in relation to the structure of gender and sexuality (Treichler 37).<sup>18</sup>

Following the narrative of modern medicine constructed within the discourse of bio-power,<sup>19</sup> argues Michel Foucault, the body of gay men has been considered by the bio-scientists as the double of perversity and danger in the realm of medical-judicial discourse,<sup>20</sup> a category of abnormality by which the health of the

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<sup>17</sup> Similarly, this biomedical discourse of AIDS reflects a gendered structure of ideological intervention, “[m]oving from biological to social etiology, the making social of AIDS includes assessment of the social conditions that directly or indirectly put individuals at heightened risk for the social constructions of medicine as politics, as institution, and as ideology” (Waldby 16). Likewise Simon Watney holds that AIDS involves a “a crisis of representation,” a signifier that has been used as “pretext” throughout the West to justify calls increasing legislation and regulation of those considered to be socially unacceptable (3).

<sup>18</sup> See Catherine Waldby and Elizabeth Grosz argue this biomedical discourse has appropriated the mechanism of gender structure wherein only the phallic body can stand unproblematic for the intact body of the nation.

<sup>19</sup> See Michael Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* for the definition of the birth of bio-power in maintaining the population in which continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms are used by the dominant discourse, a technology manipulated by the dominant discourse whereby “an explicit boundary of healthy norms and diseased others are distinguished” (142-44).

<sup>20</sup> Steve Epstein appropriates Foucault’s concept of panoptics arguing a sense of fear in sex provoked by biomedical discourse of AIDS has rendered gay community the internalization of discipline in relation to their subjectivity onto their conscious, a political strategy of simply disseminating scientific knowledge in a “downward” direction that transforms “the recipient of knowledge into *an object of*

entire population is threatened:

On the one hand, there is the notion of ‘perversion’ that will enable the series of medical concepts and the series of juridical concepts to be stitched together and, on the other hand, there is the notion of ‘danger,’ of the ‘dangerous individual,’ which will make possible the justification and theoretical foundation of an uninterrupted chain of medico-judicial institutions. (34)

As this essential theoretical core of medico-legal discourse continues, AIDS has been represented as the most threatening epidemic to our society since it was first reported in the early 1980s. The gay male body has become a problematic super-text deciphered and governed by this new medical gaze (Elbe 403),<sup>21</sup> a text whose erotic and sexual life is disciplined and surveillanced through the deployment of various imaging and diagnostic technologies, biomedical technologies that fulfill panoptic aspirations as visualized by the macroscopic and the microscopic relation between the individual and nation bodies (Waldby 15).

David Caron holds that AIDS writings should be recognized as spaces in which

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*power*” (5 emphasis mine).

<sup>21</sup> Medical gaze is a concept used by Foucault in *Birth of Clinic*, violence which legitimates the subject (doctor)/object (patient) relation and freezes it in the objectivity of medical discourse, a discourse constantly reinforced by the authority it enjoys far beyond the field of medicine. Also, Elbe considers the biomedical discourse of AIDS emerged after 1980s positions as a neo medical gaze reminiscent of nineteenth-century medicine.

the medical gaze, with its violence illustrates how the homosexual body has been represented as a locus where the subject projects his morbid fantasies in a violent process of domination (241). This medical gaze, however, is dynamic and beyond the binary opposition of the power relationship between doctor/patient and heterosexual/homosexual. Accordingly, AIDS writings reflect the fact that not only do the dominant cultures hold the authority of a medical gaze, but that it is gay men themselves that have been interpellated and internalized by this gaze as a means to regulate the sexed body within.

David Bergman appropriates Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature and argues that gay literature, as opposed to great literature, functions as a unique genre where "every individual is immediately plugged into politics," a textual space wherein the question of the individual responds to and challenges the politics of sex intervened by the discourse of bio-medicine (21). Most of the AIDS writings have become a space in which the politics of hedonism of gay subjectivity in the 1970s has been de-sexualized by the dominant culture and even the gay writers themselves. In the same vein, Edmund White considers that the emergence of AIDS has rendered gay subjects detached and alienated from sex among one another, "we [gay subjects] do feel weird again, despised, alien. There's talk of tattooing us or quarantining us. . . The Brassy hedonism of a few years back has given way to a protective gay invisibility" (Bergman 213). This discourse of bio-medicine as to HIV/AIDS thus

threats the very existence of the gay movement itself. As Edmund White contends this discourse has posed a great danger to a political identity around gay sexuality, “[w]hen a society based on sex and expression is de-eroticized [by the dominant discourse of medicine], its very reason for being can vanish” (*Burning Library* 214).

As an insider in the gay community, White holds that he has an urgent responsibility for representing how gay subjects have been disciplined and interpellated by the biomedical discourse of AIDS in his novels, “AIDS seemed to push everything backwards to an age when the only ones who were talking about male homosexuals were doctors who weren’t gay and didn’t identify as gays. They were discussing us in a very clinical way as though we were guinea pigs—‘objects’” (*Burning Library* 241).

Therefore, AIDS writings have turned to discuss this biomedical discourse as to homophobia and AIDS-phobia issue. According to Emmanuel Nelson, the gay male body has been encoded by this dominant culture as a problematic super text that has made “the political ramifications even more troublesome. . . . an object of massive public curiosity and relentless cultural inquiry. . . [and] is now widely perceived as a site of mysterious and fatal infections” (2). As opposed to this biomedical discourse, Nelson holds that gay writers should translate their anger and grief toward this epidemic as the gravely personal issue into AIDS writings that takes on the techniques of “re-creating pain but framing it in a transcendent vision; of articulating a resistant, activist consciousness instead of merely helpless, paralyzing angst” (2). Thus Edmund

White's *The Married Man* should be viewed as Nelson's problematic super text in which the sexed/diseased body of gay men has been examined in a dynamic power relationship by a biomedical gaze.

### Biomedical Gaze and Voyeurism of the AIDS Body

In White's *The Married Man* the biomedical gaze upon gay males is translated into the technology of HIV test, a positive test result, that ushers the tested into a state of permanent intuitional visibility, inserting the gay tested into a "medical management's regime" (Waldby 122).<sup>22</sup> Throughout *The Married Man* its gay characters are targeted by this biomedical discourse, living under the shadow of paranoia, ambivalently assuming their identity as virus. Peter, Austin's former HIV positive lover, represents an aversion against the de-humanized biomedical imagination of bio-medicine in identifying the body of the gay community with HIV virus. He lashes out his anger, claiming that gay males themselves have been threatened to live with this gaze, "Peter, a genuine escapist, had objected to the whole process [of HIV test,] arguing Austin would be thrown out of France if positive and sent home to the States in legs irons" (37). White speaks of this panoptics-like system

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<sup>22</sup>According to Waldby HIV test represents the solution to the problem of the invisibility of the HIV virus in both the body and the body politic. Through the inscription of a transmission identity upon the possible seropositive, gay males, this test renders the virus visible, a new identity as virus that does not endanger the health of the body politic (139).

through Peter's irrational attitude toward this HIV technology, "In Sweden, they're [the authority] sending seropositivity to prison island. . . . In Munich they test you at the border and to stay in India more than a month you must undergo a blood test" (37).

This technology of HIV test thus become a new discursive technique of governments echoing Foucault's concept of the truth of sexuality, offering up *the truth* for scientific/rational administration, whereby subjects are classified and socially ordered through the securing of confession as to the "'truth' of their sexuality" (Waldby 113).

This confession is fulfilled through the representation of biomedical language, serving as a technology of the self internalized within the consciousness of the gay subjects.

Thus the gesture of checkup the symptoms of their body becomes a daily routine for themselves:

The worst thing was studying one's body every morning in the shower for auguries. Even in that regard he envied all those hysterical gay guys back in New York or San Francisco who knew to become alarmed about the slightly raised, wine-colored blemish, not the flat, black mole or whatever, who could tell just when a cough became 'persistent' enough to be worrying or whether a damp pillowcase and a wet head counted as 'night sweats' (38).

Still, responding to Catherine Waldby's challenge against the truth of HIV testing, White has Austin questioned about the authority of HIV testing, wondering

whether this technique merely stands for a trick which renders gay males visible, a technology only serving to withdraw their subjectivity, “Austin felt that he’d gained nothing by knowing [the result of the HIV test]. . . He’d had a cheerfully defiant conviction that learning the truth is always liberating . . . but he’d come to doubt his democratic frankness, his ‘transparency’ . . . he’d learned not to blurt out whatever happened to be passing through his mind [and] he’d started to shy away from bold declarations of facts” (38). Truth, in light of Austin’s challenge, becomes an apparatus that fulfills biomedical voyeurism, serving to anatomize certain sexed body, paralyzing their subjectivity, as Cindy Patton argues in *Inventing AIDS*, that renders “the person with AIDS speaks for the virus, becomes *the taking virus*” (25 emphasis mine):

“He [doctor] wanted me to have the test”

“The test?” Austin asked stupidly

“The AIDS test”

“Why?”

“Because he’s worried about my acne and my cough and that wart I have on my penis.” (52)

The number of T-cells is another apparatus used by the biomedical discourse of AIDS, serving to interpellate and regulate the subjectivity of gay males. The imagination of bio medicine has transformed T-cells into a *gendered* cell, into “a kind

of viral representative, precipitating a series of catastrophic events” (Waldby 69). The “homosexualization” of the T cells means that infected cells represent a promiscuous life of the past. Internalizing this regime, gay subjects use the number of T-cells, a technology of the self,<sup>23</sup> to define themselves, seeing to one another. In *The Married Man*, all of the gay characters live under the shadow wherein T-cell numbers become a biomedical apparatus to regulate their body boundary:

“I talked to the doctor at the Hospital Saint-Louis today and he wants me to redo my tests, but he says they’re not very promising.”

“He thinks you’re positive?”

“Not just positive, but my T-cells are very down, just above one hundred.”

“A thousand, you mean. Normal is one thousand.”

“How many do you have? How many T-cells.”

“Seven hundred.” Austin said. “Something like that.”

“I guess you’re lucky. You must be one of the rare lucky ones.”

“My time will come.”(145-46)

In White’s AIDS writings the numbers of T-cell are thus represented not so much as a

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<sup>23</sup> Catherine Waldby holds such technology disseminated within biomedical discourse can be viewed as that of inscription, a technology that is “not just of subjection but of subjectification, a technology which not only compels subjects in certain ways but which also induces *the internalization of new norms of identity and self-management*, above all the management of one’s health and one’s sexual practices” (113 emphasis mine).

biomedical term but as a material of self-discipline and self-management of gay men themselves.

Acted as a resistant gesture opposed to this biomedical discourse, Austin's self-exile to France becomes a gesture of elusiveness against this biomedical gaze disseminating in America of the late 1980s, "cut off from America, from the massive protests and the underground treatment newsletters. . .and the organized safe-sex and massage sessions, far from the hysteria and the solace" (38). Even though Austin flees to Europe, "pretending" his body has escaped the regulation of the biomedical gaze fettering his gay fellows in America, his body has been inscribed by this gaze rooting in his deep consciousness. The threat of AIDS becomes a symbol of a gluttonous lioness waiting for her prey to come: "Austin did not know what to think of this disease that had taken them by chance, as though he had awakened to find himself in a cave under the heavy paw of a lioness, who was licking him for the moment and breathing all over him with her gamy, carrion smell but who was capable of showing her claws and devouring him today . . . or tomorrow" (37-38).

Responding to the rhetoric of the biomedical discourse which equates gay sex with death, sex between/among gay characters in AIDS writings has been represented as an act of guilt, a fantasy contaminated by fatalism that gay subjects themselves should *train* to sublime. As Austin runs across a sexy guy whose "lean, muscle legs and the compact torso" arouses his sexual desire, he has to keep

warming himself of the possible HIV virus hosting within the guy and of the consequence of sex accordingly: “[w]hen he was younger, in the pre-AIDS days, he seldom hesitated to touch another man seductively, a big grin on his face, but now he’d trained himself to recognize that. . . other men were more reticent sexually than he” (25). Living under the slogan of biomedical discourse interpellating gay subjects and equating their sex with virus and death, gay males internalize this norm as a sense of fear of their homoerotic sex as “a deadly game” and “gambling” (51). Similarly, when Julien appears to have some symptoms of a cough, what comes to Austin’s mind is whether their previous sex experience had obeyed the principles of safe sex instructed in the pamphlets: “[m]entally he [Austin] ran through all their sexual positions over the weekend but could find nothing unsafe. He hadn’t let Julien suck him. They’d kissed, but was that dangerous? Julien had held their erect penises close together in his hand, but surely that wasn’t ‘at risk’ behavior, as the pamphlets called it. Or was it?” (51). Thus under the discipline of the biomedical gaze, the act of sex is transformed into that of guilt. When Julien is diagnosed as HIV positive, a deep sense of guilt flashes into Austin’s mind as to the danger of sex they once experienced: “Austin was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. He tried to remember all the times they’d had sex. On perhaps five or six occasions they’d been seriously stoned. Could he have slipped up and touched Julien’s ass with a fingertip which he’d doused in his own precum?” (146).

