Beginning to Show:
Proust, Holleran, White and the Making
of a Gay Literary Tradition

By

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I. Overture

> "I think it looks odd...two grown men, both bachelors, spending their time together, don't you think? They have a phrase for it in the South when a man's sexual identity begins to appear. They come back from visiting Uncle Tommy and the women say, 'It's beginning to show.' Imagine that," he said with a smile composed of equal parts amusement and distaste. "'It's beginning to show.'"
>
> -Andrew Holleran, Nights in Aruba[1]

Encapsulated within this passage from Holleran's second novel is the ambivalent complex of contradictory thoughts and feelings which has long surrounded and, even after the recent legacy of gay liberation, still surrounds the multi-layered process of coming out, whether to oneself as a gay yet viable person, to particular individuals as a gay yet acceptable relative or friend, or to others in general as a member of a gay yet legitimate minority within society at large. The amusement and distaste the narrator, Paul, detects in his friend Vittorio's smile are faint traces of the freedom that is the stigma, the escape from isolation that is the imprisoning marginalization, the thrill that is the terror implied by and entailed in actualizing sexual desire between men in whatever way, whatever context. So volatile is the homophobic half of this complex that, of course, it is only "the women" who "say," who dare to notice openly: for

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[1] (New York: New American Library, 1984), p.163. All further citations from this work will abbreviate it as Nights and will be included parenthetically in the text.

men to do even this much would be too dangerous, too threatening, too likely to operate as the minor premise in that ever-present syllogism whose major premise is "It takes one to know one."

The creation, maintenance and enforcement of such syllogisms, and most importantly, the determination of what their conclusions can and should mean about the individuals and communities they categorize, are conducted primarily through representation, especially of the literary kind. Popular literature like Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin helped to establish generally accepted and acceptable roles for minorities like black people that functioned simultaneously as a starting point for their participation in a society uncomfortable (to put it mildly) with their presence, and as a perpetual means of limiting and controlling that participation, creating a place for them yet also keeping them in that place. It has remained for the members of the minorities themselves literally to write their way out of these wrongs, to blaze the trail toward transcendence of the limitations inherent in such representations by revising and replacing them with others of their own creation. In the case of the American black community, what progress they have made correlates strongly to what possibilities they have dreamed, expressed and shared through the writings of authors from Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois to James Baldwin and Maya Angelou, to name a barely representative few.

Similarly, as Vittorio indicates to Paul, and thus Holleran to his readers, to the extent popular literature and wisdom of previous generations have granted any place to gay men in

society, it is as an "Uncle Tommy," an effeminate variation on Stowe's classic portrait, a woman-trapped-in-Uncle-Tom's-body, as it were, whose representative destiny, in Holleran's words, is "to be alcoholic companions of wealthy women" (Nights, p.162). And yet, limited as this representation is, it represents a beginning, a beginning that is itself "'beginning to show,'" a hint of scandalous secrets to discover, whose ominously liberating overtones, however sublimated, make it a luminous phrase, worth repeating, to a gay man both victimized and tantalized by it. They are not his words; he can only quote them, and imagine how he might avoid their intended implication and substitute his own. "Imagine that," he says, transforming his "amusement and distaste" into an imperative to himself, to his friend, to the reader, for that is his one power and, ultimately, his only hope: to imagine for himself alternative identities, as the new, post-Stonewall generation of gay writers like Holleran has only just begun to.

In their search for and reevaluation of possible gay identities these writers have not started from scratch; like an individual coming out to himself, they have neither discarded nor discredited the substance of the past, but instead have reinterpreted it, or rather, have come to understand it more completely than ever before. The two novelists under consideration in the present study, Holleran and Edmund White, have, I will argue, built upon a foundation of narrative styles, techniques and thematics laid earlier in this century by Marcel Proust in Remembrance of Things Past in constructing their own self-consciously

gay visions, thereby 1) rescuing from critical obscurity and heterosexist interpretation the very considerable "homosexual" (to use the word of Proust's day) aspects of Proust's text, much as a previously closeted man uncovers and reclaims repressed or denied sexual experiences, fantasies, etc. upon coming out; while simultaneously 2) construing these rescued aspects in modern "gay" (as opposed to "homosexual") terms, whatever anachronistic distortions this may introduce into the past or present, much as the uncloseted gay man construes in retrospect what were perhaps most accurately described at the time as "presexual" desires as "gay" ones, or construes present desires in terms of past ones, as Marcel sees in his adult, "lascivious" desire for Albertine his childhood, "chaste" desire for his mother's goodnight kiss. In so doing, I claim, Holleran and White are participating in the creation, or more appropriately perhaps, the coming out of a gay (male) literary tradition which I intend this study itself to further.

As participants in such a process we all three face as gay writers within a largely homophobic literary and cultural tradition decisions and negotiations comparable to those we face as gay citizens of a largely homophobic society and culture. Chief among these are: 1) determining what "gay" means, or more specifically, what male sexual desire for other men, and the various phenomena of its enactment, mean--which, in the context of heterosexist society, amounts essentially to determining where in relation to the rigidly defined and enforced gender system men with such proclivities fit (or don't fit, as the case may be); 2)

deciding how we as gay writers fit, or should fit, in relation to all other writers--which, in the context of the literary and academic establishment, amounts essentially to defining our relation to the canon; and 3) laying claim to particular subject matter as, if not exclusively gay, at any rate especially germane to gay experience--which, in the context of a novel, might include items ranging from the simplest figures of speech to the most general and complex theories about human existence. In all three of these areas, both Holleran and White continue or extend the approach adopted by Proust in Remembrance, an approach so radically ingenious, according to White, that Proust "now seems the most daring novelist of the century, the Einstein of fiction"[2]--an opinion which in itself simultaneously identifies him, and justifies his establishment as, a turning point in literary tradition, and perhaps the source of an entirely new one. My goal in this study is a description of these common approaches, how they have changed and how they have remained the same as they progressed from Proust's text to White's and Holleran's, which should serve as moot proof of both White's claim for Proust and mine for the embryonic literary tradition embodied in the work of all three authors.

There are, of course, other contemporary gay writers who, in some sense, follow in Proust's footsteps, and thus are participating in and helping to further define this emerging tradition[3]. I have selected only two, the two who, among those

[2] "The Library Without Walls," Shenandoah XXXIII:3, 1982, p.15.

[3] Among other American novelists one might include Bruce Boone and David Plante.

emerging after and as a consequence of the gay liberation movement ignited by the 1969 Stonewall Riots, have appealed most widely to American critical and popular audiences alike[4]; and I will focus only on the portion of their work which is explicitly gay in content, book-length in scope and, however autobiographical, fictional in form. This includes two novels by each author: Holleran's Dancer from the Dance (1978) and more autobiographical Nights in Aruba (1983), and White's Nocturnes for the King of Naples (1978) and, again, more autobiographical A Boy's Own Story (1982)[5].

White's and Holleran's selection of Proust as a literary forebear is, in at least one respect, more difficult to justify

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[4] Sales and reviews alike of both authors' novels indicate the breadth and depth of this appeal, within the gay community and beyond it. By 1984 all four of their novels to be considered here had been reprinted at least once--Holleran's first is presently in its third printing, White's in its sixth. Besides enthusiastic (but not unmixed) reception in the gay press, notably Christopher Street and The Advocate, both authors' works have been praised by The New York Times Book Review and a host of other journals: a reviewer for Harper's calls Holleran's Dancer from the Dance "the best gay novel written by anyone of our generation" (quoted on the jacket of the 1986 Plume edition); another at In Print says Nights "is probably the best-written 'gay novel' to date" (Nights, p.1); Doris Grumbach of the Washington Post Book World finds in White's Nocturnes for the King of Naples "some of the finest writing to be found in recent American fiction" (quoted on the jacket of the Penguin edition); while a reviewer at the Chicago Sun-Times claims his A Boy's Own Story is "the best American narrative of sexual awakening since Catcher in the Rye" (quoted on the jacket of the 1983 Plume edition). In addition, White's prose has been lauded by such literary notables as Vladimir Nabokov, Gore Vidal, William Burroughs, James Merrill and Susan Sontag (all quoted on the jacket of A Boy's Own Story).

[5] The editions of these four novels that will be cited, and the abbreviated form of their titles used henceforth, are, respectively: Dancer (New York: William Morrow, 1978), Nights (New York: New American Library, 1984), Nocturnes (New York: Penguin, 1980), and Story (New York: Dutton, 1982). All citations from them will be included parenthetically in the text.

or explain. For, though no other author before or since has brought forth such a vast, obsessive amount of prose containing such an array of homosexual characters to such high critical acclaim and so canonical an authority, neither has any other been so conspicuously closeted himself, nor so eloquently pessimistic about the homosexual plight in general, issuing among other equally dire proscriptions, a "warning against the lamentable error of proposing (just as people have encouraged a Zionist movement) to create a Sodomist movement and to rebuild Sodom"[6]. How and why two authors who have supported and greatly benefited from just such a movement, who write for and about inhabitants of ghettoized "Sodoms rebuilt" in major cities the world over, could be indebted to a figure so openly opposed to the very preconditions of their existence--this in short is the question this study will attempt to answer.

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[6] Proust, Remembrance of Things Past, tr. Moncrieff, Mayer & Kilmartin (London: Chatto & Windus; New York: Random House, 1981), II:655-656. All further citations from this work will indicate volume and page number(s) as above and will be included parenthetically in the text.

II. Delusions of Gender

> I now understood, moreover, why earlier, when I had seen him coming away from Mme de Villeparisis's, I had managed to arrive at the conclusion that M. de Charlus looked like a woman: he was one!
> -Proust, Cities of the Plain, "Part One: Introducing the men-women..."(II:637)

What renders this, the central revelation of homosexuality (among so many) in Remembrance, so shocking to the unsuspecting reader is not only the contradictory equation, the sudden superimposition of the two assumedly opposite genders in one human being, but in addition the inference that any ability to reasonably arrive at the conclusion that someone merely looks like the gender opposite to his biological own is sufficient reason to presume that (s)he really belongs to it too. Thus Proust voices what is at once every homosexual's hope--a method of detection that implies a vast number to be detected (for who cannot be caught, occasionally, looking like the "other" gender?)--and every (male) heterosexual's fear--a slippage between appearance and reality from which one can never permanently escape--which in turn is the source of the homophobia causing every homosexual's oppression. Among the many overlapping, contradictory accounts of same-sex desire coexisting within Proust's encyclopaedic text, it is the one implied here, the "inversion" theory of homosexuality (to use Proust's term) originating in the androgynous "third sex" and "Uranian" theories of the late nineteenth century[7],

that most explicitly and pre-emptively imposes this double-bind, and that has been most explicitly and pre-emptively imposed by interpreters of the text as its central, even its only account of homosexuality[8]. In seeming reaction against such enforcement of this double bind, the legacy of gay liberation has left behind the androgynous "inversion" theory now associated with Proust to become largely one of increasing masculinization, insistence that a gay man is first and foremost a man, and ritual display demonstrating this claim. As White has noted,

> This masculinization of gay life is now nearly universal. Flamboyance has been traded in for a sober, restrained manner. Voices are lowered, jewelry is shed, cologne is banished and, in the decor of houses, velvet and chandeliers have been exchanged for functional carpet and industrial lights. The campy queen who screams in falsetto, dishes (playfully insults) her friends, swishes by in drag is an anachronism; in her place is an updated Paul Bunyan[9].

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[7] For a concise description of these theories and their origins see John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935) (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), pp.46-51.

[8] Terence Kilmartin, for example, in the "Index of Themes" of his Reader's Guide to Remembrance of Things Past (New York: Random House, 1983), lists under "HOMOSEXUALITY" only the cross-reference, "See INVERSION" (p.165), and lists as the first reference under the latter the one passage that seems to justify his presumption ("What is sometimes, most ineptly, termed homosexuality" [II:629]), ignoring completely the many references to, and incidents involving, homosexuality and "inverts" in the preceding 1,500 pages (though at the end of the entry he does, at least, refer one to separate listings for twenty-one of the homosexually-inclined characters which include some--but not all--of the overlooked references).

[9] "The Political Vocabulary of Homosexuality," in The State of the Language (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.238. Given the purpose of this essay, its treatment of the verb "dishes" as a foreign usage requiring translation is presumably aimed at non-gay readers unfamiliar with it, rather than at gay readers who have come out into a gay community so masculinized they may never have heard it before, though this is certainly possible.

Despite this trend, and their own participation in it, as the tone of this passage suggests, White and Holleran clearly mourn the passing of the "campy queen" and, in general, the androgynous aspects of earlier homosexual culture; for their fiction, far from abandoning or surrendering them to the past, elevates the former to the status of tragicomic hero(ine) and perpetuates the latter in both style and content, following Proust's lead in both instances.

In the passages most imbued with inversion theory--that is, the passages most often cited to demonstrate its supposed "centrality" in the text--Proust's identification of homosexuals as "men-women" appears to attribute three basic traits to them: 1) they are inescapably androgynous, forever caught in the tension between the two genders; but, even so, 2) they are, when push comes to shove, or rather when ambivalence comes to equivalence, truly the gender of the person "trapped inside" them, not the gender of their physical anatomy (as in the seemingly contradictory exclamation about Charlus previously quoted); and, consequently, 3) they are forever doomed to failure in their amorous pursuits, since--in a variation on the old joke "I would never belong to any club that would have me as a member"--their true, inner selves desire only those who desire the physical anatomy opposite to theirs, that is, only those who could not possibly desire them. Proust sees the first of these traits as an evolutionary anachronism, as it were, reminiscent of a primordial, undifferentiated state of nature, and when describing it, minimizes the preeminence of the "entrapped" self:

> But it is enough that [male inverts] do not belong to the female sex, of which they have in them an embryo which they can put to no useful purpose, as happens with so many hermaphrodite flowers, and even with certain hermaphrodite animals, such as the snail, which cannot be fertilized by themselves, but can by other hermaphrodites. In this respect the race of inverts, who readily link themselves with the ancient East or the golden age of Greece, might be traced back further still, to those experimental epochs in which there existed neither dioecious plants nor monosexual animals, to that initial hermaphroditism of which certain rudiments of male organs in the anatomy of women and of female organs in that of men seem still to preserve the trace (II:653).