## Dialectics of Promiscuity and Safer Sex

Sexual behavior has been an essential element in gay fiction, an expression of liberation encouraged by the Stonewall uprising and the larger sexual and political revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>24</sup> Still, the emergence of AIDS has made the writing of sex more contradictory than an act of rebellion and celebration of the new freedom. Because AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease, and because personal behavior plays the role it does, the politics and passion the subject generates are explosive, in real life and in fiction, inside and outside of the gay community. On the larger stage, because of AIDS, every act of gay sex and every piece of writing involving gay sex seems to stake out a political and moral position. AIDS writing thus becomes a space in which an individual judges and condemns others for their sexual choices between safer sex/unsafe sex and the monogamy/promiscuity among gay subjects are foregone (Benedict 73). The nature of gay sex, as Edmund White puts it, has been further undermined by the appearance of AIDS as opposed to the liberation of gay sex gained in the 1970s:

I bet there's very little gay sex that isn't shadowed by shame. I

think AIDS brought that back into relief, because for those people

who were just beginning to get finally adjusted to the idea that it

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<sup>24</sup> Certain homosexual writers have engaged in what Foucault terms a 'reverse' discourse, whereby "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary by which it was [. . .] disqualified" (101).

was okay to be gay, AIDS came along and said, “No, you were right in the first place. Sex is dirty, it’s a disease, you are wrong, it’s against nature.” AIDS really returned the adult gay man to his nerdy adolescence. It made you feel isolated, weird, as if you were really doing the wrong thing. (27)

Audre Lorde once wrote of the strength of homo-erotic representation in literature, suggesting the joy and fullness sprouting from sex is not unrelated to the politics. Once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us and becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives (Lorde 57).

Still, the nature of gay promiscuity<sup>25</sup> has been debated along with the appearance of AIDS. While one views gay promiscuity as genocidal, the other may suggest

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<sup>25</sup> Promiscuity originally derives from the Latin *miscere*, meaning “to mix”. Although this term has, throughout its history, contained both derogatory and more unassuming meanings, nowhere has this been more the case than in the primarily eroticized deployment of the term within late nineteenth and twentieth-century sexological, legal, literary and popular discourse. Promiscuity now conventionally connotes “excessive and often “insatiable sexual practices (Gove 6). Still, as Gayle Rubin argues, it is not “promiscuity” *per se* that is usually condemned within normative discourses, but rather, the promiscuous sexuality of specific cultural groups—particularly, *promiscuous gay men* (26). See also Steven Seidman in *Romantic Language* contending the nature of gay subculture is generally assumed as “the inherently promiscuous. . . a sign of its pathological or deviant status” (169).

abandoning that promiscuity as genocidal.<sup>26</sup> Though gay promiscuity has been contaminated by the dominant ideology as a sign of disease and of infection,<sup>27</sup> the promise of gay promiscuity of the 1970s—free sex, better sex, sex without guilt, sex without repression, sex at home, and sex in the street—thus provides what Lorde suggests a sense of fullness that empowers the gay community, a political strategy that helps to increase “the beginnings of our sense of self” (54). As opposed to the monogamous sex normalized within the mechanism of heterosexuality, gay promiscuity stands for a liberator and transgressive connotation of queer counter-practice, a political practice that transcends the repressed fantasies, desire and subjectivity to which it can be applied (Gove 19). This counter-praxis of sex, non-monogamous sexuality, therefore represents an avoidance of constrictive gender roles, and an exploration of new ways of bonding. Sexual experimentation was a means whereby gay men could free themselves of societal-imposed notions of guilt and shame around homo-eroticism. Dennis Altman, in addition, mentions this

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<sup>26</sup> While Larry Kramer contends gay promiscuity may result in the genocidal, Gabriel Rotello argues in *Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men*, gay culture ceases to exist once we relinquish some sexual freedom.

<sup>27</sup> Leo Bersani argues the nature of promiscuity, even before the emergence of AIDS, has been regarded as a sign of disease, “an unquenchable appetite for destruction” as men spread their legs up for other men (211). Similarly Susan Sontag holds in *The Metaphor of AIDS* the representation of safer sex explicitly contains a connoted language of sexphobia and homophobia, a discourse that views gay sex per se as an act needs relinquished, “[t]rue of syphilis, this is even truer of AIDS, since not just promiscuity but a specific sexual ‘practice’ regarded as unnatural is named as more endangered. . . . a sexual practice [that] is thought to be more willful, therefore deserves more blame” (26).

promiscuity shared among the gay community serves to transform the negative suggestion into a positive connotation of political strategy whereby the dominant ideology of heteronormativity is challenged: “[promiscuity] can be seen as a sort of *Whitmanesque democracy*, a desire to know and trust other men in a type of brotherhood far removed from the male bonding of rank, hierarchy, and competition that characterizes much of the outside world” (79-80).

Still Eric Rofes considers the discourse of AIDS renders a rupture<sup>28</sup> among the gay community, suggesting the once promiscuous life shared among the gay community of the 1970s, a period that spans from the protest of post-stone to the emergence of AIDS in the early 1980s, has been distorted and re-pathologized by AIDS-phobic politics. Thus the politics of promiscuity drawn on by gay subjects as an oppositional strategy against heteronormativity of the 1970s has been re-defined as a chaotic history and irresponsible past, “[w]e are told that the 1970s were a time of selfishness, excesses, decadence, and self-abuse. . . We pathologize the men and the culture of the 1970s from what we consider the superior morality of the 1990s” (Rofes 104). This new morality emerging along with the appearance of AIDS not only

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<sup>28</sup> See Ed Cohen arguing how the emergence of AIDS has sprouted a dis-continuum as to gay subjectivity, an ideological interpellation that is evident in a new procedure of subject formation, “[g]ay men struggled daily against a culture that believed them to be pathological. . . what gay men had once viewed as a healthy desire for sex was reinterpreted as a pathological desire for dangerous sex, regardless of whether individual acts might be considered ‘safe,’ a re-repression used by dominant regime renders gay sex not only heterosexualized but not really gay, not really *a man* (107).

renders the survivors of AIDS of an older generation overwhelmed with a sense of despair and guilt about the rupture of sexual worlds of the past, a predicament that “whether HIV positive, HIV negative, or unaware of anti-body status, significant numbers of gay men in America appear to be experiencing confusion, dysfunction, impotency, and deep ambivalence about sexuality and intimacy between men” (Rofes 98). This rupture stirs a dramatic change of gay subjectivity as the discourse of safer sex<sup>29</sup> enabling “distinction between safe, safer, and unsafe promiscuous practice” (Gove 31).

Compared to straight writers, gay and lesbian writers talk much more about their lack of historic role models in writing about sex and about their sense of purpose, daring and sometimes shame, in telling outsiders things the public may not know about their subculture, whether it’s the community of incest survivors, gay men before AIDS, or gay men who long for sex, love, and commitment here and now (Benedict 12). Sex scenes represented in gay novels therefore serves as a literary strategy drawn on by its queer writers as opposed to the ideology of heteronormativity.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, at

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<sup>29</sup> The myth of safer sex, says Cindy Patton, serves as an interpellation for brining certain bodies into position of duty an obligation that are constitutive identity through the national pedagogy, embarking on “a frantic attempt to regain control over producing heterosexual citizenry” (117). Accordingly the psychosocial benefits of promiscuous past have been undermined by the pathology of safer sex.

<sup>30</sup> John Preston, a gay writer noted for his representation of gay promiscuity in the pre-epidemic age, holds sex scenes in gay literature stands for an empowerment of gay subjectivity, “explicit erotic material . . . was especially important to gay men because we were all in open rebellion over the way our sexuality had been repressed. We were breaking our lives, and people were looking for a literature

least until the advent of the AIDS epidemic, promiscuity and the cruising of city spaces were described and recorded as a subcultural history in a great number of American gay writings as a more rewarding alternative to heterosexual models of social interactions.<sup>31</sup> Encouraged by the liberation of the Stonewall Riot, writings of hedonism blooms, which reflecting the newly invigorated promiscuous gay sexuality.<sup>32</sup>

Violet Quill should be regarded as a literary group who draw on gay sex scenes as their political apparatus against the hegemonic view of sexuality. These writers have created many literary works that spur an atmosphere of sexual experimentation, works that serve to give permission to limitless sexual activity, a hedonism that opens up a brand new world for gay readers. As Edmund White writes in *The Farewell Symphony* set in the mid-seventies in New York city, a golden age of promiscuity in the pre-epidemic of AIDS, he would never question the principle that “as much sex as

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to reflect that breakout” (13).

<sup>31</sup> See Douglas Crimp in ‘How to Have Promiscuity’ mentions, these sex promiscuity crystallized in pre-epidemic gay writings should be viewed as “a positive model of how sexual pleasures might be pursued by and granted to everyone if those pleasures were not confined within the narrow limits of institutionalized sexuality,” writings that serve a transgressive purpose of constitutive identity (253).

<sup>32</sup> Such writings, as Ben Gove defines, are John Rechy’s *The Sexual Outlaw*, Brad Gooch’s *The Golden Age of Promiscuity*, Allan Gurganus’ *Play Well With Others*, Andrew Holleran’s *The Beauty of Men*, and Edmund White’s *The Farewell Symphony*, writings that reflect earlier sexual adventurers of gay sex (174). Still, literature of gay promiscuity, as Gove argues, exist not limited to this period, but can be even traced back to Allen Ginsberg’s famous poem *Howl*. Vidal Gore’s *The City and Pillar* (1948) represents a novel in which gay promiscuity become a theme. However, sex described in these writings, argues Gove, oftentimes ends up tragedy (25).

possible with as many men as one could find was a good thing” (*Burning Library* 317). Recalling the promiscuous plot written in *The Farewell Symphony*, White thinks of gay promiscuity as an oppositional strategy against heteronormativity in which sex become institutionalized:

I want to show all the complexity and richness of the promiscuous society of the seventies, and then show how sexual freedom was virtually interchangeable in our minds as that point in the late seventies with political freedom. (203)

This golden age of promiscuity written in *The Farewell Symphony* represents a hedonist lifestyle shared among the gay community in which anyone can become someone else’s partner, and romantic arrangements are far more casual than they are among straights. . . . In this easygoing fraternity of sex and sociability, which is presided over by the male spirit of the hunt, dramatic break-ups have a way of quickly settling down into cozy friendships (White, *My Lives* 149). However the politics of queer friendship/affinity encouraged by the liberation of the 70s and symbolized as promiscuity has been undermined by the advent of AIDS, turning against the sensuous joy and erotic pleasure shared in the 70s and the early 80s. Today, along with the cataclysm of AIDS, the reverse discourse of gay sex scenes represented in gay writings appears as a threatened discourse in which gay promiscuity has been sublimated, de-eroticized, and replaced by the regime of safe sex.

Nevertheless in light of the nuance of HIV virus, White's AIDS writings become spaces in which the conflict of the promiscuous life-style and monogamous love is represented. The narrators of White's autobiographical novels as to HIV/AIDS, particularly *The Married Man* oftentimes battle a dialectic familiar to many gay men searching between hedonistic adventure and monogamous love. As Ben Gove argues, Edmund White's writings of the last two novels of his tetralogy,<sup>33</sup> *The Farewell Symphony* and *The Married Man*, account for a transition in which the gay characters' hedonistic life style has been in conflict with the AIDS discourse of safe sex, meaning monogamous love (185).

Written within the frame of the discourse of AIDS, White's *The Married Man* permeates a sense of ambivalence in relation to sexual behaviors. Struggling against the threat of the HIV virus, the consciousness of safe sex becomes the Foucauldian apparatus of inscription internalized among the gay characters: "we [Austin and Julien] had lots of sex, but of course it was safe, safe, safe, safe. Tons of frottage, touché-pipi, soul-kissing. No fucky-fucky—actually it was terribly romantic" (49).<sup>34</sup> White even speaks of his affirmative attitude of safe sex practiced among his gay community through the lens of Austin, his literary alter-ego:

The best prevention, the most convincing proof of the necessity for

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.edmundwhite.com/>

<sup>34</sup> See Peter's caution of safe sex in p. 220

safe sex, was ocular evidence, actually seeing KS blotches on  
skinny arms or watching rail-thin old men of twenty staggering  
into a restaurant on two canes, sharpened cheekbones about to rub  
through the parchment-thin skin, the eyes as bulbous as an insect's.

(39)

Overwhelmed by the threat of death provoked by sex, practices of safe sex thus  
become an imaginary barrier of which gay subjectivity has been intervened.

Throughout *The Married Man* the narrative of masturbation should be  
deciphered as a symbol of showing how gay characters has been *de-sexed* and  
alienated from one another by the discourse of safe sex. Masturbation thus appears as  
a nostalgia for the past of hedonist lifestyle: "he [Austin] masturbates and recalls  
every detail of . . . his coarse sensuality, which coexisted so neatly with his civilized  
behaviors. Or he'd replay erotic encounters that went back all the way to his early  
adolescence. . ." (178). Besides the act of masturbation not only solves the narrator's  
worries about the threat of AIDS, but also becomes a ritual of memory for the golden  
age of promiscuity he once experienced: "I've always been someone who masturbated  
while thinking . . . of actual people I've known in the past. My fantasies are memories  
as accurate as I can make them of past lovers and what they did to me. These days I  
find myself fucking the dead the most" (White, *The Farewell Symphony* 19). The  
narrator's masturbation as imaginary fucking with the friends who died of AIDS thus

symbolizes his rage over how the pleasure of sex experienced in the past has been reduced by the discourse of safe sex to memory. In White's AIDS writings gay sex becomes not so much an act of intimacy between one another as that of individual intervention, an act that is constituted not so much in the present as that in the past.

As the title of *The Married Man* suggests, the married man refers not only literally to Julien, a heterosexual man who once married a woman but symbolically to Austin who fantasizes a ritual of same-sex marriage. This fantasy of marriage represents a mechanism of heteronormativity wherein the vow of monogamous love is sustained, a regime which stands opposed to the hedonistic and promiscuous lifestyle once shared among the gay community, and which protects sexual subjects from the threat of AIDS. In the early part of *The Married Man*, Julien has been recognized by Austin as a decent heterosexual man whose straight-like behaviors and simplistic sex life as opposed to his promiscuous gay friends attract Austin: "[h]ere was a man, a married man, not corrupted by gay life. . . Here was a good man coming to him without intimate tattoos, pierced nipples or other body modifications" (33). The fantasy of same-sex marriage thus symbolically becomes a shelter wherein Austin's promiscuous past and his status of HIV positive body is redeemed and purified. Written in the age of AIDS, the shadow of HIV virus disseminating among Austin's gay community is thus eschewed by this ritual of marriage and the metaphor of monogamy, a ritual that renders Austin *heterosexualized* as if the horror of AIDS were

just a nightmare of the last night: “Austin would look over at this man whose body he’d never held and imagine they about to be married, as old-fashioned virgins were once married” a thought that makes Austin feels he becomes “normal” (41).

Throughout *The Married Man*, the sex of Austin and Julien has resembled a *normalized couple*. Even their first sex has been portrayed with an undertone: “they were all over each other, above, below, behind, like two boys wrestling with hard-ons they don’t know how to discharge,” a sex scene that is totally reticent (42).

As a writer whose own rationale for writing fiction is about gay sex, a rationale that reiterates the ubiquity of promiscuous fantasy, and the unbounded promiscuity of all sexual fantasy,<sup>35</sup> White’s *The Farewell Symphony* seems an implicit defense of gay promiscuity, in all its difficult complexity, against the prevalent gay and straight cultural marriage-and-monogamy mandate (Gove 186). As the narrator’s confession in the early part of *The Farewell Symphony*, sex adventure with many men as the narrator could presides over a fantasy of marriage (White, *The Farewell Symphony* 10). Gay promiscuity thus becomes an act of expenditure, an irresponsible lifestyle like “a groan heard” (37). Still, White’s writings of gay sex has been challenged and

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<sup>35</sup> “What has always been my guiding principle is that: (1) Every male thinks about sex once every 30 seconds, a frequency seriously underrepresented in serious fiction; (2) thoughts of sex are never cloistered away but rather tincture every other thought and one goes seamlessly from Kant to cunt, from pianist to penis; (3) every time sex occurs it’s a brand-new, virtually unclassifiable experience, and the novelist’s job it to capture the novelty and the nuance (White, *The Joy of Gay Lit* 114).

contradicted by the omnipresence of HIV virus in the text, and this contradiction has provokes its characters sense of ambivalence about before-after in relation to their sex behaviors.<sup>36</sup> Silenced by this omnipresence of HIV virus within the text, the golden age of promiscuity has been represented as a nostalgic fantasy of the past that seems never come back: “Austin had a busy sex life before he met Julien. He’d gone from one affair to another” (177). This “busy past,” though regulated and discouraged by the discourse of safe sex targeting the gay community, slips back. Cruising thus becomes an act of slippery overwhelming Austin’s consciousness, an act of transgression that expresses Austin’s repressed monogamous lifestyle regulated by the discourse of safe sex, and a gesture that represents his rage in relation to his loss of the golden past.

Through cruising in the park (126) and hooking a sexual partner in the gay bar (222), having sex with these anonymous individuals, Austin feels a burst of sexual excitement that has been deprived since their bodies were *re-pathologized* by the discourse of AIDS. The experience of sex with the man Austin cruises in the gay bar, as White writes in detail, is full of bodily sensation that is absent from that with Julien,

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<sup>36</sup> The narrator of *The Farewell Symphony* speaks of the ambivalence as to the attitude toward gay sex before and after the emergence of AIDS, “[t]oday even a drop of sperm is rich with death, a mortal culture, but then porno magazines referred to it as a ‘soothing cream’ and we would like to taste it, swallow it, smell it, rub it over our cheeks and murmurs with a smile, ‘The fountain of youth.’ If someone had a big cock we called it ‘The Dick of Death,’ an expression no one would dare use today” (37).

serving an act of expenditure:

[T]he man had pressed his mouth onto Austin's. They kissed in the ordinary way, their hands explored each other's body in the usual fashion—but then, suddenly, Austin felt safe enough, present enough, to lean on this man with the full weight of his desire. It wasn't even that he was releasing his lust; it was more that he'd found it. . . Austin's nipples, his penis, his mouth, his arms were all glowing; a heat-seeking missile would have found five sites to bomb. (222-23)

Although the experience of cruising and sex with strangers promises Austin a brief relief of the panoptics-like discourse of safe sex, what precedes is a great sense of loss, reminding Austin of the fact that the threat of AIDS does not go away. Thus the act of expenditure is replaced by a sense of guilt and a deep feeling of void:

[a]fter having sex with the guy he cruises, Austin feels a sense of void as to the change of sex life: "He was left with nothing but the man's coal-tar smell and a sense of bleakness, as though the world's wattage had been cut, as though he'd been returned to his American past, but a black-white small-screen version. He kept feeling he was dreaming a feverish half-dream which took place in the dim, shabby, empty corridors behind the brilliantly lit set. (142)

*The Married Man* thus represents a space where its gay characters are caught in an overlap of the golden age of promising promiscuity and a regulated life overwhelmed with the shadow of AIDS. This conflict of overlap as gay sex has become a process of Hegelian dialectics that eventually leads Austin to learn the very synthesis of love and responsibility in time of AIDS: “Now all that [hedonist behaviors] was past. Austin felt committed to Julien, joined to him: married” (205).





### CHAPTER 3

#### Shock as a Weapon: The Grotesque Body and White's Immersive Writing in *The Married Man*

Literature is sometimes believed to offer a “promise of happiness,” a form of art that should bring its readers a sense of fulfillment, and other time regarded as an idea of purely “disinterested contemplation,” a piece of work that should not stir sensation to its readers. However, AIDS literature, as Edmund White suggests, should be deemed as a *serious* writing recording the subject's confrontation with imminent death, a genre that can neither bring “a promise of happiness” nor “disinterested contemplation.” As White puts it, gay authors bear an urgent mission of locating their writings in the very crisis of the Epidemic as a way to re-write their own stories: “[writing AIDS literature is] rather about leaving stones behind us as we enter the dark forest to mark the path back to safety or just to show where we lost our way” (*Burning Library* 45). Thus AIDS writing derives from a “burning desire” for remembrance of the death within the gay community, and it questions the lack of high seriousness often perceived modern literature, “I think of our culture as very death-phobic and almost too jockey to talk about love. AIDS fiction is able to do both” (White, *Journals of the Plague Years* 15).

Douglas Crimp once said AIDS writings should serve in a utilitarian way for either those with AIDS who remain behind or those whose family, friends, lovers have died from this disease: “[a]nything said or done about AIDS that does not give precedence to the knowledge, the needs, and the demands of people living with AIDS must be condemned” (240). Writings as testimony about AIDS, as Timothy Murphy contends, offers one vital purpose of healing, providing a space for not only its authors but readers a moment of grief for the dead: “the grief of the epidemic and the incentive to memorialize are no mere biological reflexes; they are an assertion against the leveling effect of death that persons are not replaceable, that death does not nullify presence” (308).<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Iwona Rentlejsz appropriates Judith Butler’s re-interpretation of Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* wherein the unfinished process of grieving of heterosexuality itself unravels an act of which the nature of homosexuality is an ontological foreclosure which has been *always already* pre-existingly prohibited as taboo.<sup>38</sup> This lack of national mourning for AIDS victims reflects a deep-seated American belief that some lives, because deemed worthless, can be forgotten (8). The endless number of deaths emerging from the gay community thus doubles this unspeakable grief. Only through making the AIDS death spectacle

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<sup>37</sup> See also Michael Denney associates AIDS writing with ethnic writings, contending AIDS writing as literature of witness, genre that records the arbitrariness of history, “the idea that the appropriate measure of writing is its impact on the continued existence and well-being of the community is the valuating principle the act or national literature. . . All much writing has as its innermost principle the act of bearing witness” (48).

<sup>38</sup> To Butler heterosexuality is cultivated through a series of prohibitions and one of these is the repudiation of homosexuality. As such homosexuality become an impossible attachments that can never be openly grieved (89).

embodied within the process of writing, can this repudiated grief be expressed and performed into the discourse; the function of AIDS writing may thus be considered as “the way of expressing grief or ‘speaking about the unspeakable’” (Rentflejsz 8).

Similar to the essence of testimony, survivor’s life writing provides its author a space wherein the grief over the loss of the loved ones can be expressed (Ames 852).

Serving as therapeutic exercise, life writing should thus be acknowledged as a genre that resembles an autobiography in which the author performs a sense of ambivalence toward the boundary between those who live and those who die, a genre that: “may offer testimony concerning the event survived and may express the desire to spare others what themselves have suffered [. . .] Autobiographers frequently express their anguish that they are alive while others are not, and, because of the losses incurred through the trauma and its long-term aftershocks, their writings are often characterized by conflict, anger, guilt, painful memories, and unfinished mourning” (Ames 855).

Therefore, Edmund White’s AIDS writing *The Married Man* should be viewed as a therapeutic writing that combines testimony with a survivor’s life writing that not only records the panorama of the epidemic but its author’s complex sense of guilt and loss, a literary responsibility that White bears:

when the AIDS epidemic made me feel isolated from everyone, I began to write my fellow gay men, obviously an endangered

species. I wanted to reach from my isolation into theirs, express my  
grief and hope that sharing it would ease someone else's burden  
and bring comfort back to me. (White, *My Lives* 6)

Defined as either auto-fiction<sup>39</sup> or autobiographical fiction,<sup>40</sup> Edmund White's AIDS writings serve two different functions—while his life-writings target his gay community, providing a therapeutic space in which the unspeakable grief of death from AIDS can be released, his direct portrayal of the horror of HIV/AIDS may also arouse a different feeling for those outside of the urgent crisis so that they could access to a more real depiction of the disease itself.<sup>41</sup>

While some AIDS writings can be grouped as immersive writings, writings that thrust the readers “into a direct imaginative confrontation with the special horrors of AIDS,” other AIDS writings are counter-immersive writing, writings that “typically focus on characters or speakers who are in various degrees of denial about AIDS themselves,” and endorse the merits of not harrowing the denying reader into further *denial* of this disease (Cady 244). The prevalence of counter-immersiveness in AIDS literature by gay male writers roots in “a lingering depression about homosexuality and in stereotyped understandings of it” (Cady 258). In fact Cady favors immersive

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Spear in “Edmund White on Queer Autofiction” uses auto-fiction referring to White's gay-related works (261-76).

<sup>40</sup> Bertram Cohler argues Edmund White's writings—either coming-out or AIDS stories—should be defined as autobiographical fiction in his effort to overcome his complex feelings of gratitude or shame about being gay (362-79).

<sup>41</sup> While author's intention is one important factor in analyzing the text, this chapter will much emphasize on the effects of AIDS writings to its readers'.

writing for its “willingness to defy the dominant culture directly and fully,” and for “its faithfulness to the emotional and social anguish of people affected by AIDS” (261). However, Cady’s definition has been criticized. Les Brookes views Cady’s approach as itself a form of complicity with the mainstream perception that gay men are targeted as the main group of the HIV carriers (161).