The second trait manifests itself only in those unconscious, unguarded moments when this "embryo" is temporarily "born" into the "monosexual" flesh, which then appears mysteriously to switch gender:

> There are some who, should we intrude upon them in the morning, still in bed, will present to our gaze an admirable female head, so generalized and typical of the entire sex is the expression of the face; the hair itself affirms it, so feminine is its ripple; unbrushed, it falls so naturally in long curls over the cheek that one marvels how the young woman, the girl, the Galatea barely awakened to life in the unconscious mass of this male body in which she is imprisoned has contrived so ingeniously, by herself, without instruction from anyone else, to take advantage of the narrowest apertures in her prison wall to find what was necessary to her existence. No doubt the young man who sports this delicious head does not say: "I am a woman." [...] But let [one] look at him as we have just revealed him, lying back in bed, in pyjamas, his arms bare, his throat and neck bare too beneath the dark tresses: the pyjama jacket becomes a woman's shift, the head that of a pretty Spanish girl (II:643-644).

The inevitable recurrence of such unconsciously revealing transformations--or rather, from Proust's viewpoint, moments of transparency--effectually lays upon inverts the "curse" (II:637) of the third trait, forever rendering them

> lovers who are almost precluded from the possibility of

> that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, since they are enamored of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; with the result that their desire would be for ever unappeased did not their money procure for them real men, and their imagination end by making them take for real men the inverts to whom they have prostituted themselves (II:638).

Of course, if not already at this midpoint in Remembrance, certainly by the end, one realizes that in Proust's universe all love of whatever persuasion ultimately depends on contrivances just as artificial (and often as commercial) and hopes just as misguided and unattainable; but whether one considers this latter claim true, and the invert merely the most obvious case of a tragic universal law, or false, and Proust merely an obvious case of an invert homosexualizing even the non-homosexual[10], this third trait remains a characteristic of all men-women.

While Holleran and White adopt neither this theoretical framework nor any of Proust's other, less commonly known explanations to account for homosexuality, preferring rather, in the post-Stonewall manner, not to account for it at all, they do preserve some form of each of the inversion account's three basic traits in the gay characters they portray. No longer forced, but also no longer able to find these traits in all gay men, they intentionally focus on those who, for whatever reasons, still do exhibit them. In Holleran's Dancer the protagonist, Malone, narrowly escapes from a brutal assault by his violently jealous,

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[10] It is presumably no mistake that, even in the context of Proust's life, the text can plausibly be read either way, and thus satisfies both canonizers looking for Universal Truth and homosexuals looking for their own. See Section IV.

traditionally masculine first lover and on impulse asks a graceful queen in full, outrageous drag to help him. ("'My dear,'" the "wigged duchess," Sutherland, replies with all the aristocratic benevolence of M. de Charlus or the Princesse de Parme, "'the house of Guiche shall never refuse the protection of its manor to the poorest of its subjects'" [Dancer, p.92].) As Sutherland nurses Malone back to health, he presents a triptych of gender identities to Malone's only intermittently open eyes:

> Sometimes Malone would awaken and find Sutherland in the uniform of Clara Barton, washing his face...He awoke at other hours to find Sutherland trying to perfect his quiche, or sitting in a pinstripe suit beside a lamp reading aloud Ortega y Gasset on love (Dancer, pp.98-99).

The narrator of White's Nocturnes, also in flight from a more traditionally masculine lover (to whom the entire narrative is retrospectively addressed), also seeks consolation from a man whom he sees not only oscillating between genders, but "containing" both:

> His face was a charming compromise between the graceful girl and the hairy, aggressive boy within him, but when he tried to attend to what I was telling him the compromise broke down into its warring opposites. The girl, too timid to concentrate, gained control over his eyes, cloudless blue heavens darkened by twin lunar-eclipsed suns. And the girl also ruled his forehead, thin, taut silk worried by wind ripples--a girl one could picture being led by her parents up the staircase to the swelling din of her first dance, a moody, fragile girl lifted out of her daydreams and instructed to say clever things to adults and to expose her shoulders to tall men; or a rich, protected girl glancing for the first time into a dark shack teeming with children and hungry animals--a girl, that is, being reluctantly and without preparation initiated into an active, alien world.
>
> But the boy had his own surlier response when his angry eyebrows, black grease marks joined above the nose by a passage of gold stippling, lowered into threatening horizons above those tremulous skies or

> when his shaved but heavily bearded upper lip twisted into a snarl and exposed a wet canine. Then he chewed on something and, save for the frightened eyes, the entire face, bristling with male force, exposed its elaborate rigging, as though the pale skin were a top-sail turned transparent. [...] His high instep was a ballerina's but the hairy legs not a boy's but a man's, and the slender, smooth waist feminine but the low voice masculine...(Nocturnes, pp.68-69).

Here White seems to combine the transformation across gender and the hermaphroditism Proust generally keeps separate into a field of gender "force" in which the gay man to whom the narrator is attracted remains internally suspended.

For both White and Holleran this gender-field seems to affect not only how those suspended in it appear to others, but also how others appear to them, as well as how they appear to themselves. In both Nocturnes and Story White's narrators are ready, at the slightest provocative hint of androgyny, or even in the absence of any, to drag others from one gender pole into the ambiguous space between the two. The Nocturnes narrator remembers "a circus barker whose masculinity had become all the more pungent through dandyism" (p.33), and sees "A woman I met in my country"--he means the United States, but the reader is not wrong to think of Another Country--"emerge[] from the kitchen, gray hair streaming back from a face red with drink, the pungent odor of her cigar enveloping her like the greatcoat of a cavalry officer from the last century as he steps into an inn" (p.122). The Story narrator names a female Persian cat "Herr Pogner," after a "harpsichord teacher" presumably as feline (p.11), feels a special affinity with a housewife who "look[s] like an angry young man trapped in travesty as a practical joke" (p.13), and,

even when lusting after other boys in a prep-school dorm shower-room, sees "the steam and hot water...pull[] evening gloves of light over raw hands and skinny, blue-veined forearms" (p.153), rendering even nudity into drag. Similarly, Paul, the narrator of Holleran's Nights, "having been away nine months" from the gay men of New York among whom he had previously been immersed for so long, suddenly sees them in a more ambiguous light:

> They seemed so odd I felt sorry for them: locked in their little uniforms (short hair, moustaches, Air Force bomber jackets), as sad as middle-aged women who no longer dress smartly and who go out to their clotheslines in their robes during the day (Nights, p.178).

In this case the hypermasculinized trappings of gay style replace the "unconscious mass of male body" beneath them as the "prison" within which beings resembling women are "locked," implying that the incarceration is culturally enforced rather than, as Proust sometimes implies, genetically inherent. In general, Holleran and White suggest in purely figurative metaphors and similes, which merely draw comparisons across gender, the androgynous nature Proust periodically dares to assert as literal transubstantiation across gender, by more unequivocally stating that a person of one sex simply is (also?) a person of the other; but in neither instance does the physical evidence alone seem to justify the comparisons or equations, although it is all that is cited. What really makes that pyjama jacket become a woman's shift, that drunk American woman become a greatcoated military man, or those macho gay men seem like dowdy middle-aged women? What indeed besides the very impulse that led to their creation, to their being written in the first place?

Such an impulse toward androgyny operating within gay writers could be seen as evidence for--that is, as a result of--the second trait Proust's inversion account attributes to homosexuals, their true identification as women--who, perhaps, after looking in the mirror for so long with a female self-perception, begin to see its reflection first in their own male features, and then in others' as well, until they find themselves living la vie en prose of a Proust, White or Holleran. And, at times, the latter two do seem to agree with the former's assertions which imply that gay men are essentially female. The Nocturnes narrator, for example, when he first quarrels with the older man to whom he addresses the narrative, asks him, "'Doesn't it ever strike you as strange to be a man rather than a woman...?'" (p.14), and then, years later, at the man's death, is "struck...again" by "[m]y old adolescent feeling that it was odd to be a man rather than a woman" (p.144); likewise the Story narrator, a resigned "sissy" desperate for a way to be attractive nonetheless, thinks into the mirror, "If not lovable as a boy, then maybe as a girl" as he "wrap[s] the towel into a turban on [his] head" (pp.40-41). But such thoughts, however true, are not the whole truth, just as they were not for Proust. The former also compares himself to "a cloud in trousers" (Nocturnes, p.89), an ambiguous opacity gendered only in costume, while the latter also longs to "emerge as [an] energetic and lovable boy" who is "[n]ot exactly a boy, more a girl, or rather a sturdy, canny, lavishly devout tomboy like Joan of Arc" (Story, p.54)--an aggressive androgyne rather than a Total Woman.

In Holleran's Nights Mr. Friel, a friend Paul is helping to dress as Carmen Miranda for yet another party, tells him with all the breathlessly glib authority of Dancer's Sutherland,

> "We [gay men] are creatures caught between two kingdoms. That of sea and land. But we mustn't weep, like the little mermaid. We must make do" (Nights, p.125).

And what we must make do with, his comparison seems to imply, is an identity like the mermaid's, torn not between genders, for she is entirely female, but between habitats--between the murky, amniotic depths of our native nuclear families and the land of promiscuous adventure among handsome sailors ashore. And yet, if this circumstance is the real root of the problem, the mermaid's gender may be beside the point, a result only of the additional circumstance that no tale about a little merman can be alluded to. Similarly, when Sutherland exclaims to Malone, in defense of his plan to "sell" him to the heir to a fertilizer fortune, "'But don't you see that this is all there is?...Don't you know what it means to be a woman? My grandmother on her eighty-ninth birthday only wished she could walk down the street and be looked at!'" (Dancer, p.205), he seems to assume implicitly Proust's "equation" of gay men with women; but later in Dancer, in the last of the letters between the unnamed author and his friend which frame the novel-proper, Sutherland's claim is restated a bit differently. To "live as homosexuals," the author's friend asserts, is to live "as women: beings whose life consists chiefly of Being Attractive to others" (Dancer, p.248), suggesting that every gay man harbors not so much an internal female identity as an internalized identification with the female role, which can be

adopted by any--note the ungendered term used--"beings," just as the little mermaid's predicament would be no less tragic were she a little merman instead. Implicit, then, in Sutherland's comment, and in general in Holleran's and White's feminization of gay men, is not a literal equation with women, but a metaphorical one--not a commitment to an inversion theory, but intimations of a feminist one.

But if, as one would expect of texts written in the wake of a gay movement fueled by analyses of gender oppression, such a feminist awareness underlies these characterizations, it is not of the usual sort. For White's and Holleran's gay men remain tragic not primarily in the feminist sense that they are trapped in a role requiring their submission to men, but more in the sense of the third of Proust's attributes to men-women, that they, or those they desire, are trapped in a body preventing their complete adoption of that role--that they can neither have "real men" to submit to, nor be "real men" to whom other males submit, since by definition "real men" desire only "real women." We can see this impulse to escape from the homosexually "infected" body into that of a "real man" in the way the narrator of White's Story sums up the heterosexual masturbation fantasy he imagines a man he desires having while himself masturbating:

> I came. I had seen. He could conquer me. If I was Julie or Helen or whoever else, just so long as I was in his mind somehow. Or no, perhaps I didn't want to be a character in Mr. Pouchet's head, just a virus that had entered the very gland of his consciousness from which I could study, even experience, his longing for a woman. I didn't want him to like men, just me, not even me as a man but me as discarnate ardor, pure willingness in his naive, manly, exquisitely untested arms (Story, pp.162-163).

Of course, should he ever succeed in penetrating Mr. Pouchet, whether as virus or lover, the latter would become as infected as he, and therefore no longer desirable to penetrate; thus he prefers to imagine an impossible embrace in arms that remain "manly" because "naive" about what they are doing, and paradoxically "untested" even as they are finally put to the test. His dilemma is as hopeless as that facing Proust's inverts, but not quite the same, as his older, narrating self reveals a few pages later:

> I see now that what I wanted was to be loved by men and to love them back but not to be a homosexual. [...] It was men, not women, who struck me as foreign and desirable and I disguised myself as a child or a man or whatever was necessary in order to enter their hushed, hieratic company, my disguise so perfect I never stopped to question my identity. Nor did I want to study the face beneath my mask, lest it turn out to have the pursed lips, dead pallor and shaped eyebrows by which one can always recognize the Homosexual (Story, pp.169-170).

Whereas Proust tends to claim that it is "the unconscious but visible woman in him" which compels the invert "with the cunning, the agility, the obstinacy of a climbing plant" to "seek[] the masculine organ" (II:644), the Story narrator recognizes that he feared something far worse than a simple, benign woman might be his true identity, and it is the stigma of this (effeminate but decidedly male) "vampire" (Story, p.170) that he most desperately wants to avoid. However "foreign" men seem to him, his desire "to be loved by men and to love them back" does not necessarily amount, as Proust often allows it to, to his being a woman, or even to a desire on his part to be a woman. Yes, he does imagine being "Julie or Helen;" but this is the only acceptable,

literally the only imaginable route in heterosexist culture to his goal: the path of least resistance does not always lead home. He seems as interested, if less at home, in finding a way, however impossible it seems, to identify with the man he desires, to "experience [Mr. Pouchet's] longing for a woman" as he experiences his own for Mr. Pouchet, a man.

The gay men furiously, desperately having sex with each other in Holleran's Dancer are in pursuit of the same goal, trapped in the same Proustian double-bind, but with the same difference.