Similarly, Mars-Jones disapproves of the main writing tip for gay writers, arguing that this runs the risk of falling into a structure of stigmatized association based on a homophobic and AIDS-phobic mechanism: “[a]t a time when media coverage tends to push the issues of AIDS and homosexuality closer and closer together, as if epidemic and orientation were synonymous, how can you justify writing fiction that brings this spurious couple together all over again?” (2) Still, all gay writers nowadays confront a dilemma in which gay male writers draw on the “immersive” writing of AIDS to express their anger and as self therapy may run the risk of stigmatizing the gay community *per se* (Mars-Jones 7).

Edmund White himself responds to this distinct position of AIDS writings in this way:

Should I record my fears obliquely or directly, or should I defy them? It is more heroic to drop whatever I was doing and look disease in the eye or should I continue going in the same direction as before, though with a new consecration? Is it a hateful

concession to the disease even to acknowledge its existence?

Should I pretend Olympian indifference to it? Or should I admit to

myself, “Look, kid, you’re scared shitless and that’s your

material?” (White, *My Live* 24)

However, it is for a gay writer to strike a balance. As opposed to the convention of AIDS writings wherein the grotesque AIDS body is projected as a moral image to educate the public of the shame as gay itself, this thesis views Edmund White’s *The Married Man* as a subversive text that draws on an immersive approach to reflect on the epidemic of AIDS and reverses the passive function of grotesque AIDS body. This chapter particularly discusses Edmund White’s *The Married Man* as a subversive response to Cady’s immersive writing in which White’s literary strategy of AIDS restlessness<sup>42</sup> is projected through the image of the grotesque body, that thrusts its readers into the direct imaginative confrontation with the special horrors of AIDS. Also, this grotesque AIDS body will be recognized as a literary weapon which provokes in its reader not only a sense of shock but evokes a sense of empathy, an effect that makes AIDS no longer a mystery to the public.

### Joseph Cady’s AIDS Immersive and Counter-Immersive Writing

Is the suppression or avoidance of the word AIDS itself within literature

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<sup>42</sup> AIDS restlessness is a strategy Edmund White used to challenge its readers as to their ignorance of AIDS. This term will be later exemplified.

evidence of complicity with the dominant ideology of denial of the disease or a defensible strategy for divesting the subject of damaging cultural connotations?

Cady's preference of immersive AIDS writing shows that he takes the former view, as he believes that counter-immersive writings protect the readers from too harsh a confrontation with the subject through a variety of distancing devices so that the term of AIDS is avoided. The representative examples are Paul Monette's *Love Alone:*

*Eighteen Elegies for Rog* and *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*, two notable works in memory of his late lover Roger Horwitz. Cady uses these works' direct association of illness/death and the personal/social havoc of AIDS as examples for his definition of immersive writings of AIDS. Written as witness to the reality of AIDS, the effect of Monette's immersive writings, says Cady, lie in his attempt to "shock and unsettle out of his or her insensibility to AIDS" by virtue of featuring "harrowing specifics about AIDS and its treatment. . . . [which] is dominated by explicit, intense, and unembarrassed statements of painful personal feeling" (246-47). Monette's AIDS writings represent a wrecking chaotic space wherein readers are left entirely "fractured, unmarked, and destabilizing," where the horrors of AIDS are directly, relentlessly thrust in the readers' eyes (Cady 250). This devastating style as writing strategy thereby fulfills Monette's attempt which is to jolt his readers out of their denial and bias of the AIDS.<sup>43</sup> Refusing to keep mute over the devastation of AIDS

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<sup>43</sup> Cady's quotation of Monette's "blood-cries" poems in 247-252. Cady gives some examples of Paul

on his community, Monette, draws on this writing strategy of immersive writing to fight for and beyond “the powers of concessive and ironic outlooks about homosexuality” (260).

Whereas Cady praises Paul Monette’s immersive writings as an oppositional strategy used by gay writers, he dismisses Edmund White’s AIDS writings<sup>44</sup> collected in *Darker Proof* as counter-immersive AIDS writings because of his character’s evasiveness about both their homosexuality and the denial of the AIDS disease themselves. Cady argues that counter-immersive writings refuse to “press its audience to experience the [AIDS] subject in any way that significantly differs from its characters’ stance,” an approach that “makes no compelling demands on the denying reader to change” (257). Edmund White’s short story, “Running on Empty” (1988), is taken by Cady as a representative example of counter-immersive writing, arguably because “the denial of the protagonist Luke is directed toward other PWAs and stems at least in part from his prior denial of his homosexuality.” As such, the story is a normalized and compromised narrative that “sustains that denial through the end of the work or at least not significantly reverse it” (256). Given the absence of the word AIDS and the lack of description in reality, counter-immersive writing, “ultimately

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Monette’s “blood-cries” pomes which repeatedly bespeak in the language of extremity in representing how AIDS has shattered his world, unrestrainedly presenting himself as “sobbing,” “howling,” “shrieking,” “roaring,” “burning,” “aching,” and “screaming” at his loss of Rog

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Holleran’s short story, “Friends at Evening,” (1986) and Adam Mars-Jones’ “Slim” (1986) are chosen as counter-immersive writings for the ironic and reticent tone in relation to AIDS respectively, both of which, suggests Cady, serve no effect to create a sense of shock to their readers, as a way in which the homophobic and AIDS-phobic is not so much relieved as burdened.

allows its audience the ‘escape’ from the terrors of AIDS that immersive writing refuses to provide,” and is a reticent writing that recurses to a homophobic and AIDS-phobic mechanism internalized by the gay writers himself (259). However, this thesis wants to point out that Cady’s choice of White’s story is an earlier work written in the 1980s. Besides, Edmund White has attempted to switch his topics from coming-out stories to HIV/AIDS since he was once attacked by Larry Kramer as a non-serious writer who avoided his literary responsibility as to the Epidemic that was tremendously striking their community. With the gradual change in public opinion and confrontation by more writers of the issue of AIDS, Edmund White’s *The Married Man*, with its portrayal of the grotesque body, may also qualify as an example of immersive writing that reflects White’s own changed response to AIDS.

In his “Sex in the afternoon,” Mark Simpson regards *The Married Man* as White’s masterpiece as it marks him an “undisputable master of a slightly sickened-sickening sensuality,” and as it handles so well the corruption of the flesh and of the soul of PWA (2000). In this work, AIDS restlessness becomes another way of depicting the harrowing effects of AIDS, a metaphor of journey through suffering employed by White himself that links AIDS to an aimless and endless traveling in an invalid attempt to “outstrip, trying to pack into this short life they have left as much experience as possible” (White, *My Lives* 120). Employed as a writing strategy, AIDS restlessness provokes in its readers a sense of suffocation, forcing them to directly

stare and confront with the reality of the plight of AIDS without providing any space for breath “as if they were in a submarine with the air going slowly out of it, which is very much the experience one has dealing with AIDS in real life” (White, *My Lives*, 127) The diseased depicted in White’s AIDS restlessness thus becomes fragments of exile, suffering from journeys of alienation wrought by the AIDS-phobic discourse, desperately waiting for a permanent space to die, a nightmare that triggers a sense of crackdown both on the other characters and also on the readers. White’s AIDS restlessness thus resembles Cady’s immersive writing of AIDS in that the wrecking scenario of diseased/grotesque body thrusts its readers “into a direct imaginative confrontation” with no relief or buffer provided, pressing them to directly witness the most desperate sufferings that has been ignored or demonized for long.

Through the representation of two diseased bodies—Julien and Peter—set within the many trans-atlantic journeys of self-exiled—across Providence, Rhode Island, Key West, Venice, Rome, and finally Morocco—White’s immersive writing is fulfilled. During the journeys, Julien’s suffering from the HIV renders him self-alienated, a body that resembles “the bowler hat descending into the live volcano” (198). Desperate journeys thus become a resistant act which White employs to manifest his awareness of “the conflicting context of discourses of political correctness on the one hand, and an ongoing homophobia on the other” (Purvis 311). It is through White’s literary strategy of AIDS restlessness embedded in these journey

that the reality of AIDS is not so much a secret hidden in the closet born by the gay community itself but a spectacle that lays bare in the text. Employed as counter-praxis, AIDS restlessness thereby becomes a strategy through which White urges his readers to contemplate the essence of life itself and to shatter their indifference and denial as we come to deal with AIDS and PWA.

During the trip to Rome White describes how journey *per se* becomes a motif to foreground the immersive writing of Julien's diseased body:

as they were ambling down the hill to the Villa Medici, suddenly Julien doubled over. He said it felt like sharp needles piercing his eye-ball. . . Austin sat beside him, not even daring to hold his hand lest the pressure of his skin. . . and add to the reality of his suffering, as though pain, like the atmosphere, could be measured in pounds per cubic inch. . . [h]e twisted and turned in his seat, grimaced and thrashed from side to side. (244)

As the trip proceeds from Europe, Mediterranean to North Africa, Julien's physical condition weakens day after day. Austin and Julien's trip to Morocco becomes a journey for death, which foreshadows White's comparison of Julien to a desperate saint "who has already moved halfway toward transcendence" (266). The journey to Morocco thus stands for White's representative scenario of AIDS restlessness, a writing style that resembles Cady's definition as to immersive AIDS writing in which

the vividness of Julien's grotesque body presses its readers to witness the reality of AIDS. It is in their final trip that Julien's body becomes much alienated than ever, "When Austin went to help Julien out of the car, Julien burst into tears and pissed through his robes in a copious yellow soak. "What are you doing!. . . They'll [clerk of the hotel] never let us in if you're going to do that!' Julien's voice was so feeble that Austin had to crunch down to hear him. "I can't help it. I've lost control" (285).

Additionally, the laughter of the Muslim carnival is employed as a comparison to foreground Julien's suffering:

Outside the car were the swirling, laughing crowds and inside two somber men, one as gaunt as a saint or his relics. . . . here the Muslims were the ones who appeared animated and fully human, whereas the Christian tourists were stunned into nearly mineral torpor and indifference. (288)

Transferred from hospital to hospital, the debilitation of Julien's body becomes a weapon employed to accuse the inhumanity and ignorance in medical discourse of AIDS, a loaded gun that forces its readers to witness and thereby rethink the symbolic boundary constructed between the healthy self and the diseased other, and between the heterosexual self and the homosexual other. Thus Julien's dying scene reflects White's deep anger as to the unfriendly attitude toward HIV/AIDS issue:

Finally they pulled into the back of the Clinique du Maroc, which

was not at all the clean, modern, fully staffed hospital Austin had expected. . . . A nurse emerged and looked at Julien contemptuously: “What on earth does *he* have?” she asked, as if dying were comical, certainly a humiliation. “Is he still alive?” [ . . . ] A young doctor in a white coat came through swinging doors and he, too, looked at Julien as if he were a bit of garbage a greengrocer had had the audacity to offer for human consumption. “Are you sure he’s alive?” he asked. (295)

### The Grotesque Body and Death in AIDS Writing

It is said one of the tasks of literature is to impose a structure on life and death, giving meaning to both, a discipline that serves to understand the world wherein we live and to interpret our own role in the human condition. Still the ritual of death, in a consumer-centered society where beauty and youth are overvalued, is constructed as a taboo.<sup>45</sup> Particularly when caused by disease, the process of dying is much feared, a physical decay that we refuse to look at. Though dying and death from disease have been represented in literature since the *Book of Job*, it is after the sexual revolution of the 1970s that they are much highlighted in literary works as a counter-strategy, by

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<sup>45</sup> See Margaret McLaren appropriate Foucault’s idea in exemplifying the fear of death in modern time as a pain in opposition to “survival and to pushing back the moment of death through focusing on the worth of living” (1).

which the bureaucratization and technologization of death from disease can be revealed (Wendell 24). In light of this subversive power, images of dying and death in AIDS writings should be recognized as a political/ethical strategy with which to “affect a constant awareness of the dead and the living and also a process of building an identity that eventually moves beyond the text” (236). The battle against and the eventuality of death embedded within AIDS writings is a textual intervention, the activity of making noise, avoiding deadly silence, a scenario employed to “play[ed] a role in the cure that will come and the lives that will be saved” (Kermode 235):

Too exhausted to feel anything more than mildly curious, he [Austin] turned towards Julien. He looked at the glucose sack and saw it was no longer bubbling. Then he looked at Julien’s face and saw his eyes were wide open and his mouth frozen in a sudden grimace. He was half-raised out of his bed, as if responding to a sudden cry or to violent pain. He was dead. At the same moment a nurse rushed over to the bed, took his pulse and said, “He’s dead.”

She hurried away on a crepe soles. (296-97)

If Julien’s corpse stands for any signification, it is his dying and final death in North Africa that represents a radical protest and vehement rage against medical system’s prevailing indifference toward AIDS. Body image of dying and the final death in AIDS writing is thus both social and literary, weapons that attack the denying reader’s

innocence.

The grotesque body has been conventionally employed in literature for divergent purpose. The grotesque, as Wolfgang Kayser contends, includes the element of suddenness and surprise to its spectacles, terrifying images with their dramatic metamorphosis that engenders in its readers a sense of shock and disgust. Certainly Kayser's theory of the grotesque is based on the structure of binary opposition, the juxtaposition between normal and abnormal, healthy and diseased, thus the unsettling essence of this estranged image of the grotesque, as Kayser puts it, lies in its reversal of readers' a prior aesthetics of the existing world: "we are so strongly affected and terrified because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. . . It is primarily the expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (48). As an endeavor to respond to Kayser's idea of the grotesque as an image of horror, Philip Thomson argues that one of the shock effects of literary grotesque should be used as an aggressive weapon: "the shock-effect of the grotesque may also be used to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective" (Thomson 58).

Similarly, Susan Corey proposes that the grotesque in literature is an image that embodies the clash of seemingly incompatible elements:

an aesthetic form that works through exaggeration, distortions,

contradiction, disorder, and shock to disrupt a sense of normalcy and stimulate the discovery of new meaning and new connections. In its capacity to shock and offend . . . it taps the resources of the body and the unconscious to open up new worlds of meaning and to expose the gaps in our conventional meaning systems. (32)

Disease and grotesque have been conventionally associated by critics.<sup>46</sup> While the body is the empirical quintessence of the self, certain diseases undermine the unity of the body and the experience of embodiment by transforming the once healthy physical appearance into grotesque images. Thus selves that once mastered the body become enslaved by it. Disease breaks through normative boundaries, making the body unclean and unruly and provoking its agents into feelings of uncertainty, guilt, fear, devastations, confusion, anger, and vulnerability. AIDS is such a disease that humiliates the body of its agent, rendering its subject into a grotesque image by disfiguring the physical appearance. This grotesque not only suffers from physical pain, loss of bodily control, and dignity, but becomes a terrifying image that disorients its spectator's sense of normalcy relating to the discourse of body boundary (Thomas 20). Indeed the diseased/dying images depicted in AIDS literature should be recognized as a grotesque body that serves to not only disturb its readers' perception as to the biomedical definition of a normalized body, but evoke a sense of sympathy,

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<sup>46</sup> See Porter argues that the diseased may be recognized as grotesque, a body that provides a shock effect, "the grotesque flesh had power of its own, not least the power of shock" (61).

so that they reevaluate the true meaning of AIDS in their life, a claim that asks for the public to put aside their moral judgment viewing HIV/AIDS merely as a deserving gay plague but as a sort of physical sufferings that someone experiences. Grotesque images in certain AIDS literature thus become a literary weapon and strategy authors employ to challenge the readers to look directly at the reality of AIDS.

Edmund White's *The Married Man* is thus an immersive writing wherein the presence of the grotesque body of PLWA—Julien and Peter's—dominates, by which the diseased body speaks of its rage against the cruelty of the dominant discourse. In opposition to Julien's once phallogocentric identity—a body that is recognized as heterosexual and thus clean, healthy—Peter's body, with his gay identity and HIV positive status, appears in the beginning of the novel as more deviant *per se*. Resembling an ominous raven of martyr, Peter's distorted appearance becomes overshadowed by a *fin de siècle* depravity "he [Austin] didn't even notice the twenty pounds shed since the last time they'd gotten together. His reassuring noises weren't a lie if taken to mean that a new birdlike nobility had descended on his features, as though the victim, before he was sacrificed to the gods, had to be encased in an avian mask" (98). The decadent image of bird becomes the embodiment of Peter's grotesque body, a young body in age but physically deteriorating: "[h]e'd [Peter] always looked like a New England patrician but now his higher cheekbones, whiter hair, bonier shoulders and the birdlike way he cocked his head from side to side made

him resemble the patriarch of a ruling clan, someone outraged by *fin de siècle* depravity or the immorality of abroad” (99). Peter’s diseased/grotesque body is more likely to trigger in the readers not so much a sense of empathy<sup>47</sup> as disgust.

By contrast, Julien’s ambivalent, mysterious sexual identity and his different status of body condition—healthy in the beginning yet diseased/grotesque later—complicates readers’ view. As opposed to Peter’s decadent body, Julien’s body of contradiction should be recognized as that which manifests more subversive power in challenging the gaze of its *denying* readers. Literally, Julien represents the very heterosexual married man as the title of this novel suggests. In the beginning of *The Married Man*, Julien appears as a healthy: “charming young man” (29), and a delicious lad, eye candy to others—both men and women, a body with its masculine opposition to other gay characters, either diseased or feminized. Julien represents a symbol of phallogentrism. To readers, this phallogentric body signifies a Self, as compared with the other feminized diseased body as the Other. Through the comparison of Julien’s health and Peter’s diseased body in the beginning, the symbolic boundary of the Self, which Julien represents, becomes a phallogentric signifier with which most of the readers easily identify:

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<sup>47</sup> According to David Hume, the imaginative projections of empathetic engagement remains not always limited to the present moment, but what we often feel by communication the pains and pleasure of others, which are not in being and which we only anticipate by the force of the imagination. Thus I attempt to argue not only the image of Julien and Peter’s grotesque body but the literary metaphor of AIDS restlessness that are used literary weapon in *The Married Man* serve to arouse reader’s empathy as to the very issue of HIV/AIDS.

He [Julien] looks so young, Austin thought. Then he glanced over at Peter in a cruelly unconscious instant of comparison. Peter looked so—well, it wasn't old, exactly, but dry, as though Peter were the white-haired, stiff-jointed, desiccated version of this brunt young Frenchman with his full lips, rounded rump, his clear dark-blue gaze focused on some distant point of pleasure whereas Peter's washed-out blue eyes were blurred by the indistinctness of all his present woes. (102)

However, Julien's later succumbing to AIDS ironically turns the image of ideal Self into that of the grotesque other, a hideous body that its spectator fears. This infected body, as directly depicted, becomes a grotesque, pressing its reader to directly witness this horrifying scene of disease: "Julien became extremely ill with a microorganism, a kind of tuberculosis, in the blood; it was called 'avian micro bacteria.' His remaining cushion of flesh, no matter how slight, was boiled off his bones; he looked like as ramshackle infant" (249). However, as Julien becomes ill day after day, the image of grotesque proceeds to haunt and suffocate the readers, serving as a weapon imposed on them, forcing them to look directly at this horrible presence. This grotesque image, as Kayser contends, appears as a shocking image for its "definite lack of proportion and organization" (24), revealing the presence of disorder in the midst of apparent order. "[T]his rickety, shivering old man with the protuberant eyes, the thinning, dry

hair, the huge rack of shoulders hanging out a wisp of a torso was, after all, only *thirty-one years old*, under ordinary circumstance just a youngster coming into his own, not just shuffling ancient without hips and a twenty-seven-inch waist, shoes too heavy for his feet, belt too cutting for his tender skin, leather coat too heavy for his frail frame” (260, emphasis mine), a ruined body whose wounds were “excluding pus and the shunt had to be removed” (261). Julien’s distorted body of a grotesque image is emphasized before he eventually dies in Morocco, as a clown-like freak stumbling amid the carnival:

His body was all feet, knees and shoulders, with dry boards for bones connecting them. The skin was hanging loosely and yellow. The knees were nodes that bulked far large than the thighs or calves. The head was huge and heavy, hard to maintain upright, like a painted papier-mache carnival head worn by a frail child, a head with just one expression. (288)

As such, no longer does Julien’s body signify a locus of transcendence, but that serves as a loaded weapon which creates a sense of shock to its spectator, “Julien was too skinny to sit on an uncushioned metal chair in a café. His face, gaunter and browner than a Navajo’s, *frightened* the Romans, even the flirtatious young men around the Campo dei Fiori *averted* their eyes” (243, emphasis mine). He is no longer a charming man appealing to the eyes of others, but instead a monster feared by them.

This contrast is foregrounded by Marie-France's reticent yet aversive gaze upon this decaying body, who once admires Julien's masculine physical countenance: "[i]f Marie-France was shocked by Julien's protruding bones, brown face and stubble, his layers of shirts stuffed above his hipless jeans and slat-thin leg, she didn't let on at all. She was courteous, merry, light" (248).

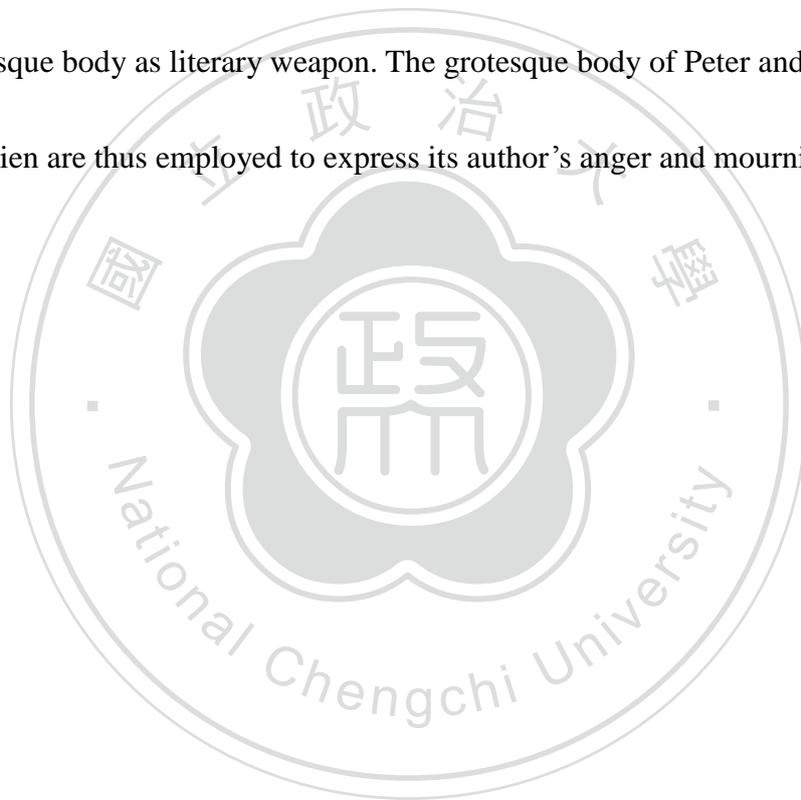
If the apparent hostility to PWA by the dominant biomedical discourse is the target Edmund White attempts to question, the reticence of the upper-class as to HIV/AIDS is also challenged through Austin's deprecating response:

The shame of disease, of their loathsome, terminal, sexual disease, overwhelmed Austin and he felt his cheeks burning. Marie-France even appeared to him to have turned fractionally colder, as if she regretted that her innocent daughter had been sullied by the contact [with Julien]. (249)

It is through Marie-France's change that enables the readers to see the once phallogocentric signifier Julien, as compared with Peter's already homosexualized, *fallen* body in the very beginning of the text, as a more aggressive literary weapon used by the author to question and to shatter the readers' either naivety or denial as to AIDS itself.

In Wolfgang Kayser's view, the grotesque arises in periods of insecurity, when "the belief . . . in a perfect and protective natural order cease[s] to exist." In addition,

the essence of grotesque, as Kayser holds, lies on its horror-provoking potential to create shock effect, as he puts it, “it [grotesque] results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence” (37). Grotesque should thus be reviewed as a subversive dimension piercing the façade of reason, normality, and certitude. Edmund White’s *The Married Man* is thus an immersive writing of AIDS using the grotesque body as literary weapon. The grotesque body of Peter and most importantly Julien are thus employed to express its author’s anger and mourning.



## CHAPTER 4

### Finding Hope in AIDS writing: Closet Body and Queer Kinship

#### The Dynamic of Hope/Despair Embodied in the HIV Closet Body

Hope lies in the concern for something Other, something better, something not yet, an inherent element in the human condition and one of the deep components of human creativity. It is hope which allows us to go on when conditions look bad or even impossible to change. The essence of hope manifests itself in one's longing for a possibility of change over his unfulfilled reality. It is realistic rather than fantastic, a desire to transcend from the distress of the present onto a future which is different, new, and always better:

Hope alone is to be called 'realistic', because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught. It does not take things as they happen to stand or lie, but as progressing, moving things with possibilities of change. . . Thus hopes and anticipations of the future are not a transfiguring glow superimposed upon a darkened existence, but are realistic ways of perceiving the scope of our real possibilities, and as such they set

everything in motion and keep it in a state of change. Hope and the kind of thinking that goes with it consequently cannot submit to the reproach of being utopian, for they do not strive after things that have 'no place,' but after things that have 'no place as yet' but can acquire one (Moltman 2-3).