> "I suppose what we all want is to--not be lonely," he said, his voice growing small. "What I really want is someone to love."
>
> "Ah," said Sutherland.
>
> "But you see," he said, "I don't think two men can love each other...[sic] in that way. It will always be a sterile union, it will always be associated with guilt. Sometimes I think that God was sitting up above the world one day, after he created it," the boy sighed, "and someone said, 'Now what could we throw in to spoil it? You've created such a perfect existence, how could it go amuck?' And someone said, 'Confuse the sexes. Have the men desire men instead of women, and the women desire women. That would do it!' And that's what they did," he said (Dancer, p.169).

For once the irrepressible Sutherland has nothing to say, because the "fertilizer heir," John Schaeffer, to whom he is speaking in an initial attempt to "sell" Malone to him, has said it all[11]. While fittingly relocating its perversity in its divine originators rather than its earthly practitioners, this revised Genesis of homosexuality remains every bit as tragic as Proust's Biblical

[11] In the final image we see of John Schaeffer he is "off the coast of Nova Scotia, reading Proust in a skein of silver sunlight that stretched inviolate for miles around him" (Dancer, p.236)--having found the light at last, or his Bible at least, it would seem.

revision, in which "the men-women" are "the descendants of those of the inhabitants of Sodom who were spared by the fire from heaven" (II:vii) and who managed to escape only because "the two angels who were posted at the gates of Sodom to learn whether its inhabitants...had indeed done all the things the report of which had ascended to the Eternal Throne" were "exceedingly ill chosen by the Lord, who ought to have entrusted the task to a Sodomite" who would have known one when he saw one (II:654-655). Like Proust's, this gospel according to quaint John identifies the source of the homosexual tragedy in "confusion" of the sexes. But again, as in White's Story, this confusion consists of a mismatch between gender roles and physical gender, rather than between what Proust might call "true gender" and physical gender, as a previous exchange between Sutherland and Malone makes clear:

> "Is that what you really want?" said Sutherland. "You want to be a man?"
>
> "How do I know," sighed Malone. "We are free to do anything, live anywhere, it doesn't matter. We're completely free and that's the horror."
>
> "Perhaps you would like a Valium," said Sutherland. "I happen to have four or five hundred with me in my pocket" (Dancer, p.146).

What horrifies Malone is not an ultimate inability to "be a man," but his existential freedom to be one, which is simultaneously the freedom not to be one even though one is physically male. The tragedy results from the fact, not that souls of one gender can be born "wired into" bodies of the other, but that the gender categories are not wired-in, not immutably attached to their biological counterparts: one can believe in the categories even when one fails to fit into them properly. Sutherland's proposed "treatment" for this condition mocks the medical approach to

homosexuality as a curable disease while pointing to where the problem really lies--in the believer, the perceiver of categories who can be at most sedated, never cured by medicine alone.

By transforming the Proustian phenomenon of men who are True Women into one of gay men who are True Believers in (stereotypical) Men and Women, Holleran and White prevent their tragic fate from appearing inevitable for all men of like persuasion, but they concentrate almost exclusively on the tragic cases nonetheless. Virtually all of Holleran's characters--from Malone, Sutherland, John Schaeffer in Dancer to Paul, Vittorio, Mr. Friel in Nights, not to mention several less prominent--share the same tragic outlook inscribed in Malone's very name, which labels him, as he compulsively sees himself, as the Mal (Bad, Evil) One, permanently maladjusted, perpetually malcontent, one destined to remain Alone[12]. White's gay characters, though beyond such tragic resignation, or at least able to envision other possibilities, prefer the reliving of the former to any exploration of the latter. The Story narrator dwells nostalgically on an upbringing and adolescence embedded within this condition, closing his nar-

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[12] When Sutherland first identifies Malone to John Schaeffer, he simultaneously underscores both the phonetic similarity between Malone's name and the word for his condition, and the philosophical similarity between his own outlook and Proust's:

> [A] young man appeared in the doorway by himself; and the fertilizer heir said, "Oh, who is that? Find a flaw, I can't find a flaw."
>
> "That is Malone," said Sutherland in his lowest, most dramatic voice, "and his only flaw is that he is still searching for love, when it should be perfectly clear to us all by now that there is no Mister Right, or Mister Wrong, for that matter. We are all alone" (Dancer, p.55).

rative as he reaches the threshold of alternatives, just as the Nocturnes narrator dwells on memories of a relationship that not only ended tragically, before it ever really began, but even appears to have been inherently doomed, since, as one reviewer has noted, given their respective characters, "there probably was no way the two men could have stayed together" under any imaginable circumstances[13].

Holleran offers some explicit explanation for this concentration on the tragically homosexual in the letters preceding the novel-proper in Dancer, where the author's friend makes objections to the project of writing any gay novel which quickly turn into a justification for writing even a tragic one:

> So (a) people would puke over a novel about men who suck dick (not to mention the Other Things!), and (b) they would demand it be ultimately violent and/or tragic, and why give in to them?
>
> Anyway--contrary to the activists who want the world to believe not only that Gay Is Good, but Gay Is Better--gay life does have its sadness.
>
> Your novel might serve a historical purpose--if only because the young queens nowadays are utterly indistinguishable from straight boys. The twenty-year-olds are completely calm about being gay, they do not consider themselves doomed. Someone should record the madness, the despair, of the old-time queens, the Great Queens whose stories, unlike Elizabeth of Austria (!), have never been told: Sutherland, She Who Must Be Obeyed, and Epstein--the true loonies of this society, refusing to camouflage themselves for society's sake (Dancer, p.15).

Before the author himself even responds, his friend has made the inevitable "politically correct" objection to the novel that will

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[13] Charles Jurrist, "Edmund White: The Center of His Own Attention," Mandate, April 1986, p.38. This article begins, significantly, by comparing the unnatural "metabolism" required to read Remembrance of Things Past to the similar demands made by "the languorous, self-intoxicated surface" of White's equally "expansive prose" (p.37).

follow, dismissed it, and provided a higher purpose for the novel to fulfill--artistic preservation of those "refusing to camouflage themselves for society's sake"--thus rhetorically obscuring the fact that to do so accurately, as the novel does, is to satisfy the homophobic societal demand for "violence and/or tragedy" he began by questioning. As if aware that this maneuver is not quite convincing, the author responds with an extended version of the same argument his friend has already made to him:

> After all, most fags are as boring as straight people--they start businesses with lovers and end up in Hollywood, Florida, with dogs and double-knit slacks and I have no desire to write about them. What can you say about a success? Nothing! But the failures--that tiny subspecies of homosexual, the doomed queen, who puts the car in gear and drives <u>right</u> off the cliff! That fascinates me. The fags who consider themselves worthless because they are queer, and who fall into degradation and sordidness! It was those whom Christ befriended, not the assholes in the ad agencies uptown who go to St. Kitts in February! Those people bore me to DEATH! [...]
>
> So you see I've written about a small subspecies only, I've written about doomed queens. Capisce? (<u>Dancer</u>, p.18)

His friend obviously understands, since he was first to suggest immortalizing this "small subspecies;" it is the reader--heterosexual or gay--who is addressed here, who is the real "you" who Holleran hopes will "capisce" and not read his text as either confirmation or perpetuation of the stereotype his characters nonetheless epitomize. Inasmuch as his justification for them amounts to the claim that these characters are "more interesting," the author begs the real question: <u>why</u> are they "more interesting?" Because they satisfy the demands of a homophobia so deeply ingrained in our society that it influences even the artistic tastes of openly gay men? Or because, even as they

appear to satisfy it, they do or represent something else, something more that opposes or transcends it?

The only answers Holleran, or White (who never even goes so far as to beg the question), give are their novels themselves, where their fascination with "doomed queens" is embodied, enacted, given textual substance[14]. It has been the purpose of the discussion so far to demonstrate how much of that substance freely embraces the androgyny and female-classified characteristics authoritatively enforced as the homosexual lot in (the standard interpretation of) Proust's text, even in the context of a gay subculture which, in White's words, "fortified by gay liberation" now allows those who have traditionally "thirsted for the font of all value and authenticity, a 'real' (i.e. straight) man" to "become those very men they once envied and admired from afar"[15]. The apparent contradiction embedded in this comment--that gay liberation has allowed gay men to become more straight, not more gay--is actually a brief statement of a reservation more

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[14] Holleran is careful to add, in the climactic last letter following the novel, what we are supposed to take as the true moral of the story--"The point is that we are not doomed because we are homosexual, my dear, we are doomed only if we live in despair because of it" (Dancer, p.249)--but this functions as little more than a politically correct bumper sticker on a vehicle so seductively beautiful it tempts the typical, "boring" gay male reader to hop in beside the "more interesting" doomed queens and drive "right off the cliff" with them. Recognizing after publication of the book that "people thought I had glamorized the circuit," Holleran himself has confessed, "I began to worry I was making this kind of life appealing to people" (William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Andrew Holleran," Publishers Weekly, 29 July 1983, p.72. The second half of this quotation appears only in the unpublished transcript of this interview, generously provided by Mr. Goldstein.)

[15] "The Political Vocabulary of Homosexuality," op. cit., p.243. I am indebted to David Kaiser for kindly drawing my attention to this article.

thoroughly and elaborately voiced in White's and Holleran's novels, a reluctance to abandon the gender-crossing of the past, to let gay liberation mean merely that fags can be real men too. But, as I have also argued, this reluctance does not amount to a tacit acceptance of the traditional gender categories (with a lesser "third" niche within or between them for homosexuals) in the manner of Proust's inversion account, either. What underlies it instead, it seems, is a dissatisfaction with the gender-based classification of sexuality and behavior in general (embedded in terms like "homosexual"), a yearning to get beyond obsession with gender as the difference and to recognize other differences as equally if not more crucial[16]. Besides the androgynous and gender-crossing configurations already noted, there are glimmers of this yearning in the realization of White's Story narrator, as he studies those boys in the showerroom, that

> Just as each shell held to the ear roars with a different ocean timbre, each of these bodies spoke to me with a different music, though all sounded to me unlike my own and only with the greatest effort could I remember I was longing after my own sex. Indeed, each of these beings seemed to possess his very own sex...(Story, p.153).

Later he asserts a different sexual classification as more significant than the usual male/female, hetero-/homosexual dichotomies, when he "recogniz[es] that the world is governed by a

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[16] I am indebted also to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick for pointing me toward these thoughts, and in particular for drawing my attention to "the linguistically unappealable classification of anyone who shares one's gender as being 'the same' as oneself, and anyone who does not share one's gender as being one's Other" inherent in the homo-/heterosexual distinction (Sedgwick, "Homosocial, Homosexual, Homophobic Canons," unpublished manuscript [courtesy of author], p.11).

minority, the sexually active, and that they hold sway over a huge majority of the nonsexual, those people too young or too old or too poor or homely or sick or crazy or powerless to be able to afford sexual partners" (Story, p.167). Holleran offers another critique of the usual classifications in the form of Mr. Friel's fate in Nights. A former professor denied tenure because competing colleagues revealed his homosexuality, Mr. Friel drifts from one menial service job to another, without hope, because, as he explains to Paul, "'I am a teacher...the way that is a cat. And since I could not be what I am, nothing that has happened to me has been a surprise'" (Nights, p.97). This person who defines himself more by his preferred vocation than by his preferred sexual partners is the same one who later, immediately after comparing gay men to the little mermaid as previously discussed, and just before dramatically descending a staircase in his make-up, dress, cape and fruit-bowl headdress "like a barge, a float in a New Year's parade," casually expresses an even more symbolically potent and explicitly feminist skepticism of the traditional gender system his very presence mocks. Having heard Mr. Friel describe "the flaw in [his] soul, the cross [he] must bear" and demand to know his, Paul asks him,

> "Why?...Why must there be a cross?"
> "Why must there be a penis?" he said...(Nights, pp.125-126).

The gay men of White's and Holleran's fiction bear their crosses, wear their dresses, bare their flawed, androgynous, conflicted souls, with all the tenacity of Proust's inverts, in the same pursuit of "the masculine organ;" but in so doing, they revoke

and deny the heterosexist male privilege their own possession of that organ entitles them to, and thus question, as Mr. Friel does, as White and Holleran would have their readers question rather than simply exploit, the rigid framework of significations pivoting on this usually flaccid signified.

III. The Man Who Would Be Queen

> And I was later to know, as the reader will learn, highnesses and majesties of another sort altogether, queens who play the queen and speak not after the conventions of their kind but like the queens in Sardou's plays.
>
> -Proust, The Guermantes Way (II:442)

The improbable reader who, innocently taking Proust at his word here, waits patiently during the course of the 1,700 remaining pages of Remembrance for female monarchs displaying the promised lack of noblesse oblige waits in vain. Only one candidate, the Queen of Naples, ever appears, and she conducts herself so graciously, with such "venerable wisdom" (III:248), in her modestly affectionate treatment of her entirely insensitive hostess, Mme Verdurin, as to epitomize the precise opposite of the behavior evidently meant here[17]. But another sort of reader, a sort that Proust--like M. de Charlus, who claims they number "somewhere between three and four out of ten" (III:300)--would no doubt have considered more probable, might read this sentence with very different expectations, which would proceed to be amply fulfilled. He might suspect that these "queens" who are "of another sort altogether" are of another gender altogether, or rather, are female in temperament only; and that "the conventions

[17] The behavior of Mme Verdurin might fit the description; but, even after becoming Princesse de Guermantes, she is not a queen--nor even a princess save by marriage, in title alone, after most of her "playing the queen" is behind her.

of their kind" which they transgress involve the nuanced maintenance of an open secret not about their lineage and social status, but about, as Proust would say, their "habits" and "tastes." As he continued to read he might number among their ranks M. de Vaugoubert, M. Nissim Bernard, Jupien and, eventually and most especially, even that former model of imperious aloofness, M. de Charlus himself. And he might discern the true significance of this remark in the fact that, as each of these inverts gradually succumbs to the woman within, (s)he seems determined to offset the loss of male dignity, privilege and empowerment entailed therein by affecting the manner of not just any woman, but of the highest and most majestic of women, the women who by divine right rule men as they are revered by them, and represent the closest their gender ever comes to wielding the benefits of male superiority. He might come to realize, if indeed he had not presumed all along, that, in short, inasmuch as these characters are men who <u>are</u> women, they are men who would be queens.