Still, critics tend to consider hope and despair to be a linked dichotomous response to the hard times human beings experience—wartime, plague, and also incurable disease (Fletcher 521). Generally while hope may be acknowledged as a dream of liberation, despair as a consequence of imprisonment, what counts this twin psychosomatic relation is the belief/disbelief in a futurity, whether redeemed or doomed respectively, so that in effect these twin states of mind are always in the aspect of expectancy.

Literature acts as a discourse to express such a twin relationship.<sup>48</sup> As Flo Keyes argues, writers tend to create positive, hope-inspiring images as a way to fight against the perception of despair wrought in times of distress and danger. It is a desire to present a promising future, “any work that predicts a future for humankind, no matter how bleak that future may be, is providing a degree of hope because the very existence of a future means that mankind has the chance to change” (178). Still, the

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<sup>48</sup> See Angus Fletcher contend that the twin relationship of hope and despair inherent in western literature derives from the idea of expectation in Judeo-Christian ideal. As he puts it, the spirit of faith rooted in Christianity in particular builds “theological frames for imagining the future and our saved-unsaved relation to it” (523). He thus gives literary examples to account for this twin relationship of hope/despair is based on a Christian thought for a better life when one confronts hard times. He thus illustrates from Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Christopher Marlowe’s *Faust*, to Charles Dickens’ novels to explain the function of using the dichotomy of hope and despair.

feature of AIDS writings, as John Clum defines in “The Time Before the War: AIDS, Memory, and Desire,” lies in its focus on memory of the past and its view that the present is sad and terrifying, and the future is drastically foreshortened, “a wasteland in which memory and desire are poignantly intertwined” (648). To Clum, only through writing about the nostalgic past<sup>49</sup> before the emergence of AIDS can we subtly affirm the foreshortened and uncertain future in the face of those devastating deaths. While writing of the past becomes a strategy through which a terrifying present and an uncertain future can be avoided and further healed, hope for the future seems an impossible element in AIDS writings. Similarly, Robert Franke holds in “Beyond Good Doctor, Bad Doctor: AIDS Fiction and Biography as a Developing Genre,” the feature of AIDS writings manifests itself in a prevalence of negative attitudes toward modern science and technology in that, defined as a fatal and incurable disease in terms of the doctors, who traditionally offered hope, all the blame and anger against the doctor becomes an expression of their hopelessness and despair about the future (93-95). While struggling between the hedonist past that appears a nostalgic romance and an abyss of dark present, AIDS writings seem a genre that is equal to *No Future*.

While some of the queer theorists attempt to dislodge queer from its gossamer attachment to sexuality by thinking queer as a critique of normativity *tout court* rather

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<sup>49</sup> Clum illustrates this sex liberation past in the 70s embodied in the works of Paul Monette’s *The Borrowed Time* and Robert Ferro’s *Second Son*.

than sexual normativity specially, they come up with the idea queer time, a subversive concept that is used as a counter-narrative of teleology and an alternative chronotopes.<sup>50</sup> Emerging along with the threat of AIDS at the end of the twentieth century, queer time is a “dark nightclub,” a perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of organized notion of time defined in the mechanism of heterosexuality—adolescence, early adulthood, marriage, reproduction, child rearing, retirement, death—a denormativization of temporality through its relation to desire, wish, and the impossibility of sustaining linear narratives of teleological time, especially in relation to the hope of *longs recits*. Queer time gives subjects’ perception over diminishing future as a result of AIDS, becomes a counter-hegemonic logic that emphasizes *here and now*. As opposed to a notion of future as a desirable logic, queer temporality undermines the normative narratives of linear historicism, an alternative life narrative that “pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity” (Halberstam 152). Such theorists of queer time tend to identify progressive, and thus future-oriented, teleologies as aligned with heteronormative reproduction. Similarly, Lee Edelman appropriates Lacan’s notion of time’s move into the future as an *always already* futile attempt to reconcile the Symbolic and the Real, arguing that because Lacan’s foundational lack can never be filled, any hope that the future will be better than the present remains an ideological lie that leaves people feel better about

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<sup>50</sup> See Madhavi Menon’s “Spurning Teleology in *Venus and Adonis*” (2005) and Elizabeth Freeman’s “Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories” (2005).

our failing in the present, whereby the status quo can be maintained and reinforced.

Therefore he suggests queers should resist the discourse of futurism embodied in the equation of children with futurity that only perpetuates a suffocating heteronormativity (Edelman, *Homographesis* 5). Thus, queerness only belongs to the present. While queer time may serve as an subverting concept of which queer subculture could be created by virtue of liberating fixed sexual desires defined under the regime of heteronormativity, Judith Halberstam still suggests the liminal subjects oscillate between the norms regulated by a heterosexual life narrative that governs the recognizability of the human and the transient, extrafamilial style of queer life, an ambivalence of overlap as to the notion of time that instead “preserves the critique of heteronormativity that was always implicit in queer life” (Edelman 154). As a result, despite these liminal subjects queer temporality, as Halberstam argues, acts as a challenge to the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative, a logic precipitated by the emergence of AIDS that “lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2), the notion of future itself remains a problematic logic acquired by those queer subjects. Could queers still keep a faith in future in Time of AIDS? Is there any hope inherent within AIDS writings? Could writers of AIDS literature leave any hope for his readers?

The great utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch develops a method of cultural criticisms which expands conventional Marxian approaches to culture and

ideology, in which Bloch charts the vicissitude of hope, arguing hope and dreaming for a better future permeates everyday consciousness and its articulation in cultural forms—film, literature, advertising, and other cultural phenomena—forms that contain emancipatory moments which project visions of a searching of a better future from the misery of the structure of life under despair of certain discourse. To Bloch the consciousness of three dimensions of human temporality—past, present, and future—is intertwined. As a process philosopher who believes the reality is not to be taken as closed, but rather moving, Bloch contends that time should be recognized as an open system based on the principle of hope as a guiding principle of both subjective and objective reality. As such he offers a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the present can direct us to a better future. And its unrealized hopes and potentials of the present, which could have been and can yet be, is constituted by latency and tendency, an unrealized potentialities of the present that can thus serve to lead to a utopian future. To Bloch, the unrealized potentiality of the present is embodied as an Educated Hope,<sup>51</sup> which stands for the reality of the *Not-Yet-Here*, as a world whose real hope for the future is realized in the very present.

As opposed to other queer theorists of anti-relationality,<sup>52</sup> who write about

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<sup>51</sup> Bloch distinguishes two type of hope/utopia. While abstract hope are untechered from any historical consciousness, a banal optimism, concrete (Educated) hopes are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized and potential.

<sup>52</sup> The advocates of anti-relationality in queer theory in the works of Leo Bersani, Lee Eldeman, and slightly Judith Halberstam, argues queerness should avoid notions of futurity and collectivism as a way to dissociate queer discourses from the heteronormativity of the capitalist norms of family values. Still as Munoz contends his queer futurity is a notion that write against these antirelational movement, as he

abandonment to the negative and a subsequent rejection or evasion of politics, arguing against the possibility of queer future, Jose Esteban Munoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* holds queerness is not so much a current identity as that exist for a utopia, “an ideality,” developing a notion of hope and utopia for those who fail to fit the regulation of heteronormativity (Mounoz 1). As Munoz continues, the notion of antiutopianism in queer studies more often than not intertwining with antirelationality “has led many scholars to an impasse wherein they cannot see futurity for the life of them” (12). In fact, Munoz appropriates Bloch’s concept of utopia as a critical and collective longing that is relational to historically situated struggles, which “found solid ground for a critique of a totalizing and naturalizing idea of the present in his concept of the no-longer-conscious [of the past],” which in turn enables for the deployment of a “critically hermeneutics attuned to comprehending the not-yet-here [future]” (12). Far from conceptualizing queer collectivity as a political impossibility for a future, Munoz contends that an analysis of how queer belonging is demonstrated through aesthetic works that reveals the political potentiality of queer future, a potentiality that is glimpsed in the gestures that exist within the present, “a type of affective excess that presents the enabling force of a forward-dawning futurity” (23). In contrast to Halberstam’s idea of queer time that

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puts it, he attempts to “combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current movement, a version of reality that naturalizes and cultural logics as capitalism and heteronormativity” (12).

serves a discontinuum as to historical structure, queerness to Munoz is not yet here but a progression of potentiality that is “distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future, ‘now,’ is queerness’ domain” (1). To Munoz, queer time should thus be recognized as a continuum constituted not only through the past and present but leading to a future, an ambivalent convergence of past, present, and future, a politics “oriented towards and not ends” (281). Queer writing in the time of AIDS therefore is not so much an oppositional project about “hope vs hopelessness” or at the very least “hope or hopelessness” as the conjunction “and” (281).

In this chapter, Jose Esteban Munoz’s queer appropriation of Bloch’s potentiality acting counter to other theorists of queer time will be employed to account for how White’s AIDS writing of *The Married Man* should be recognized as an aesthetic work that shows ambivalent temporality of past, present, and future through the embodiment of Austin’s HIV asymptomatic /closet body, a sense of ambivalence as to the slippage of future/no future that juxtaposes with that of hope and despair respectively, whereby Munoz’s queer dialectical relation of *no-longer-conscious* (healthy past) and *not-yet-here* (utopian future) can be articulated through the AIDS writing in the present.

Besides this dialect as to queer temporality, the construct of queer kinship urged by the circuit of HIV virus will be recognized as an alternative structure that brings about the element of hope/future in White’s AIDS writing, primarily because this

kinship subverts the negative effects of HIV virus historicized by the heteronormativity, of which the HIV virus instead becomes a positive substance that leads its hosts into a future through the trace of memory once shared among the members within this kinship. As such the episteme of queer temporality becomes more complicated by bringing in Munoz's idea of queer futurity to discuss White's aesthetic work of AIDS writing, and to see how the characters within this AIDS writing struggles ambivalently between *the no-longer-conscious of a healthy past* and *the not-yet-here of utopian future*, a text that is struggling between hope/despair, future/no future, as a counter to Judith Halberstam's idea of queerness that exists exclusively at the movement of "here and now," as that which serves "a real dose of utopianism" (Munoz 35). As Munoz continues, this queer future helps us imagine "a space outside of heteronormativity" permitting us to "conceptualize new worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the institutionalized state of homophobia" (35).

Hope for the future is essential for all people in order to create meaning in our lives, and it is especially crucial in the depth of an epidemic. As opposed to Judith Rabkin's idea of hope that it is normal to assume that life will continue into a distant future, people with AIDS seem not to have the luxury of anticipating the future (1). Still, hope for the future, as Rabkin continues, prevails, "[e]ven in extreme circumstances, hope may shrink but it need not disappear altogether" (2). While

despair regarding contracting the HIV virus leaves those a downward process that leads to being stuck in a situation, losing grip, sinking into a narrow existence, losing perspective of the future, hope is surely the most indomitable and necessary of feelings, a notion of future oriented of the belief that life is still worth living, and it is even truer to whom the signs of symptoms is still closeted (Kylma & Vehvilainen & Lahdevirta 775). As a physician that is HIV asymptomatic after 20 years, Michael Shernoff, mentions in “A History of Hope: The HIV Rollercoaster” that, given the ambivalent feature of the HIV virus, the perception of despair is complicated by the hope for future, especially for those HIV asymptomatic/closet patients, as he puts it, this closet body represents an ambivalent substance that struggle between the dynamic life of normal/abnormal, hope/despair, having future/no future:

Many people have truly come back from the dead and are, viscerally and without qualification, hopeful. But this truth cannot ease the reality that people are still dying from AIDS, and that new people are still becoming infected. Nor can it bolt from memory those who have died and the belief that had they survived a little longer, they would, in the end, have lived a lot longer. (Shernoff 6)

To the HIV closet body, the HIV virus thus becomes a substance of ambivalence, complicating the dynamic of hope/despair, future/no future, and an ambiguity that provokes its host a sense of uncanny regarding the temporality of past/present/future.

Austin's closet/asymptotic body in Edmund White's *The Married Man* indeed represents a signifier of the ambivalent feature of the HIV virus, a text that responds to Munoz's idea of queer utopia through revealing the dialectics of *the no-longer-conscious of a healthy past* prior to the emergence and the outburst of AIDS in the 1980s and *the not-yet-here utopian future* within writing the very *present* of Austin's closet body. As Munoz puts it, the potentiality of hope transcends beyond this ambivalent present, "a turn to the no-longer-conscious enabled a critical hermeneutics attuned to comprehending the not-yet-here (3). This temporal calculus performed and utilized the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now," (12) an ambivalence that instead empowers AIDS writings a potentiality of hope for the future.

As Munoz contends "the no-longer-conscious," what is left forgotten in the past, can serve as a tool for resisting and transcending the limitations of the present into potentiality of utopia. Thus to Munoz, queerness remains a prison that is "not-yet-here," but existing in the future. In fact, Austin's closet body—an ambivalent body that signifies both hope and despair, consciously struggling between future/no future—represents embodiment of Munoz's queer reading of the dialect of "no-longer-conscious" and "not-yet-here." Austin's closet body thus contrasts Halberstam's notion of queer temporality that is exclusively here and now, but represents a potentiality of hope promised within Edmund White's AIDS writings.

In the very beginning of *The Married Man*, Austin confesses his HIV seropositivity (14). In a sense, a seropositive HIV body renders its host that supposes to lead a hedonist life that responds to Judith Halberstam's notion of a queer time, a libertine whose hope for future is replaced by the alternative queer lifestyle that cares exclusively in the very "here and now." As opposed to this hedonist lifestyle, Austin, like other HIV positive PAWs, is overwhelmed by the threat of AIDS death and the concern for futurity. Closet and invisible as they are, the HIV virus still poses an extreme threat to Austin's sense of future:

His mind slid away from the painful subject of the future. He had no future, which meant that he couldn't fully immerse himself in the present. . . . He knew that some people were galvanized by the prospect of an imminent AIDS death, but he'd become even lazier and more disorganized than previously. (82)

This approach of death caused by AIDS casts a shadow unto Austin's consciousness, "[h]e would soon turn fifty and was seropositive, and he now had a heightened sense of the swathe his life was cutting" (54). "Future" in fact appears as a wishful thinking that Austin dares not even to possess (94), the "unknown" that he stumbled toward (96):

"Are you worried about the future?" Peter asked him. . . .

Austin laughed. "Honestly, I don't think that far ahead. I just rush

around to my class and prepare him meals. I live from day to day,  
not wisely like AA people but as though I'd been stunned." He then  
asked, "Are you afraid, Peter?"

"Of dying? I'd like to have one good affaire before I die—I stil  
look all right, don't I? Tell me. Do I look AIDSy? If you saw me at  
a bar would you be scared off?"

"No, not at all," Austin lied. (190-91)

Preoccupied by the threat of death related to AIDS, Austin struggles over the  
ambivalence as to the very issue of future and hope. In *The Married Man*, hope  
appears a luxurious dream, and a wishful thinking, "since no one escaped AIDS, it  
seemed. Austin mustn't entertain false hopes. He must train himself to accept the  
inevitable" (109). Given this imminent danger, he recognizes himself as another  
"facing death" (114).

Nevertheless, as opposed to Julien and Peter, who have already shown certain  
signs of the symptoms of AIDS, Austin's asymptotic/closet body signifies an  
ambivalent position lingering between normal/abnormal not only to his own  
consciousness but to the eye's of others. And it is this ambivalence that problematizes  
the essence of queer time and further dynamics of the binary of hope and despair in  
White's AIDS writing. HIV seropositive as he is, Austin appears as a robust  
middle-aged man who still attends the gym to enjoy the physical training and thus

exposes himself to the chances of cruising with other guys (1). Still, what makes *The Married Man* a problematic writing as to the HIV virus lies in Austin's HIV closet/asymptotic status, an ambivalent body that is visually healthy but its seropositivity hidden physically in Austin's consciousness. Despite his HIV seropositive diagnosis, his body remains closeted and invisible from any signs of the symptoms; an illusion that renders Austin and confuses *the no-longer-conscious of a healthy past* with his very present. As opposed to the grotesque body whose bodily signs of symptoms of HIV have rendered them outcasts off the symbolic boundary of normal/abnormal, Austin's closet body is an ambivalent text in between the symbolic boundary. Austin thus represents an ambiguous substance, an ambivalent subject that breaks down the symbolic boundary of healthy/diseased and future/no future, a division that is explicitly cut down in other AIDS writings:

Peter perched on the chair beside his breathing was shallow and fast and his eyes were racing here and there. With the force of a falling stone it came over Austin that they were occupying entirely different places. Austin, though positive, was still bloomingly healthy, making enough money to travel and invite his friends along, embarked on a new love affaire, whereas Peter was markedly ill, frightened and disorientated. . . Austin had a present, even future, whereas Peter had only a past in which Austin bulked

large. (98)

The sense of uncanny provoked by this illusion therefore renders Austin to lead a double life, lingering between the ambivalent conscious of hope/despair, future/no future. This ambivalence embedded within Austin's body and considers the HIV virus itself as an elusive substance, an abstract notion that only *exists* when people discuss in the public: "Austin decided they should never talk about AIDS; it was an abstract thing that would never take hold if they ignored it" (149).

Thus the ambiguous attribute of HIV virus that is evident in Austin's closeted HIV body thus leads him to an overlap between the *no-longer-conscious* of a healthy past and the *not-yet-here* of the potential future. The present, on the contrary, becomes a vacuum that serves no meaning for him. As opposed to Julien and Peter's grotesque body whose future seems not promising, Austin's closet body represents a signifier of ambivalence brought about by HIV:

Here was Austin, entering his fifties, making a new start in life back in America, infected but healthy, even chubby, and he had invited along Peter and Julien, both years younger than he but much more immediately endangered. He wondered if he'd infected both of them—it was certainly possible. Maybe his virus was benign to him but lethal to everyone else. (160)

Given the ambivalent feature of the HIV virus, Austin's closet body represents a promised substance in which the potentiality of hope/future can be seen:

“. . . I [Peter] hope you'll go with me to the bars.”

“It's years since I've been to a bar. And look at me, how out of shape I am. Won't they turn me away?”

“Oh, but people like a bit of heft now, Austin. It shows you're not sick.”

“Everyone says that,” Austin grumbled, smiling, “but it's not strictly speaking true.” (217)

Along with the emergence of AIDS, the notion of health appears a collective fantasy of the gay community that is no longer conscious, a nostalgic past that is fantasized by those who still live under the shadow of AIDS. In fact, the ambivalence of Austin's closet body thus becomes a signifier which the collective fantasy of a *no-longer-conscious of a healthy past* and *the potential hope of the not-yet-here* can be projected, a problematic body employed to break through the limit of AIDS writings shadowed by the equation of gay and PWAs with imminence and eventuality of an AIDS death. In fact, as opposed to Peter and Julien, he is a man who has a past to remember, a present to live in, and a promising future to embrace, a man who could afford the past as a luxury (241). This attribute of ambivalence regarding the HIV virus embedded in the body thus promises Austin a chance to re-employ and re-create

the fantasy of a “no-longer-conscious” past. By consciously switching back and forth the time span of the nostalgic past and the potential future, Austin’s closet body represents a potentiality of queer futurity inherent within the time of AIDS as opposed to Halberstam’s queer temporality that ends “here and now,” proving that queerness can be been as not-yet-here.

### Queer Kinship Constructed by HIV Virus

Ideologically, gay men were depicted as hedonist deviants who lead a care-free lifestyle countering to the genealogically calculated relations of *family*. Following this logic, and in an amazing variety of contexts, the gay identity has been portrayed as a rejection of the family and departure from hegemonic understandings of kinship. As Simon Watney contends “we are invited to imagine some absolute divide between the two domains of ‘gay life’ and the ‘family,’ as if gay men grew up, were educated, worked and lived our lives in total isolation from the rest of the society” (103). And this division has been employed by theorists of queer temporality who suggest an anti-relationality strategy of which queer should abandon the value of “family” as a way to counteract against the regulation of heteronormativity. Similarly, Dennis Altman suggests a “straight is to gay as family is to no family” thesis, “the homosexual represents the most clear-cut rejection of the nuclear family that exists, and hence is persecuted because of the need to maintain the hegemony of that

concept” (47).

Still, arguing for a more democratic alternative free from Freud’s derivation of significant relationships from filiation, Guy Hocquenghem urges gay men to elaborate friendship networks and a potentiality of kinship as a counter-praxis to disengage the boundary of heteronormativity (21). In the same vein, suggesting from an oppositional ideology, Kath Weston contends that the very essence of gay kinship lies in its value of an individualistic formulation, as she puts it, “the family we choose” shows to counteract a historically collective trauma left by heteronormative regime, “many people have a tendency to create ties primarily with people they perceive to be ‘like’ them, using one criterion or another to gauge similarity. . . families we choose offer novel possibilities for healing some of the rifts and wounds left over from a painful decade of learning to deal in difference” (207). The gay family, as Weston continues, gestures an alternative value as opposed to the heterosexual family who “place family and friends in an exclusive, even antagonistic, relationship,” *the family we choose* instead pictures kinship as an extension of friendship, rather than viewing the two as competitors or assimilating friendships to biogenetic relationships (118). As she puts it, a gay family is more inclusive than exclusive as comparing to a heterosexual one, “people from diverse backgrounds depicted themselves as the beneficiaries of better friendships than heterosexuals, or made a case for the greater significance and respect they believed gay people accord to friendship,” a more

extensive kinship that embrace rather than exclude (118).

Similarly, Judith Butler questions in “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?” that the essence of kinship is far from a fully autonomous sphere but an ideological apparatus constructed by heteronormativity by which the distinction of hierarchies between legitimate and illegitimate queer lives is reinforced (15). This ideological apparatus sutured within the institution of heterosexual marriage as the regulation of the state, contends Butler, marks “how the field of intelligible and speakable sexually is circumscribed so that we can see how options outside of marriage are becoming foreclosed as unthinkable, and how the terms of thinkability are enforced by the narrowed debates over who and what will be included in the norm,” a bond that is sexually extended to maintain the normalized kinship (18). Given the rapid development of global economy, argues Butler, the normalized form of kinship constructed exclusively to heterosexual couples of biological basis, are displaced by a “breakdown” of queer kinship that “not only displaces the central place of biological and sexual relations from its definition, but gives sexuality a separate domain from that kinship,” a new tie that opens up and calls into the question of traditional signification of kinship to “a set of community ties that are irreducible to [biological ] family” (37-38).

Following Bulter’s oppositional concept of queer kinship constructed outside of biological basis, Tim Dean argues for a much more subversive idea of kinship related

to the circuit of the HIV virus, considering kinship “less as inert substance than as intentional activity” (89).<sup>53</sup> Subverting the negative effects of the HIV virus as merely stigma and shame, Dean considers the HIV virus itself may be recognized as a particular form of memory, offering an effective strategy to maintain certain relations with the dead (88). This viral consanguinity wrought by the HIV epidemic, contends Tim, converses strangers into relatives (91). Given the spread of the HIV virus, the queer community has become stronger from the virus by transforming relational affines (lovers) into consanguines (siblings) as a way to extend the scale of queer kinship, transforming the negative effects of the epidemic of HIV/AIDS into a more positive source that serves to counter to the normalized foundation of heteronormativity (93).

Some observers of AIDS in late twentieth-century America have suggested that gay men look not to their biological family but peer caring networks as an alternative kinship strategy of which the responsibility is demonstrated. As a result, the HIV virus has become a catalyst of which the scale of queer kinship is constituted and further enlarged. Edmund White’s *The Married Man* in fact demonstrates such an AIDS writing in which the negative effects of HIV virus has been subverted by transforming the stigma of virus into a more positive shared substance providing an enclave of

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<sup>53</sup> Tim Dean originally considers this subversive queer kinship exclusive to bareback culture practiced among gay community. HIV virus, says Dean, represents a gift circulates among those who employ bareback. Still, I appropriate Tim Dean’s idea of relating HIV virus with gift, whether deliberately or not, a substance that unites PWAs as an alternative kinship.

kinship, a basic act of care outside of biological bond, an alternative relatedness that brings a light of hope in time of despair.