The gay characters in White's and Holleran's fiction who live as invert-like "women" even where given the option of being "real men" instead are no exception. As the term Holleran prefers for such characters, "doomed queens," suggests, they too would not be just any women--they too rely on metaphors of class distinction to counteract the disempowering consequences of their assumption of the lesser role in the heterosexist gender system. To understand fully how and why they cope with this ambivalent, precarious stance requires an exploration of how and why these

men would be queens, and in what sort of aristocracy, if any, such a designation includes them.

Proust's, as well as Holleran's and White's, usage of class metaphors to distinguish homosexuals is part of the twentieth-century legacy of a nineteenth-century process described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as "the feminization of the aristocracy as a whole" whereby "not only aristocratic women..., but the abstract image of the entire class, came to be seen as ethereal, decorative and otiose in relation to the vigorous and productive middle class." As Sedgwick notes, one result of this "mapping of the 'feminine' onto the 'aristocratic'" was that "by the turn of the twentieth century, after the trials of Oscar Wilde, the 'aristocratic' role had become the dominant one available for homosexual men of both the upper and middle classes"[18]. As the aristocracy gradually dwindled in size and was drained of economic and political power, it left behind a residue of signifiers of its former glory appropriable by any willing to assume also its antique, esoteric and effeminate connotations. Resigned already to the latter, because rigorously denied access to the more manly, virtuous, mainstream iconography of bourgeois self-perception, homosexuals subscribing to an inversion theory to account for themselves were a natural selection for this new niche created as the aristocratic species approached extinction in the ever-evolving socio-economic environment.

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[18] Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.93-94. All further citations from this work will abbreviate it as Between Men and will be included parenthetically in the text.

In the Europe of Proust's day, when this evolutionary process was at its midpoint, enough real aristocracy remained (kept alive mostly by transfusions of bourgeois capital administered through "convenient" marriages) to provide an exclusive milieu in which the homosexual assuaged by aristocratic pretensions, with or without origins to match, could immerse himself entirely. In this world, to be a queen in the gay sense allowed one quite literally more access to those who were queens in the purely aristocratic sense. What these two types of queen shared, the medium through which they communicated and distinguished themselves from others, was their trademark "wit," epitomized in Remembrance by "the wit of the Guermantes"[19]. One example of this wit in action demonstrates the access to the aristocracy that being homosexual could provide to bourgeois or even working class men, while more ostensibly providing comic relief from one of M. de Norpois's stultifying diplomatic disquisitions, here joined in progress:

> "...there runs through the whole family, on that side, a political sense of which we have seen the ne plus ultra in the admirable Princess Clementine, and which

[19] In her discussion of The Country Wife Sedgwick identifies such "wit" as the signifier for the sublimation of the relation between urbane, prestigious life and its foundation in a land-based, feudal economy which bourgeois capitalism was quickly undermining. She attributes the sort of access to aristocratic benefits without aristocratic birth I descibe here to the fact that "a share of the prestige that belongs to [aristocratic] economic and political position can also be achieved by men who cultivate the signifier 'wit' even in the absence of its economic and political grounding" (Between Men, pp.62-63). In the two centuries between Wycherly and Proust the complete triumph of capitalism over feudalism renders what was formerly a sublimation into an open secret, and its signifier becomes accordingly more cynical and "bitchy," but in essence Sedgwick's description remains accurate.

> her son, Prince Ferdinand, has kept as a priceless inheritance. You would never have found the Prince of Bulgaria clasping Major Esterhazy to his bosom."
>
> "He would have preferred a private soldier," murmured Mme de Guermantes, who often met the Bulgarian at dinner at the Prince de Joinville's, and had said to him once, when he asked if she was not jealous: "Yes, Your Highness, of your bracelets" (II:250).

The Duchess's two rejoinders, delivered to different audiences at separate times and locations, are here combined into one sentence, their proximity linking, fusing the tendency of the Prince to bejewel himself "like a queen" to that allowing certain private soldiers the sort of intimate access to their sovereign that "only a queen" could have.

The fusion of these two tendencies becomes increasingly evident as the novel progresses, among inverts in general and in particular within the evolving personality of its central invert, M. de Charlus. By the beginning of The Captive, when he receives a love-letter from an adoring "doorman" who "took the liberty of addressing him" by his carefully-guarded first name--a symbolic embodiment of homosexual access to the aristocracy--Charlus cannot resist showing it off to M. de Vaugoubert, another bourgeois owing his friendship with Charlus to their mutual tastes, and a flaming embodiment of homosexual affectation of aristocratically feminine airs:

> He even brought M. de Vaugoubert away from an afternoon party in order to show him the letter. And yet, heaven knows M. de Charlus did not care to go about with M. de Vaugoubert. For the latter, his monocle stuck in his eye, would keep looking around at every passing youth. What was worse, shedding all restraint when he was with M. de Charlus, he adopted a form of speech which the Baron detested. He referred to everything male in the feminine, and, being intensely stupid, imagined this pleasantry to be extremely witty, and was continually in fits of laughter. As at the same time he attached

> enormous importance to his position in the diplomatic service, these deplorable sniggering exhibitions in the street were constantly interrupted by sudden fits of terror at the simultaneous appearance of some society person or, worse still, of some civil servant. "That little telegraph messenger," he said, nudging the scowling Baron with his elbow, "I used to know her, but she's turned respectable, the wretch! Oh, that messenger from the Galeries Lafayette, what a dream! Good God, there's the head of the Commercial Department. I hope he didn't notice anything. He's quite capable of mentioning it to the Minister, who would put me on the retired list, all the more so because it appears he's one himself." M. de Charlus was speechless with rage (III:38-39).

Ostensibly this rage is directed at Vaugoubert for publicly including him in "these deplorable sniggering exhibitions," for forcing him to descend from his usual queenly companions to merely queeny bourgeois substitutes; but, given that Charlus knows perfectly well to expect this behavior from him, and continues to confide in him nonetheless, it is perhaps better understood as anger at a mirroring presence whose reflection on (of) himself he would prefer to avoid. His rage is all that separates the aristocratic access he represents from the affected excess of Vaugouberts, his behavior already conceding to their union, and even this permeable barrier quickly dissipates. Soon he is accosting Marcel and Brichot on their way to Mme Verdurin's and exclaiming, with even less restraint than Vaugoubert,

> "So this is how you prowl the streets at night, Brichot, with a good-looking young man...A fine example. We must tell your young pupils at the Sorbonne that this is how you behave. But I must say the society of youth seems to agree with you, Monsieur le Professeur, you're fresh as a rosebud. I've interrupted you though: you looked as though you were enjoying yourselves like a pair of giddy girls, and had no need of an old Granny Killjoy like me" (III:206-207).

Proust is careful to identify the campy, gender-crossing content

of such outbursts as the inevitable result of Charlus's indulgence of his "vice," but his complete lack of restraint, compared to others more covert and less noble in birth (like Vaugoubert), is the result of his aristocratic position: Charlus is the greatest of the queens (in the gay sense) in Remembrance--the one who ranks, in Holleran's words, as one of the "Great Queens" whose stories demand to be told--precisely because he spontaneously actualizes his homosexuality just as he has lived his entire life, with all the capricious authority of one of the Great Queens of European history, one who, even when reduced to the role of "an old Granny Killjoy," proceeds, like Queen Margaret in Richard III, to be just that, with a vengeance.

By the 1950's, in the America of Holleran and White's youth, the only trace of the aristocracy already decaying around Charlus was a set of attitudes and manners, intimations of a coveted lifestyle, abandoned completely to metaphorical appropriation, bolstered by a few powerless, publicly-funded figureheads such as the British Royal Family, kept in their gilded cages like endangered species in zoos, for curiosity and posterity's sake. In this land of opportunity, in what Sedgwick describes as "an idealizing appeal to the out-dated values of an earlier system, in defense of a later system that in practice undermines the material basis of those values" (Between Men, p.14), every man's home became his castle, and housewives were offered the opportunity on a televised game show to become Queen for a Day. So it is no surprise that sensitive little boys, sons of those housewives, when pained to see the women closest to them trapped in the

female role, would also appeal to aristocratic metaphors to accentuate their dignity and transcend, by comparison at least in the absence of any literal means, their socially-imposed limitations. "I suspected," the narrator of Holleran's Nights confesses,

> that we imprisoned my mother by not allowing her to do any work. She was like one of those purely ceremonial empresses whose existence, while gilded, is completely controlled by those who wait on her. [...] I viewed her--as I viewed all women, perhaps--as a lady stranded in circumstances beyond her control. She was the princess trapped in the hut of mud and wattles on the Rhine (Nights, pp.33-34).

Aware of the injustice of her situation, but confined to a gender system defining such arrangements as just, Paul appeals to an older concept of justice which he has gleaned, no doubt, from his voracious reading of "those novels set in ancient Rome or Napoleonic France" (Nights, p.22). By translating the gender difference into one of class, he transforms his mother from an ordinary housewife, a woman among men, into an empress, a princess, an inherently superior aristocrat among the squalor of the lower classes. Unable to imagine her in control of them, he instead metaphorically adds to the "circumstances beyond her control" in which she is presently "stranded" another, fantasized one about her birth which invests those circumstances with his own, rather than his father's or his society's, perception of her worth. The narrator of White's autobiographical Story engages in the same process when recalling the humiliation of another female role model, one who has dared to imitate male dominance over women by lashing her submissive (but willing) girlfriends with their fathers' belts:

> My sister, at that time a tall, taut platinum blond who didn't like grown-ups, answered my mother's furious questions with indignant yeses and noes, lowered eyes and a set jaw. She was afraid of my mother, the interrogation alarmed her, but not for a moment did she feel guilty or question what she had done. She was the queen of her tribe of girls (Story, p.59).

By attributing an aristocratic quality to her defiance, the narrator emphasizes his big sister's power even as it is checked, and justifies her use of it even as she is accused of abusing it: as "the queen of her tribe of girls" she remains empowered, her action becomes a divine right, and her lack of guilt for it proof of her "nobility" and superiority to the ignorant "grown-up" persecuting her. Both narrators seem to rehearse, in describing women they admire in childhood, the use of class metaphors that they will eventually expand to counteract their own coercive entrapment in the female role.

This expansion, from the aristocratic queens of fairy-tales to the "doomed queens" of the homosexual subculture, consists primarily of a reinforcement, a fusion of the aristocratic metaphor with the connotations of the one (female) sexual outlaw permitted by the heterosexist gender system, the prostitute. According to White, this reinforcement is etymologically embedded in the very application of the term "queen" to the male homosexual, which, he claims, "is almost certainly derived from quean (the Elizabethan word for prostitute)"[20]. Whether or not his

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[20] "The Political Vocabulary of Homosexuality," op. cit., p.238. Eric Partridge, in his Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (New York: Macmillan, 1984), concurs with White's claim, going so far as to call the modern usage of "queen" for "a homosexual, esp. one with girlish manners and carriage" an "incorrectly" spelled usage of "quean" (p.946). Like White, he claims "quean" originally meant "a harlot;" whereas the Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Oxford

claim is historically true, there is no doubt that the gay queen is metaphorically a synthesis of the royal queen and the defiant whore, who, exchanging harsh reality for popular fantasy, manages to be both a queen free of political constraints and a whore unmotivated by economic necessity. White touches upon the psychological sources of the appeal of this synthesis to gay men at a reflective point in Nocturnes:

> We love to give help but only to those who have no need of it, or more properly to those who desperately need it but proudly or despairingly refuse to accept it. We reach toward unreachable men in distress and toward no others. Self-sufficiency may inspire admiration but not love; frank, hungry need excites pity but tranquilizes desire (Nocturnes, pp.73-74).

The freedom from need, the pride and self-sufficiency of the aristocracy, combined with the desperation, despair and chronic distress of the pitiable whore, form a female amalgamation complementary to the unreachable desired male described here. Attracted yet repelled simultaneously to and from both roles in heterosexist romance, the knight-in-armor and the damsel-in-distress, the homosexual conjures for himself a figure incorporating elements of both but equivalent to neither: the queen-in-heat, doomed but defiant, imperial though impoverished, who excites in those identifying with her a mixture of admiration and pity intoxicating enough to drown out the ache of unfulfilled

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University Press, 1985) identifies it as a Middle English term meaning simply (and perhaps more in line with current gay usage) a "bold impudent woman, jade, hussy" (p.731). Its one occurrence in Chaucer is compatible (both orthographically and semantically) with either account: "Or hastow with som quene al nyght yswonke" ("Or hast thou with some 'quene' all night 'labored,'" Manciple's Prologue [Fragment 9, Group H], line 18, in Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson [Cambridge, Ma.: Riverside Press, 1957], p.224).

desire, or the emptiness of a life devoted to sex but lacking in love. In one of the rare moments when he makes his presence felt, the narrator of Holleran's Dancer remembers being inebriate with this identification:

> What queens we were! With piercing shrieks we met each other on the sidewalk, the piercing shriek that sometimes, walking down a perfectly deserted block of lower Broadway, rose from my throat to the sky because I had just seen one of God's angels, some langorous, soft-eyed face lounging in a doorway, or when I was on my way to dance, so happy and alive you could only scream. I was a queen ("Life in a palace changes one," said another), my soul cries out to Thee. The moon, which already floated in the sky when we awoke, above deserted buildings on the Bowery was more beautiful to me than any summer moon that I had seen hanging over the golden walls of the city of Toledo. Some strange energy was in the very air, the pigeons fluttering to rest in the gutters of the tenement behind the fire escape. In the perfect silence the telephone would ring, thrilling, joyous, and we would slip into the stream of gossip as we would slip into a bath, to dissect, judge, memorialize the previous night and forecast the one to come (Dancer, p.114).

The trademark of the gay queen, her calling card as it were, is the effeminate shriek, which pierces not merely the silence imposed around the love that dare not speak, but also the boundary between the genders and, perhaps most revolutionary of all, the prohibition against the sort of unabashed sensual fulfillment that makes angels of fallen men lounging in doorways, and projects a heavenly aura into the sooty air and filthy pigeons of a foresaken earth covered with decaying tenements. For the true scandal of the queen is not only that she bursts all these dams, letting pour forth her streams of gossip and desire, but that she joyously, flagrantly slips into them, luxuriating in their liquid warmth without guilt or embarrassment. By investing the whore's irreverent promiscuity with the aristocrat's air of inherent

value she is more able to be who she wants and get what she wants despite her society's sexual roles and rules; by investing the whore's defiance of the law with the aristocrat's aura of political power she is more able to do as she pleases despite her society's denial and repression of her pleasure.

But the queen fitting this description is largely an allegorical figure, more a free-floating persona than an actual personality, or, as White says of a cosmopolitan character in Nocturnes, "less a man in time than a synchronous field of energy" (p.93)[21]. Even the few who come to embody this persona, who absorb themselves into this field, usually do so only for awhile--like the narrator of Dancer, they spend more of their lives remembering the queens they once were than they spent being queens. Yet this persona, this field of energy, can always be tapped after leaving it behind, or before fully taking it up, by that majority of gay men too cautious--or not reckless enough--ever to take it up more than momentarily. For these latter, posturing briefly as the queen functions as a secret weapon, a last

[21] Dancer's Sutherland, the one character (among those in the four contemporary novels under consideration) whose personality most completely merges with this persona, is also the character who most fits White's description: Besides his ubiquitous presence at all "important" gay social events in New York, past and present, which makes him "seem[] to have been alive, like the Prime Mover, forever" (Dancer, p.49), he is mentioned in the letter accompanying the novel-proper as having appeared at a party given the night before (p.21)--that is, after the author has written the (assertedly faithful) account of his death and wake. This contradiction, and several others in Dancer and Nights involving equally impossible chronologies, whether intentional or not, represent a further similarity between Holleran and Proust, whose notorious "oversights" concerning when exactly characters have died, etc., create, despite his resolve to depict men accurately within time, the same timeless, "synchronous-field" effect.

resort when their closet or their other antihomophobic armor is not enough, and they require, in Sedgwick's words, "some critique of--some ready leverage on--the official bourgeois culture" (Between Men, p.90) to preserve their gay identities. In Holleran's Nights the Clam, a character so nicknamed for his perpetually sweaty palms, maintains an outwardly masculine demeanor appropriate to his position in the army, but when a more flamboyant messmate threatens to expose his passion for a cook, his voice becomes the bitchy queen's:

> "Cute," said Stone. "Cute and dumb. He's from Florida and his I.Q. is slightly lower than this lima bean's," he said.
>
> "But a lima bean doesn't have a dick," said the Clam in an intense, trembling, and unusually low voice. He sat down and said, "Besides, how many lima beans can you outthink? It's not as if we discuss Proust every night in the EM Club, is it, ducky?" he said. "No we tend to talk about less elevated topics. Like cock. And we do so in voices no one hears because there is so much noise from the jukebox. Here there is no jukebox," he said in the same compressed, trembling, furious tone. "So lower your stinking voice" (Nights, p.71).

Like Charlus's rage at Vaugoubert, the Clam's rage at Stone projects onto a companion insecurity about his own gender ambiguity, which, unlike Charlus's, does not remain "speechless" only because he allows it to speak through the very voice it compulsively condemns. This voice of the queen, so volatile it even has an odor, can playfully turn dicks into duckies, cooks into cocks, freely crossing the gender barrier, which its slang terms, borrowed from birds, mockingly recasts as a species barrier. And, interestingly, what it does take seriously--what it spontaneously produces as an exemplary source of "elevated topics"--is Proust.

Later, when the Clam begins taking long showers in order to see more of the cook, he instinctively masks his true intention with queenly condescension:

> "What is this, Clam?" said O'Neill..."Are you trying to wipe off the ooze once and for all?"
>
> "Never," snapped the Clam. "My subjects would not permit it. The Imperial Ooze has been handed down for generations. No, I have simply learned the lesson of the Orient. Gooks find the odor of Western flesh nauseating. We eat meat. We stink. We have a smell that is quite offensive. And since I wish to be worshipped by the masses I have to cleanse myself. No meat! Lots of showers!" he said, and slammed his locker shut (Nights, p.77).

In defending his "ooze," the characteristic determining his only name in the novel, the Clam is defending his true (gay) identity, or rather camouflaging it in such a way as to permit its clandestine expression, while rationalizing his need to do so. Forced to conceal his desire but unwilling to admit this, he transforms what is in reality conformity to heartless universal compulsion into a sacrifice garnering universal acclaim; and though it is he who would openly worship the cook were it not for the scorn of the masses, the content of his imperial complaint expresses his true frustration nonetheless: since any attempt to satisfy his desire to "eat meat" would inevitably reek with the "offensive smell" of homosexuality, he resigns himself to "No meat! Lots of showers!"--a regimen which allows him limited satisfaction of his desire yet keeps him "clean" of that desire's stigma.

In White's Story the precocious narrator secretly cultivates the persona of the queen just as instinctively, using metaphors of class distinction to pave the way for his newly developing awareness of his sexual difference. Alienated by a family outing

to "The Big Top" restaurant, he muses from the backseat of the family Cadillac:

> The dinner had left me bleak with rage. Something (books, perhaps) had given me a quite different idea of how people should talk and feed. I entertained fancy ideas about elegant behavior and cuisine and friendship. When I grew up I would always be frank, loving and generous. We'd feast on iced grapes and wine; we'd talk till dawn about the heart and listen to music. I don't belong here, I shouted at them silently. I wanted to run through surf or speed off with a brilliant blond in a convertible or rhapsodize on a grand piano somewhere in Europe. Or I wanted the white and gold doors to open as my loving, true but not-yet-found friends came toward me, their gently smiling faces lit from below by candles on the cake. This longing for lovers and friends was so full within me that it could spill over at any provocation...(Story, p.27)

as indeed it just has here. What begins as a yearning for more "elegant behavior and cuisine," for a more stylistically aristocratic life, quickly shifts to the heart of the matter, becoming a "longing for lovers and friends," the sort of companions his family and the whole bourgeois culture deny him, by isolating and imprisoning them all in the ubiquitous chains of "Big Top" restaurants. The true point of these pretentious flights of fancy, his feasts on iced grapes and talks till dawn, is the assumption of the royal "we" they make possible, the inferred existence of other selves like his they justify, the postulation of a group, a social space where he does belong. At the end of the novel, after disillusioning attempts to find this space, these others among the hustlers, bohemians and closet-cases of the fragmented, pre-Stonewall homosexual underworld, he becomes spiteful, and the queen within, her hopes now soured into bitterness, is there again to support him, to provide otherwise unobtainable justification, to elevate to high moral drama a petty act he will live

to regret. On his way to having sex with Mr. Beattie, an obnoxious, professedly heterosexual teacher at his prep school whom he has resolved to expose to school authorities as a drug dealer immediately after their encounter, he feels not

> lustful or fearful but ceremonial...I felt like someone in history, a queen on her way to the scaffold determined to suppress her usual quips, to give the spectators the high deeds they wanted to see (Story, p.217).

He feels, in short, like a doomed queen; and though this is Holleran's phrase, White's evocation of it here gives us the fullest explication of its underpinnings: the homosexual queen is allowed a place in "history," in her oppressor's culture, only if she agrees to end her story with the doom it proscribes for her and, even then, only if she submits to the demands of the "spectators" and "takes it like a man." Only this renders permissible and preservable "her usual quips," her scandalous critique of the heterosexist status quo; ultimately she must sacrifice them and herself in ceremonial affirmation of all she has challenged and denied, as proof to her peers and posterity that the cost of such a critique is too great, and its effect too ephemeral, for it to be a rational position. In the case of a true queen like Dancer's Sutherland, this drama structures her whole life, ending inevitably in tragic death[22]; but for most who, like the Story narrator, are queens for at most a day at a time, it provides scripts for briefer vignettes, ending with a betrayal, a job lost, a hope dashed--the less spectacular tragedies through which, slowly but surely, the gay man comes to terms with himself in a homophobic society.

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[22] Although characteristically glib, the account of

In compensation, as it were, for the tragic scenario it entails, the persona of the queen offers its bearers access to the true (male) homosexual aristocracy, what one of Holleran's characters describes as "the only aristocracy [he] care[s] about" (Nights, p.114), the aristocracy of male beauty[23]. For a queen need not be attractive--can even be, like Sutherland, cursed with "the leprosy of homosexuals" (Dancer, p.43), a small penis--and still be welcomed to the parties, discotheques and resorts crowded with all the handsomest homosexual men. By devoting themselves entirely to the pursuit and appreciation of the male body, by as Holleran puts it "liv[ing] for Beauty," "liv[ing] only to bathe in the music and each other's desire" (Dancer, pp.115,40), the queen seemingly earns the right to the exclusive company of the beauties like Malone, who instinctively grant and respect it. For Holleran this elevation of physical beauty above all other values defines the queen as such:

What was the true characteristic of a queen, I wondered

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Sutherland's death culminates in an image hinting at a more serious interpretation: at the end of the note found next to his corpse, he has drawn "A forest of X's...which looked like crosses, but were really kisses" (Dancer, p.233), implying, conversely, that his death, which only looks like a suicide, is really the symbol of a sacrifice comparable to that represented by the cross. One can even see in that "forest of X's" a cemetery for other doomed queens whose stories remain untold, one cocktail-kiss cross marking each grave.

[23] Holleran also describes it, at one point in Dancer, as "a strange democracy whose only ticket of admission was physical beauty" (p.40). Although he presumably means to emphasize only, as he says in the very next sentence, that "All else was strictly classless" among these men, that race, salary, education, social status in the "outside world" were no barriers to their sexual interaction, it is a strange democracy indeed that requires a genetically-determined ticket of admission--one which is more accurately and honestly described, as it is in Nights, as an aristocracy.

> later on; and you could argue that forever. "What do we all have in common in this group?" I once asked a friend seriously, when it occurred to me how slender, how immaterial, how ephemeral the bond was that joined us; and he responded, "We all have lips." Perhaps that is what we all had in common: No one was allowed to be serious, except about the importance of music, the glory of faces seen in the crowd (Dancer, p.114).

The friend's answer, an example of the wit of the queen, alludes mainly to the gender ambiguity, the coercively presumed/campily assumed female-identification of gay men, both by basing its classification on a specific part of the body, just as the gender classification is based, and by making that part the "lips"--the very organs of the queen's wit and gossip, with all their feminine, labial-vaginal connotations. But from this quip, surprisingly, significantly, the narrator draws a conclusion not about the gender characteristics implied by designation as a homosexual, but about the values implied, even enforced, by participation in the queen-persona--about the pseudo-aristocratic mentality distinguishing queens from other gay men, or, perhaps more accurately, distinguishing "playing the queen" from simply being gay. In so doing, he suggests that, like its purely aristocratic ancestor, the wit of the gay queen functions as a signifier for the sublimation (sometimes the open secret) of the relation between the urbane, glamorous life of the gay "circuit" and its foundation in a physical-appearance-based, fiercely competitive economy of desire, and thus offers a share of the prestige belonging to beautiful men in the gay subculture to the queens who cultivate it, even when they themselves are not attractive[24].

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[24] See note 19 (p.32) above. An example of this wit signify-

In White's Nocturnes this gay "aristocracy" of desire is evoked more poetically and treated more reverently. Glossing over the division of gay men into a beautiful, witty "elite" and a more homely, uninspired "lower class" it helps to establish, or, more generously, interested perhaps in the potential for each gay man to belong to the former in at least one other's eyes, White uses the class metaphor to idealize the commitment to male beauty and the dictates of anarchic desire, while localizing it in the center of the body, at the center of the individual:

> The boots were caked with mud too raw to be from this part of the country; his waist was circled by a belt made of silver medallions laced together which, if the observer squinted, fused into a luminous, turning ring; in the depths of his chair his face was pale and long, the already high cheekbones raised higher by the cross-hatched steel engraving of his beard. The silvered waist was the zone I preferred and described to myself as "aristocratic," coming as it did between the feudal splendors of his face and the modern brutishness of his boots (Nocturnes, pp.74-75).

In this initial description of Thomas, to whom he and his present lover Craig are both strongly attracted, the narrator justifies his focus on Thomas's waist and its "luminous, turning ring" by blurring it with a faulty class distinction which locates the "aristocratic" inbetween the "feudal" and the "modern." But, of course, since the existence of a true aristocracy depends on a

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ing an open secret about--rather than a sublimation of--this glamor-circuit/male-beauty relation is Sutherland's frequent, blatant exposure of his own lack of endowment, as when he says to a stranger dismissive of someone similarly "plagued,"

> "Please...I am sure his cock is no smaller than mine...Do not be harsh on us untouchables. We lepers of homosexual society. [...] A homosexual with a small cock makes no sense, that's all, like a man who rushes to the tennis court without a racquet. An opera singer without a voice" (Dancer, pp.202-203; see also p.54 for a similar, equally loquacious lament).

feudal economy, the "aristocratic" and the "feudal" are really coextensive, are but different sides of the same coin, just as the waist and head, desire and intellect, are but different parts of one organic whole. By imagining an unoppressive aristocracy independent of either feudalism or "modern brutishness," a desiring and desirable waist independent of the head's intellectual complications and restraints--by melding the two into an aristocracy of the waist, the narrator is able to envision an idealistic incorporation of Thomas into his and Craig's relationship which, when put to the test, doesn't quite work out. After losing Craig temporarily to Thomas, and losing himself temporarily in disillusioned despair, the narrator is led by the other two through a dream-like ritual, staged in the theater where they live, with Thomas providing behind-the-scenes technical support while Craig stars as the narrator's seducer:

> [T]he sound of our footsteps through underbrush is simulated offstage by Thomas trampling a burlap bag filled with flake glue. As we approach an old tree, thick as a giant's waist, the trunk opens to admit us to a sweet bower canopied with luscious woodbine, sweet musk roses and eglantine. Craig places an animal's head over my own and sheds his clothes until he is as smooth and pale as melting candlewax at the moment it brims over its oily cup and slides down the firm taper (Nocturnes, p.79).