Throughout *The Married Man* characters are encircled within this queer kinship that acts opposed to the biological notion of kinship defined under heteronormativity. The triangular relationship between Austin, Julien, and Peter should be recognized as an alternative bond acts counter to the mechanism of monogamy. Their bond is not so much fixedly circumstanced but dynamic. They could be a father-son relationship, “[t]hat was a comprehensible relationship, father-son, and given their age difference it put a respectable gloss on a visual disparity that if it were simply sexual might have seemed indecent. . . Unlike a straight man of forty-nine, his own children hadn’t ratcheted him year another notch toward death” (95). Still their bond could be even gender subversion as mother-son, “Austin had become his [Julien] sidekick, his only friend. Maybe he’d also become something like Julien’s mother” (109). Beside parental relation, their queer kinship as responds to Weston’s suggestion is more inclusive than exclusive, a relatedness that, as Austin suggests, acts opposed to heterosexual values in that it is an inclusive bond of which “friendship ruled supreme” (177), a kinship that is opt to transform the form of love into that of friendship, embracing instead of excluding former lovers (118):

Austin was thrilled. . . Now he thought that he could invite Julien to live with him. Of course Peter wouldn’t want to leave New York

for Providence, but he might have to spend longer and longer periods of convalescence with Austin—and with Julien, if they should stay together. Maybe because Austin was a product of the unpossessive 1970s, he'd always thought gay men shouldn't pair off in little monogamous units. They should stay loyal to their old friends and lovers and take them in when necessary, not reject their former mates like heartless heterosexuals. (104)

Still the queer kinship constituted in *The Married Man* is further intensified through the substance of the HIV virus, wherein the kinship is encircled by virtue of the fact that one another play the role of caregiver. Tim Dean turns the negative effect of the HIV virus upside down, arguing that the virus had become a substance for queer reinventions of kinship in that it provides a crucial means of showing relatedness (89). Additionally, this alternative form of kinship constructed by the resource of the HIV virus has been reinforced through the ethics of care shared one another within that enclave (Murray 335). It has been argued amongst the diverse resistant strategies that oppose moralistic representations of HIV/AIDS and the stigmatization of those with HIV/AIDS in literary forms, one mode of resistance frequently is employed within HIV/AIDS writings, sick role subversion, a narrative that draws on a wider shift from an emphasis on the HIV patient as a “compliant, passive medical object of care” towards the sick person as the subject, the active agent of care (Kieinman 3-4).

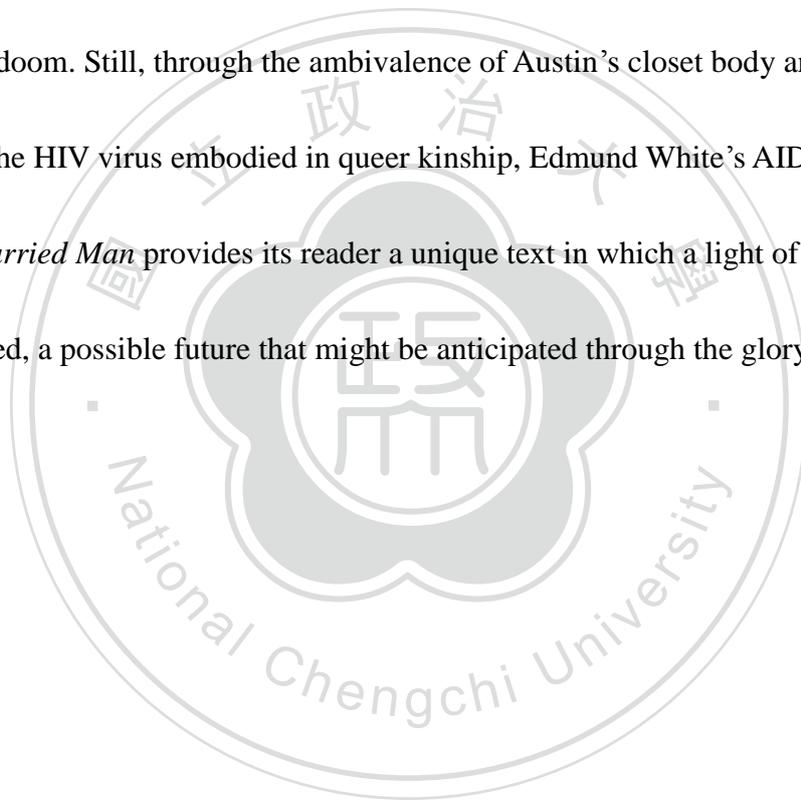
Edmund White's *The Married Man* should be recognized as a text where its gay characters are embraced as a queer kinship through the HIV viral exchange, and among this queer kinship, the intensity is completed by virtue of Austin's role as an active caregiver. HIV seropositive as he is, Austin appears as an active caregiver throughout the text when Peter and Julien one by one fall ill with AIDS, an ethics of care that is driven not only from a sense of guilt that it might be Austin himself that transmit the virus but a sense of responsibility, a resistant narrative that counters to conventional AIDS writing in which PWAs are depicted as "passive victims but active caregivers" (Kieinman 4). Throughout the text, the HIV virus itself has become a substance that exacerbates the *promise* of caring in time of AIDS that bonds one another. This ethic of care brought by promise constitutes an alternative kinship performing between Austin to Peter, Julien to Austin, and finally Austin to Julien when the latter came down with the HIV virus after the two, "he'd [Austin] always promised Peter he'd take care of him if he ever came down with AIDS," (12) "Peter and Austin had promised that they'd take care of each other, and now the time for honoring that pledge was speedily coming due" a form of relatedness that is combined together through virus (105). As such it is the effect of time that intensifies their bond, leading them toward an unknown yet promising future,<sup>54</sup> "[t]hey'd made a pact, not

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<sup>54</sup> Given Tim Dean's idea, HIV virus can be recognized as a substance that provides a trace through the route of transmission as a way to enlarge the scale of queer kinship, a trace that can be employed to lead queerness into a "future." Despite the host of HIV virus may die, this trace still pass down into one another. This trace, as suggests in the end of *The Married Man*, is maintained by Austin's closet body.

sworn in blood but in time, a more solemn fluid, to look after each other” (160). As Julien’s signs of HIV symptoms progresses, their bond intensifies, “Austin had never shirked his duty toward Julien. . . Austin felt committed to Julien, joined to him: married,” a relatedness that is united by the virus (205).

At the turn of the twentieth-first century, HIV/AIDS remains an incurable disease. Given the incurability of AIDS, literature responding to this issue seems to bathe in an atmosphere of doom. Still, through the ambivalence of Austin’s closet body and the subversion of the HIV virus embodied in queer kinship, Edmund White’s AIDS writing *The Married Man* provides its reader a unique text in which a light of hope can be witnessed, a possible future that might be anticipated through the glory of humanity.



## CONCLUSION

Still, homosexuality in the gay writings written prior to the emergence of the Stonewall riot is mainly employed as a foil to fulfill the operation of the homophobic ideology. As Edmund White suggests, gay writings then were divided into two general types, “the apology” and “the pornographic rag.” The former is evident in its biased portrayal of the doom of the fallen gay characters whereby the fear of gay male hedonist lifestyle as a threat to main ideology is purified, and the latter aims at gay readers sold at exorbitant prices under the counter (*Joy of Gay Lit* 110). In contrast to this ramification of the homophobic mechanism in pre-Stonewall gay writings, as David Bergman holds, writings of Violet Quill transgress the boundary of heteronormativity by depicting the true experience of gay life in a *positive* light, “shar[ing] several impulses: a desire to write works that reflected their gay experiences, and specifically, autobiographical fiction; a desire to write for gay readers without having to explain their point of view to shocked and unknowing heterosexual readers; and finally, a desire to write . . . in a selection of the language really used by gay men” (20). Soon after the epidemic of AIDS struck the gay community in the early 1980s, writers started to produce an always somber, often

highly political literature that sought to bring attention to its terrifying impact on gay life, an activist narrative written when politicians and community leaders remained mute.<sup>55</sup>

Since the emergence of the Epidemic, AIDS and gay men are linked in complex and contradictory ways. The constructivist problematically demands recognizing that AIDS is a hegemonic “signifier” (Edelman 9) that acquires meanings “from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it” (Crimp 3). As such AIDS has become a highly contested signifier which writers attempt to reconstruct. AIDS is thus recognized as a material as and about the bodies who suffer, get angry, feel pleasure, pain, and die. As opposed to biomedical discourse of AIDS, AIDS writings, as Cady argues for the strategy of immersive writing, transform the meaningful works of significations into real depictions of the sufferings, a literary strategy that helps to shatter “the profound denial that has dominated the worldwide cultural reaction to AIDS” (244). Edmund White once comments in “Journals of Plague Years” that AIDS writing derives from a burning desire for remembrance of the dead, a desire “to get it all down, to crowd even the margins with necessary details, recollected words, horrifying events—all of it unspeakable, although we are precisely the people who must speak about it” (16). AIDS writings, says White, are prompted

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<sup>55</sup> David Bergman suggests such narrative are reflected on Larry Kramer’s *The Normal Heart* and William M. Hoffman’s *As Is*, writings that respond to those political apparatus that turn a deaf ear as to the disease itself (3).

by the living and suffering individuals directly out of the magma, materials that “is like a big bully growing steadily bigger, and we grab for any technique that will convey all we are feeling and thinking and doing” (12). It is a witness recorded by the suffers themselves, a reality bourn out of a desire to show their remembrance for those have died, those who still suffer, and those who see their family and friends suffer.

AIDS writings, as White suggests, derive from a combination of sex, love, and death, in which the problematic signifier of AIDS defined by the biomedical discourse is responded to and further questioned. Edmund White’s *The Married Man* is such a text in which the complex of love, sex, and death are depicted as a literary strategy which opposes the negative effects of previous AIDS writings. Edmund White seeks to inverse the convention of previous AIDS writings in which negative depictions of AIDS victims are foreground as a pedagogical material recouring to heteronormative values:

Of course, it could be said that most of AIDS literature has been assimilationist—the sick son is received back into the bosom of his family. If family members must accept his homosexuality, he must accept their love and all it entails. The gay man is no longer perceived as a sinner but as sufferer, no longer as a high-flying hedonist, more handsome and sophisticated than his stay-at-home

heterosexual siblings, but rather as the pathetic prodigal who has come crawling home, longing for acceptance, sometimes even bitterly renouncing his former life of promiscuity. If this is the stuff of many AIDS novels and most stage and screen melodramas, it is also a scenario that many of our more careful writers and thinkers have sought to modify or defy. (*Joy of Gay Lit* 117)

Edmund White's *The Married Man* is by no means a type of writing that recourse to such heterosexual values. On the contrary, it is an oppositional text in which the values of HIV/AIDS and the bodies of HIV/AIDS sufferers have become problematic and inversed. Given that gay sex has been viewed as a poison, the conflict of safe sex and promiscuity has become salient, and this conflict has been intensified when the once hedonist way of the gay male promiscuity is intervened by the biomedical discourse of HIV/AIDS. This conflict is depicted in Edmund White's *The Married Man* as a strategy to expose how gay community itself has led a life in which the tension between the regulation of safe sex and the erotic politics of promiscuity are represented and further intensified by biomedical discourse of HIV/AIDS. White's *The Married Man* is thus a text that shows how its gay characters react and struggle between these two poles of sex. Though death from AIDS is recognized as an inevitable theme in any AIDS writings, Edmund White transforms the grotesque body and the horrified scene of death of Julien into a literary weapon that evokes sympathy

from its readers. By reversing the negative effects of the grotesque image and the darkness of corpse, White attempts to adopt what Joseph Cady's immersive writing suggests, "a direct imaginative confrontation with the special horrors of AIDS" (244).

In opposition to other theorists of queer temporality, who insists that the emergence of AIDS queer is driven by "the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment," (Halberstam 2) White's *The Married Man* provides a light of hope by virtue of complicating the biomedical discourse of the HIV virus. Austin's asymptomatic/closet body, as opposed to Peter and Julien's grotesque body that symbolizes the abject, challenges the symbolic boundary of health/disease and signifies an embodiment of ambivalence, through which the potentiality of hope/futurity is provided. Additionally, unlike other AIDS writings, Edmund White not only brings up the real panorama of PWAs' lives, he also challenges this symbolic boundary by depicting the PWA as an active caretaker, "I felt it was important to show the inner life of people dealing with AIDS. Either they were caretakers or they had the disease themselves or were worrying about it" (11). As such *The Married Man* embodies an alternative kinship in which its characters are *married* by HIV virus, a relatedness that is combined and shadowed by love, sex, and death.

As the title suggests, White's *The Married Man* represents a new relationship that is married by the emergence of HIV virus. This new relationship not only

intensifies itself by the shadow of potential death but changes the whole landscape of gay community through the definition of their life time. As David Bergman suggests, writing about AIDS is humiliating in that “it shows our fear, our weakness, our failures to cope. It shows our pettiness, our desire to control and our need for love” (280). It is a space in which anger over this humiliation can be expressed. Though Edmund White, as Bergman contends, “tends to hide the humiliation of the communal sense of vulnerability, abjectness, neediness” in his writings of the 1980s,<sup>56</sup> the absence of anger becomes in the 1990s part of his strength. White has found a new way of writing AIDS not only through his grief, loss, guilt and humiliation, but through his hope for the potential future in *The Married Man*, a text that shows White’s distinctive and unique view of the gay experience in a time of AIDS, in which the fatalism that the HIV virus represents is transformed into a more positive one.

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<sup>56</sup> Here Bergman responds to Cady, who contends White’s AIDS stories collected in *Darker Proof* of the 1980s should be recognized as counter-immersive AIDS writings, which employ an undertone as to the issue of AIDS. Still, as I argue in this chapter, White’s *The Married Man* should be defined as an AIDS immersive writing.

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