Having entered the Realm of the Waist, where his human head is replaced with a less inhibited animal's, and his lover sheds his clothes to become a naked embodiment of (male) orgasm, the narrator feels more, not less, awkward and vulnerable; like "ass-noled" Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream--to which this scene seems consciously to allude--he becomes a ludicrous plaything of his idealized aristocracy rather than a member of it. And yet in

this role, seemingly as a result of his submission to it, his desire is heightened, and he realizes that it was a yearning this deep, casting its bearer into a role as submissively helpless, that his former (unnamed) lover, the "you" to whom the narrative is addressed, felt for him all along:

> I told [Craig] that when we lived together you had loved me with the impious desire I had felt for the first time only last night, felt within the bole of the giant tree--a desire that I had felt for him, Craig. [...] You loved me as I loved Craig--with this difference, that...your love endured for years, silent and patient (Nocturnes, pp.83-84).

Thus the narrator comes to understand that all the time he felt he was playing the valet, the common squire to his former lover's aristocratic knight, his lover, despite his greater age and refinement, felt the roles to be the precise opposite: both inwardly placed themselves in the lower caste of an emotional class system while outwardly cultivating the aristocratic lifestyle they thought worthy of--native to--the inherently superior man whom they desired. Or, to reintroduce the gender dynamics reinforcing this distinction, both reenacted the heterosexist projection of the out-dated class system into the love relationship, where the husband-king is adored by his female serf and chattel--with this difference, that each saw the other as the king while aspiring himself to be "aristocratic" enough to be his queen.

IV. Bringing Up the Subject

The phrase "homosexual subject" can be interpreted in either of two different ways which, ultimately, are aspects of one and the same meaning. On the one hand it may refer to any subject or topic claimed to have special associations with homosexuality, perhaps to the topic of homosexuality itself; on the other hand it may refer to any subject or individual consciousness who claims or is claimed to be homosexual. While remaining obviously distinct in common parlance, these two usages converge at the deepest level: to claim that a topic is "homosexual" is to claim that it is in some sense inherently entailed by a "homosexual" consciousness, just as to assert a "homosexual" consciousness is to assert a set of characteristics in some sense unique to it and entailed by it which form kernels of inherently "homosexual" topics. In the most general instance, the topic of homosexuality itself refers, of course, not to any entity independent of particular individuals, but to a postulated set of characteristics universal among all homosexual individuals, and thus is equivalent to the postulation of a universal homosexual consciousness or subjectivity which it is the raison d'être of the topic of homosexuality to characterize. The two uses of "homosexual subject," then, signify not two different signifieds, but two different perspectives on, or approaches to, the same

signified--one operating in (what is traditionally presumed as) the manner of science and treating the phenomenon of homosexual individuals as an object to be investigated from the "outside in" as it were; the other operating in (what is traditionally presumed as) the manner of art and treating the same phenomenon as a subjectivity to be experienced from the "inside out."

So the distinction goes, but it never manages completely to hold, anymore than the traditionally presumed distinctions--between science and art, between objectivity and subjectivity--which underlie it. With most such distinctions, crucial as their unperceived effects on everyday life may be, none but the scholars care; but when the subject is homosexual, its ultimate failure to hold makes most everyone nervous, inside the classroom and out. For, consciously or not, "avoiding the subject" of homosexuality always carries the force of both senses of "subject"--that is, it functions as much as a means of politely excluding the topic from conversation (if not denying its existence altogether) as it does a means of defensively excluding the consciousness of same-sex desire from one's own subjectivity (if not denying altogether the very possibility of a coherent subjectivity including such consciousness). More to the present point, to "take up the subject" in a work of literature in either sense, by discussing homosexuality or by portraying homosexual characters, is to jeopardize the "universal" (presumptuously heterosexual) subjectivity the establishment and reinforcement of which is the key prerequisite for the highest literary valuation, canonical status[25]. The admittance of any homosexual

consciousness into a text precludes the possible universality of its narrator, who either "is" or "isn't," and therefore, by definition, cannot be universal--can be, at most, a smug member of the "moral majority" confident of his superiority to the minority he attempts to marginalize. Yet even such attempts are perilous, for even the most homophobic treatments of the subject require admission into the text of this consciousness which always "taints" the subjectivity narrating or writing it: in the history of Western literature, no condemnation of the practice, or description of the brutal punishment of its practitioners, no matter how severe, has placed any author above suspicion of being himself "tainted" with the lascivious wickedness he dares to mention, with one notable exception--and His existence (not to mention His interest in women) is still disputed.

It is the remarkable, ingenious, unparalleled achievement of Proust to have come as close as any of the rest to transcending this double bind, not through vigorous marginalization--by, as it were, including homosexuality merely in order to exclude it as rigorously as possible--but rather through audacious universalization--by including it so rigorously and pervasively

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[25] Who grants this status, and what works have truly achieved it (or are truly in the process of achieving it) remains wide open to debate. But whether those granting it are members of the Académie Française or popular journalists who review bestsellers for a Sunday newspaper supplement, the essential criterion for it remains the same: To be truly "great," to be "Art" with a capital "A," a work of literature must be able to function as recreation in the literal sense that it re-creates for the reader the formal subjectivity with which she must identify in order to participate fully, harmoniously and cooperatively in her society and culture. I owe my understanding of this point to conversations and correspondence with David Lloyd.

as to exclude the existence of any domain not tainted with homosexuality or, at least, homosexual dynamics, while simultaneously encompassing this world-view within an all-embracing subjectivity which is not (or, at least, claims not to be) itself homosexual. The result is a text so monumental, so obviously and seriously engaged in the subject-formation sacred to the canon that it cannot be ignored, yet so completely ambivalent about the subject (in both senses) of homosexuality that it can be read "either way"--as the product of the homosexual subject run wild, closeting itself just enough to make its distorting homosexualization of the entire universe plausible to heterosexual readers, or as the exhaustive, definitive proof that the homosexual lot is but an illustration casting into highest relief the essential conditions of the human lot universally tainting us all. So deep is this ambivalence that no amount of biographical information about Proust has been able to resolve it conclusively one way or the other: the fact that Marcel the author, unlike Marcel the narrator, was admittedly and actively homosexual, that the character of Albertine was a composite of his male lovers, etc., etc., ultimately tells us nothing about whether he felt he was closeting peculiarly homosexual characteristics in artificially contrived heterosexual terms, let alone whether the portrait of love and life he created in whichever way is as universal as he claims. Regardless of the frame of reference and critical apparatus used to read his text, the foundation of its canonical status, as well as its implicit assault on the project motivating the maintainance of such a status, are paradoxically both

preserved.

In Remembrance this overarching ambivalence is reinforced structurally and thematically by parallel ambivalences evident in Proust's treatment of the established artistic canon and the aristocracy. How parallel and thoroughly interconnected the two are becomes increasingly clear as the novel progresses, and is perhaps clearest in this passage from Time Regained:

> [T]hat these commonplace models whom I had known should in addition have inspired and advised certain arrangements which had enchanted me, that the presence of one or another of them in a painting should be not merely that of a model but of a friend whom an artist wants to put into his pictures, this made me ask myself whether all the people whom we regret not having known because Balzac depicted them in his novels or dedicated books to them in homage and admiration, the people about whom Sainte-Beuve or Baudelaire wrote their loveliest poems, still more whether all the Récamiers, all the Pompadours, would not have seemed to me insignificant creatures, either owing to an infirmity of my nature, which, if it were so, made me furious at being ill and therefore unable to go back and see again all the people whom I had misjudged, or because they owed their prestige only to an illusory magic of literature, in which case I had been barking up the wrong tree and need not repine at being obliged almost any day now by the steady deterioration of my health to break with society, renounce travel and museums, and go to a sanatorium for treatment (III:742-743; emphases added).

Notice first the usages of "literature" and "society," which are repeated elsewhere throughout the text. In both cases a word generally denoting an entire category--the set of all written texts, the aggregate of all individuals--is used to denote only an elite fraction of that category: when Proust says "literature" and "society" he means "canonical literature" (e.g. Balzac, Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire) and "aristocratic society" (all the Récamiers and Pompadours). These presumptuous usages are symptomatic of an implicit view that the canonical texts are to all

literature as the aristocratic class is to all society, and that, in both instances, the former includes all that is really important and most valuable in the latter[26]. But, here and elsewhere, the content of the passage invoking these usages seems to undermine the view they imply, by asserting that the "highest" art often is inspired by the most "commonplace models," and concluding therefrom that the glitterati revered as the artistic and social aristocracy of the past may in fact have been "insignificant creatures" who "owed their prestige only to an illusory magic." In general, Proust is flagrantly obsessed with the canon and the aristocracy, especially with his potential inclusion among their exclusive ranks; yet his obsession takes the form of analyses so penetrating, acutely observed and exhaustively reasoned as to obliterate any possible justification for itself, even as it continues to permeate his text. Despite all his sincere respect for members of the lower classes like Céleste and Marie, who have "all the gifts of a poet with more modesty than poets generally show" (II:878), despite all his promotion of unjustly unrecognized artists like Anna de Noailles, who he

[26] This comparison bears considerable elaboration. As with the aristocracy, it is an open secret that, while the canon supposedly consists of texts whose inherent "greatness" functions as a birth-right into the class of privileged texts (the canonical work is described as having been "destined" for its status from the moment it was conceived, however long it has taken to be "recognized"), in fact it includes many that owe their prestige to other factors--e.g. the recommendation of another "Great Artist"--just as aristocratic circles include some who are not "of the blood" because they are favorites of those who are. As Charlus has the ability to raise Jupien's niece up from social obscurity to become a Guermantes, so Eliot had the ability to raise Donne up from critical obscurity to become, centuries after his death, a canonical poet.

asserts is "a person of genius of the type of Alfred de Vigny or Victor Hugo" (II:105), he spends less time with the former than he does among his aristocratic acquaintances explaining how commonplace they truly are, and leaves the latter in her obscurity once having noticed it, preferring to quote and discuss at length already celebrated works by those to whom he "generously" compares her.

Though Holleran and White, as self-proclaimed gay writers, openly and unambiguously orient their texts around the homosexual subject, they nonetheless perpetuate the reinforcing ambivalences parallel to Proust's paradoxical embrace-yet-denial of it, maintaining a dual fascination with the aristocratic and artistically canonized as skeptical and irreverent as it is persistent. As discussed previously, the aristocratic component of this fascination appears in their novels as a metaphorical appropriation, a cultivation of attitudes and styles now floating even more freely from the genuine aristocrats among whom they originated than they already did in Proust's day. Similarly, the canonical component of this fascination takes a form in their work analogous to its form in Proust's, but altered by the further evolved social and cultural context in which their texts were produced. For Holleran and White, whose ability to publish gay novels depends as much (or more) on their marketability to a popular gay audience as on their artistic appeal to the critical elite, to reject or embrace the canon risks alienating crucial readers; hence their ambivalence toward the canon and its demands is more pronounced, and often takes the form of entrapment or indecision between the

"pop culture" of the mass market and the "high-brow" works elevated above it by the literary intelligentsia. The author of the novel-proper in Holleran's Dancer, for example, writes to his friend and first reader:

> I do not know whether to use as a quote to open my novel a line of Nietzsche or the Shirelles:
>
> The world can never be
> Exactly what you want it to be.
>
> (from "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?")
>
> In fact, I don't know whether the novel should be done along the lines of Auntie Mame, or Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; it has elements of both (Dancer, p.17)[27].

The "line of the Shirelles" he considers reflects as much on the dilemma forced on him as a writer by the popular/canonical distinction as it does on the dilemma forced on him and his characters as gay men by the hetero-/homosexual, normal/perverse distinction: just as the "world" in which he lives can never be exactly what the latter distinction demands that it be (insists that it is), his literary representation of that world cannot be restricted to either category of the former distinction. While professedly more resigned to this categorization--"American writers must really make the choice between being so-called literary

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[27] Again in the manner of Proust, Holleran does not quote the lines accurately, nor attribute them to their correct source. The actual lines are, "Life can never be/Exactly like we want it to be," and come not from "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, but from another, even more popular Shirelles song, "Dedicated to the One I Love," by L. Palling and R. Bass. (The lyrics to the former are printed on the jacket of Carole King's album Tapestry [New York: CBS Records, 1972]; the lyrics to the latter can be clearly heard on The Mamas and the Papas: 16 of Their Greatest Hits [Universal City, Ca.: MCA Records, 1980]. Either can be less distinctly heard on the [now rare] original Shirelles recordings of the songs.)

authors and popular authors," he has told one interviewer[28]--within his novels White seems no less reluctant than Holleran to restrict himself to either label. In the brief, wordless encounter that opens Nocturnes, the narrator describes how an unidentified "young man," when approached, expresses his lack of interest by "turn[ing] back to his river as though it were the masterpiece and I the retreating guard" (p.1), thus identifying himself at the outset of his narrative as a guardian--and therefore presumably an imitator--of masterpieces, but one who is in retreat, having been motivated solely by a desire to seduce his audience by whatever means. The same self-contradictory impulse underlies an enigmatic image, in Story's opening chapter, of

> a full-bodied, glossy-lipped singer in an Italian restaurant who had serenaded [the narrator's father] with a wobbling but surprisingly intimate rendition of "Vissi d'arte" to an accordion accompaniment executed by a hunchback with Bell's palsy freezing half his face while the other half modestly winked and smiled (Story, p.21).

Since this comically grotesque display succeeds--where the awkwardly effeminate young narrator always fails--in exciting the sincere, enthusiastic approbation he wants most from his father, it would seem to set an example of how he might (or will or should) proceed. But should he "live for Art," as the words of the singer's aria declare[29], or "execute" (as in butcher) it in the manner of her hunchback accompanist? The final, inconclusive

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[28] William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Edmund White," Publishers Weekly, 24 September 1982, p.8.

[29] The choice of this particular aria, from Puccini's Tosca, doubly reinforces the ambiguity of the attitude toward "Art" expressed here, first by gesturing toward the attitude Tosca expresses in it--"I have lived for Art," she sings, "...why, O Lord, why hast Thou repaid me thus?"--and second by gesturing toward Puccini, whose operas remain embroiled in critical contro-

focus on the hunchback's face, half eerily frozen, half pleasantly animated, suggests an incongruous combination of opposites, true to the narrative resuming immediately afterwards.

Whether the canon and its requirements are problematic solely in the way they restrict the expression of homosexual subjects, as is the case for Proust, or additionally in the way they alienate the popular audience, as is the case for Holleran and White, these three authors, like every other, have only two basic ways to approach the problem the canon presents for them: by referring (or refusing to refer) directly to canonical works and artists, and by conforming (or refusing to conform) to the various structural and thematic formulas devised to establish the universal subject the canon demands. More concisely, they must take their stance toward the canon by mentioning it or imitating it--either, neither, or both[30]. Holleran and White follow Proust's example, not only by electing, as Proust does, to do both extensively, but by mentioning and imitating no other canonical artist more than Proust himself.

Fully aware and wary of the challenge to the canon his presentation of the homosexual subject represents, Proust never misses an opportunity to mention the canon whenever the subject

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versy about whether they are "truly great" or "merely popular" works of art.

[30] Elaborating further the canon-as-aristocracy-of-literature metaphor, these two activities might be considered equivalent, respectively, to the "name-dropping" and influence-peddling by which one can enter aristocratic circles such as the Guermantes' even without noble birth ("mentioning"), and the demonstration of social instincts, idiosyncratic habits and genealogical pedigree guaranteeing one admission to such circles by proving noble birth ("imitating").

comes up, especially when it offers him--that is, allows him to manufacture--an excuse to expose or draw attention to what homosexuality the canon marginally does contain. In one instance he illustrates how Charlus's thoughts are "irresistably attracted towards [his] obsession" by having him list the most homosexual moments in that other vast novel composed of novels, Balzac's Comédie humaine:

> "What? you've never read Les Illusions perdues? It's so beautiful--the scene where Carlos Herrera asks the name of the château he is driving past, and it turns out to be Rastignac, the home of the young man he used to love; and then the abbé falling into a reverie which Swann once called, and very aptly, the Tristesse d'Olympio of pederasty. And the death of Lucien! I forget who the man of taste was who, when he was asked what event in his life had grieved him most, replied: 'The death of Lucien de Rubempré in Splendeurs et Misères'" (II:1084).

At the same time Charlus is subtly ridiculed by the text (for unknowingly revealing himself so obviously, for taking one of Swann's characteristic quips much more seriously than it was intended), he helps to justify it by pointing to canonical precedents which might otherwise have escaped the reader's attention or slipped her mind. In another instance, Proust has Brichot recount how he learned from Charlus that

> the treaty [sic] on ethics which I had always admired as the most splendid moral edifice of our age was inspired in our venerable colleague X by a young telegraph messenger. Needless to say, my eminent friend omitted to give us the name of this ephebe in the course of his demonstrations. In this he showed more circumspection, or, if you prefer, less gratitude, than Phidias, who inscribed the name of the athlete whom he loved upon the ring of his Olympian Zeus. The Baron had not heard this last story (III:334).

Besides expanding precedents of homosexual inspiration from the past into the present, by coyly omitting (in a text otherwise

willing to create noms de plume as well as mention real persons' real names) any name for this philosopher, who thus may or may not represent one of Proust's contemporaries--besides mentioning yet another classical precedent to boot--Brichot's remarks here open up the possibility that any text, even one not (openly) involving homosexuality, even one serving as a "moral edifice of our age," might have been produced or influenced by homosexual subjects. Yet by conveying a tone and stance at once playful, confidently heterosexual and authoritative, they immediately deflect the panic such an insinuation might otherwise engender in the reader, channeling it toward the friendly competition of the (male) homosocial ritual of intellectual one-up-manship. Before she knows it, the reader is watching a game (were it produced for television it might be called Name That Queen) where, deftly rebounding from the point the invert (Charlus) scores, the heterosexual pedant (Brichot) victoriously scores another, giving the impression that normalcy remains in the lead even as nothing but homosexual points are made.

In Holleran's and White's novels the game is reversed, and would have to be retitled Name That Allusion. Compelled, like Proust, to link their texts to the canonically privileged few, but more concerned with avoiding accusations of snobbery from their gay readers than of immorality from their non-gay ones[31], they weave into their texts mentions of and allusions to the most homosexual canonical works designed, like the subtle signals gay men have long used to communicate in public clandestinely, to be recognizable to the initiated, but inconspicuous, never puzzling,

to all uninitiated on-lookers. Both authors, for example, manage to allude to Henry James' The Beast in the Jungle to describe not yet self-aware gay men without clouding their own narratives with the sort of closeted, erudite obfuscation epitomized by that text, which might confuse readers of their texts unfamiliar with it. "He felt as if he were a character in Henry James," the narrator of Holleran's Dancer says of Malone before his sexual awakening, "he began to suspect he was to be that man to whom nothing whatsoever was to happen" (Dancer, p.68); while the narrator of White's Story evokes this character even more vividly without citing its source, when he describes Mr. Pouchet as

> the cautious, isolated man who sleeps alone...who never seems to have a headache or hangover, who's a well maintained machine but idling, idling, who approaches each new experience...in a spirit of mildly detached curiosity, and yet nothing has touched him. He is vulnerable and he's untouched. He is a man to whom something is about to happen (Story, p.161).

Even the gay reader unfamiliar with James or his Beast can experience the relief that comes from releasing these men to whom something seems perpetually about to happen, but never does, into a narrative where the something finally does happen, is recog-

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[31] When either author is panned in the gay press, it is primarily for such snobbery, for demonstrating more concern with their literary/intellectual reputation than with their role as literary/intellectual representatives of the gay community. Charles Jurrist, for example, complains about White's "show-offy erudition" in Nocturnes ("The Center of His Own Attention," op. cit., p.38) while another Mandate reviewer "takes [White] to task for presenting characters who seem uncomfortable with homosexuality, instead of showing characters happy with being gay." White responds to such criticism by claiming that "'the [gay] novelist's first obligation is to be true to his own vision, not to be some sort of common denominator or public relations man to all gay people'" (William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Edmund White," op. cit., p.6).

nized, named and even lived; while those familiar with the allusions' source can additionally share, as Holleran and White presumably intend them to, in the relief that comes from releasing as a writer of openly gay literature the frustrations they previously experienced as readers of the homophobic canon.

What homosexuality the canon does include is as important to White's and Holleran's characters as it is to Proust's, and comes as frequently and forcefully to their minds as it does to Charlus's, but is treated more skeptically. The narrator of White's Story remembers vividly how he "read Death in Venice and luxuriated in the tale of a dignified grown-up who died for the love of an indifferent boy my age. That was the sort of power I wanted over an older man," he thinks (Story, p.10), announcing at the very beginning the desire, nurtured by his reading of the canonical homosexual texts, that structures his entire narrative. Later it takes the form of fascination with Rimbaud, "the poet who'd conquered Paris or at least Verlaine by age sixteen (I was fifteen--a year to go)" (p.151); and not much more than a year later, at the very end of his narrative, he at last finds his "temporary Verlaine" in the person of Mr. Beattie, an adult "heterosexual hipster" whom he can seduce and betray without guilt (p.214), emulating what his reading has helped to convince him is the only feasible expression of male homosexual desire. But it leaves him cold: "[N]ot even one volt of desire passed through me," he reports, realizing much later that this "purely symbolic" act was in fact "the ideal formulation of my impossible desire to love a man but not be a homosexual" (pp.217-218), and

not a true expression of homosexual desire at all. A similar realization underlies Paul's description, in Holleran's Nights, of how "Each time I returned to Jasper the father who met me at the airport shocked me in the same way the portrait Dorian Gray kept in his closet made him gasp" (p.181). The tragic fate Wilde casts in terms of narcissism and the dangerous results of indulging homosexual desire, Paul's reference suggests, has more to do with the complex, always difficult, usually sublimated affection between father and son, and the dangerous results of repressing homosexual desire within the "closet" of the nuclear family. The longer Paul postpones revealing his gay identity to his family, the more the ravages of time, so evident in his father's face, pull them--and the corresponding halves of Paul's life--further apart, making that revelation, their reconciliation, ever more impossible to imagine. And when the narrator of Holleran's Dancer, like Brichot discussing his colleague, coyly suggests a contemporary canonical figure by casually mentioning "a bearded poet, who had been unable, after all, to leave this round of discos, bars and baths he had denounced on many occasions" (Dancer, p.163), and who presumably corresponds to Allen Ginsberg, it is to underline the hypocrisy which makes his notoreity possible. Eager as they are to exhibit their consciousness of this tradition and link their own texts to it, White and Holleran seem recalcitrant to accept the hypocritical, self-defeating denunciations it demands: by telling the tragic stories of gay men who in some sense fulfill them while stressing that "it didn't have to be this way"--by enacting in plot what

they deplore in commentary and tone--they get to satisfy the canon's demands while criticizing them too.

So it is only logical that the canonical figure whom they mention and to whom they allude most often, the one whose influence they inherit least skeptically, is the one who has come closest to achieving these mutually contradictory goals: Proust. His preeminence in White's reading of the canon, evinced in his description of Proust as "the Einstein of fiction"[32], is implied in Story when, after his friend Howie (whose "ties came from Charvet on the Place Vendôme because that had been Proust's haberdasher" [p.149]) compares the narrator's mentors, the Scotts, "to characters in Proust [whose] names meant nothing to me," he simultaneously resolves and foretells that

> I, too, would read Proust someday, but only after I'd mastered Pound, Moore, Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Donne, Dante and all the other poets the Scotts discussed every night (Story, p.195).

That the turning point predicted here is precipitated, as the narrator later reveals, by his discovery that DeQuincey Scott is a closeted gay man using his deceived wife as a "cover" for his clandestine affair with one Father Burke (p.216)[33] adds to the suggestion that Proust requires, and therefore represents, a higher level of mastery than these others the implication, mockingly modeled on the heterosexist dismissal of homosexuality as an immature stage in development, that Proust's homosexual perspective is further advanced and less naive than those of these mostly religious and (ostensibly) heterosexual poets. In

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[32] See Section I (p.5).

[33] There is more than perverse pleasure in White's symbolic transformation of the three canonical authors, and one canonical

Nocturnes White evokes Proust as directly, and more powerfully, without having to mention his name:

> If a lady were to ask me I'd say love dwells in memory, moves in memory, is formed by memory, just as the evening light was formed in the curtains that screened it --but no lady asks (p.10).

In Remembrance, of course, there often is a lady who asks, who provides a narrative excuse for the elaborate digressions on love and memory White partially summarizes here. One example is the occasion "when Mme de Cambremer had expressed surprise that [Marcel] could give up seeing a remarkable man like Elstir for the sake of Albertine" (III:944), which sets off a chain of reflections culminating in a statement that is the very premise of the narrator's project in Nocturnes: "[T]hese painful dilemmas which love is constantly putting in our way teach us and reveal to us, layer after layer, the material of which we are made" (III:947). Like Marcel, the narrator discovers this material to consist of an ever-shifting series of perspectives on the past. While observing "four twenty-year-olds out on a Saturday night" he muses,

> Didn't they know (as I did) that the best thing had already happened, that their long lives, that progression from this year's hits and haircuts to next year's, from a first job to a second, a sixth, from sitting over cold coffee at dawn in a diner to sipping wine at supper on a balcony in Haiti--that this long sequence of slightly varying incidents would give them only time to see the past from every angle, as though the past were a statue they kept pacing around in ever-widening circles? (Nocturnes, p.125).

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institution, incorporated in these two names into bedfellows: in fact as in his fiction, he also suggests, DeQuincey-Scott's impassioned Romanticism and the ecclesiastical Burke's catholic conservatism offer the same condemnation of homosexuality while often negotiating the same closeted indulgence of it.

Here White translates into a more American, more popularly digestible idiom the aestheticized nostalgia perfected by Proust, which transforms the Jamesian suspicion that something is always about to happen but never will into the conviction that something--"the best thing"--always has already happened, and which discerns "[r]eal life, life at last laid bare and illuminated--the only life in consequence which can be said to be really lived" (III:931) only in the retrospective contemplation made possible by art and literature.

Holleran, perhaps even more than White, identifies strongly with this Proustian outlook, and, both in tribute to his mentor and as subtle signals to readers familiar with him, strews his novels with references and allusions to him. In Nights he goes so far as to place a miniature, untitled overture before the first chapter that contains echoes of the first line of Proust's Overture ("So the night before I left for Jasper I tried to go to bed early" [p.7]) and of the last line of Swann in Love ("How I had come to share a home with someone whose coldness shocked me --like a man who ends up with a wife not at all his type--was a mystery" [p.8]) and that, true to Proust's form, is focused around the memory of a moment when the narrator was waiting for his mother ("I didn't want to be waiting for her as she hurried to this house; I wanted to be waiting for her as she was then, thirty years ago" [p.12])[34]. But these structural and

[34] Acknowledging that this opening is "exactly like the opening of Swann's Way," Holleran has confessed to mixed feelings about its composition:

> I thought, Dare I do this? Then I thought, I don't care. I thought, I can't possibly do this, it's too obvious. And then I thought, I'm going to anyway, be-

stylistic touches merely highlight a more substantial continuity which, as with White, is primarily thematic. Consider, for example, Paul's reflections about Sal, who appears to be the man he's always been waiting for up until he no longer has to wait for him:

> But love is above all a subjective pleasure, an egoistic appetite, and I found that, once I had possessed his beauty, the outpouring of his soul became more and more intolerable. [...] It was as if I longed to be rescued from my banal life by Love, and then, once having obtained the object, found a new form of banality stretching before us: that of lovers (Nights, p.108).

Yet like Marcel, who might have written these lines about Albertine, Paul nonetheless suffers terribly when he loses Sal, until he experiences how even loss can be lost--which leaves him, at the conclusion of his narrative, sounding Proust's climactic theme:

> For the one thing I had been unconscious of till recently, the single element I had utterly ignored in my anxious worry about the nature of my life and relationships with other people, was time (Nights, p.230).

Holleran's novels, Nights in particular, at the same time they faithfully and compellingly portray the lives of contemporary American gay men, are so imbued with the sensibility of Proust

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> cause it fits and it works and it's real for this narrator...So I just went ahead and left it there. But I had a moment's pause...You can't even try to imitate Proust, but the opening is such a brilliant device...(William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Andrew Holleran," op.cit., unpublished transcript, p.8).

Like his character Sutherland, who justifies his curious choice of theme for the Pink and Green Party by reminding Malone that, "like any artist burdened by the tradition of those who have gone before, like the novelist who must write after Proust, Joyce and Mann, we are faced with a constricted area of choice" (Dancer, p.204), Holleran feels the weight--but doesn't let it cramp his style.

that they may qualify as selective readings, perhaps even abridged retranslations of Remembrance within a different, but equally salient, social and historical context.

To the extent they do, they represent yet another way in which Holleran follows Proust's example; for Proust not only points out the fissures through which the homosexual subject manages to leak through the canonical edifice, not only suggests how ubiquitously it may be hidden behind those universalizing (i.e. hetersexualizing) walls, he also offers selective readings, contextual retranslations of texts forming the most solid portions of those walls which effectively cast its homosexualizing shadow on them as well. The most extended example occurs, appropriately, in Cities of the Plain, when the narrator quotes liberally from Racine to explain why M. Nissim Bernard lunches so faithfully at the Grand Hotel:

> The fact of the matter was that he was keeping, as other men keep a dancer from the corps de ballet, a fledgling waiter of much the same type as the pages of whom we have spoken, and who made us think of the young Israelites in Esther and Athalie. It is true that the forty years difference in age between M. Nissim Bernard and the young waiter ought to have preserved the latter from a contact that could scarcely have been agreeable. But, as Racine so wisely observes in those same choruses:
>
> Great God, with what uncertain tread
> A budding virtue 'mid such peril goes!
> What stumbling-blocks do lie before a soul
> That seeks Thee and would fain be innocent.
>
> For all that the young waiter had been brought up "remote from the world" in the Temple-Caravanserai of Balbec, he had not followed the advice of Joad:
>
> In riches and in gold put not thy trust.
>
> He had perhaps justified himself by saying: "The wicked cover the earth." However that might be, and

albeit M. Nissim Bernard had not expected so rapid a conquest, on the very first day,

Were't in alarm, or anxious to caress,
He felt those childish arms about him thrown.

And by the second day, M. Nissim Bernard having taken the young waiter out,

The dire assault his innocence destroyed (II:871-872).

(And so it continues.) At the moment when Proust's narrator assumes the voice of unquestionable, universal authority to declare "the fact of the matter," he annexes his reader (through the "we" who have spoken, the "us" who have been made to think) to his own determination to recast these passages from Esther and Athalie as commentary on a homosexual relationship; but who would not be flattered by partial credit for such wit? Before she is likely to realize it, the reader has been seduced, by the same rhetorical techniques which make possible the universal subject, into not only witnessing, but participating in the sodomization of Racine, the homosexualization of the very canon that excludes and represses homosexuality--and, regardless of her own sexual preferences, has probably had a good time doing so. But then again this is not her first time, since she has already let quotations from Esther speak the unspoken parts of a conversation between Charlus and Vaugoubert about "those who, beneath the disguise of their uniform, were at heart [their] *congeners*" (II:689-690); nor is it her last: for, in one of several hints that Albertine's ostensible gender is just such a disguising uniformity, more quotations from Racine later supply the words for some of the most intimate exchanges between Marcel and his Captive (cf. III:10,115,402), suggesting a similarity between their

relationship and M. Nissim Bernard's with the waiter that undermines, if not its heterosexuality, at least the heterosexist insistence that it must be different from and superior to any homosexual bond. And Proust does not hesitate to preach what he practices, repeatedly having his narrator voice sympathy for "[t]he invert who has been unable to feed his passion save on a literature written for women-loving men, who used to think of men when he read Musset's Nuits" (III:244) and defend those like Charlus who "during his childhood, in order to be able to feel and understand the words of the poets,...had been obliged to imagine them as being addressed not to faithless beauties but to young men" (III:611). Like Proust, they have the power (and, his narrator argues, the right) not only to concentrate on what hints of homosexuality the canon does contain, but to read homosexuality into even the most heterosexist texts.

Rather than ignore the non-homosexual majority of critically and popularly acclaimed "masterpieces," as their mostly gay readership would no doubt allow, and might even prefer, Holleran and White subtly exercise this power, as Proust does, to illustrate with comic irony how serious about homosexuality they really are, and how completely it, like all other projections of desire, is in the eye of the beholder. During one scene in Dancer, Holleran subjects works of both popular and "High" art to this treatment. "'I been bitten by the love bug!'" Sutherland exclaims to himself in the mirror of Malone's hospital room, transforming a line from a once very popular song sung by Diana Ross and the Supremes[35] into an unrepentant apology for gay

male promiscuity, and a parody of its condemnation as compulsive narcissism. Soon after, one of the "circuit queens" visiting Malone in the hospital is introduced by the narrator as "Bill Morgan (who looked like a portrait by Titian, always had gonorrhea, and worked at the airport fueling jets)" (p.166)--a description which exemplifies Holleran's refusal to dissociate the aesthetic from the sexual, the canonical from the commonplace, the "noble" subject matter of Art from the often painful and embarrassing facts of life. In addition, the order of these three attributes so blithely conjoined, yet so wildly disjunct in popular perception, emphasizes the hypocrisy of the bourgeois, heterosexist culture which oppresses gay men partly because they dare to take seriously and attempt to live by its falsely professed priority of values (1. Art and Love; 2. Health; 3. Source of Income) instead of conforming to the status quo and merely paying lip service to this priority while in fact living by its exact opposite (1. Source of Income; 2. Health; 3. Love and Art). In Nocturnes White exposes a similar hypocrisy in a passage by "Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth century rogue (and brother of St. Macrina) whose first book extolled virginity, though he himself was never able to attain to celibacy for even a single day," and who "hoodwinked the faithful with continual exegeses of that amoral hymn to voluptuousness, The Song of Songs" (p.42). Having rendered ludicrous Gregory's dutifully theological analysis of an

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[35] "Love Is Like an Itching in My Heart" (1966) by Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier and E. Holland, rereleased on Diana Ross and the Supremes' Anthology (Hollywood, Ca.: Motown Record Corporation, 1974).

undeniably bawdy Biblical verse with his own straightforward, colloquially flippant account of it, White proceeds, ironically, to identify with him:

> Why do I copy out this passage for you? Not to make fun of the worthy Cappadocian who lingered over his Old Testament lovers...No, I simply want to anticipate your laughter at my method, which will be his. For I, too, will relish an amorous history, then lift a hand from the page or my pleasure and find in vivid scenes portents (Nocturnes, p.43).

With his demonstration of how much (so-called) immorality even the most (so-called) moral literature can harbor, White wants to clear from within the canon an authorial space with enough room for even the openly homosexual subject while at the same time maintaining the canonically imposed separation between "privately savoring" and "publicly interpret[ing]" (Nocturnes, p.42) which, as he claims elsewhere, releases the author "from the vague, always changing but ever-stringent demands of...sincerity" (Story, p.189) and allows him true artistic freedom. He would remodel, rather than dismantle the canon, continuing the reconstruction where Proust ambiguously left off.

Holleran playfully hints at a more radical approach to canon-reform, the dissolution of the literary class distinction on which the canon is founded, with the signatures he has the author and his friend use to sign the letters framing the novel-proper in Dancer. The letters preceding the novel-proper are signed, in dead-pan majesty, with names of famous French figures, three of them canonical authors, who are mentioned repeatedly by Proust and have therefore acquired gay connotations not attributable to their lives or work alone. In the order used they are:

"Agathe-Hélène de Rothschild" (Dancer, p.11), "Madeleine de Rothschild" (p.14), "Hélène de Sévigné" (p.16), "Victor Hugo" (p.18), "le Duc de Saint-Simon" (p.20) and "Marie de Maintenon" (p.22)[36]. The letters following the novel, by contrast, are signed with names of popular American figures, two of them fashion celebrities--"Rima the Bird Girl" (p.240), "Diane Von Furstenberg" (p.245), "Betsy Bloomingdale" (p.248)--except for the climactic, suddenly sincere last letter, signed simply, and for the first and only time without affectation, "Paul" (p.250)[37]. The gay novel between these signatures, itself a form of correspondence between the author and his friend, between Holleran and his reader, straddles the hierarchal gap enforced between these domains, encouraging their dangerously liberating cross-fertilization, challenging the prestige of the one even as it inconsistently, unapologetically uses that prestige to enhance the diminished status of the other.

The ambivalence toward the canon apparent in their many

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[36] Though Proust does not refer to Agathe-Hélène or Madeleine in particular, the Rothschilds as a family appear and are mentioned several times in Remembrance (cf. I:558, II:604, III:32, et. al.). Marie de Maintenon is mentioned twice (I:337,759) while mentions, discussions and quotations of the three authors are legion throughout the text.

[37] The fact that "Paul" turns out also to be the name of the narrator of Nights--in which it is also mentioned only once, near the very end (p.234)--is no coincidence, as Holleran has acknowledged:

> Paul: that was conscious. I did want to keep things between the books...I wanted there to be and I want there always to be the connection. I'd just like to write one book in a way (like Proust: how lucky he wrote one novel, his first novel, a very long novel, but he never wrote a second)...(William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Andrew Holleran," op. cit., unpublished transcript, pp.9,5).

references and allusions to it is reflected in the ways all three authors, Holleran and White following Proust's lead, continue to conform to the canonical formulas even as they deviate from and react against them. Committed, on the one hand, to exploring and affirming what sets the homosexual subject apart and makes it unique, and, on the other, to satisfying the canonical demand for "universal truth" that establishes a unified, undifferentiated subjectivity for all potential readers, all three authors attempt to clasp the two hands together into a symbolic compromise, a narrative diplomacy of peaceful coexistence wherein neither project disrupts the other.

The first article of this treaty is that the homosexual experience, albeit unique and uniquely unenviable, is but a special, especially illuminating instance of universal human experience, and should be tolerated (can be dismissed) as such. Proust takes great care to assure his (non-homosexual) readers, as he does after describing Vaugoubert's "deplorable sniggering exhibition" with Charlus, that his "portrayal of such weird characters" serves a higher, more universal purpose:

> Art extracted from the most familiar reality does indeed exist and its domain is perhaps the largest of any. But it is none the less true that considerable interest, not to say beauty, may be found in actions inspired by a cast of mind so remote from anything we feel, from anything we believe, that they remain incomprehensible to us, displaying themselves before our eyes like a spectacle without rhyme or reason. What could be more poetic than Xerxes, son of Darius, ordering the sea to be scourged with rods for having engulfed his fleet? (III:40)

Here the key to extracting universal truth from the homosexual subject, to understanding, for example, how "[t]he case of an

affected old woman like M. de Charlus...falls under a law which applies far more widely than to the Charluses alone" (III:350), is a willingness to let the "cast of mind" it represents "remain incomprehensible"--to delay or deny any interpretation of the motives behind these "actions," that would require identification (however brief and tenuous) with their authors. Only by feigning ignorance--for example by pretending not to understand how rage at loss could make anyone act so irrationally as Xerxes, or by attributing his action entirely to a religious belief about an ocean god no longer considerable tenable--only through such displacements can appreciation of Vaugoubert's "exhibition" and sympathy with his predicament be kept from implying empathetic appreciation of--that is, infection with--his homosexual desire. Only by not taking seriously the challenge to heterosexist gender definition implied by this "exhibition" (which is precisely what makes it so considerably interesting, not to say beautiful) can it be subsumed under a universal subjectivity founded on that definition, and made palatable enough for universal consumption. And yet, like an inoculation with a vaccine, the immunity from danger achieved through this safely distanced tone and treatment represents itself a form of infection with the dreaded disease: for no matter how incomprehensibly mysterious, marginally dismissable or condescendingly humorous these exhibitions of the homosexual subject are made to appear, their contradictions of supposed universal truths remain as visible as their confirmations of them.

Holleran and White maintain a similar claim to universality

by approaching the gulf interposed between "mere observation" of homosexuality and unabashed identification with it from the opposite side, turning observations from an openly gay viewpoint about what makes (or once made) gay experience seem unalterably unique into generalizations applicable to non-gay experience as well. In the manner of Proust when he claims that Charlus's "desire to be bound in chains and beaten, with all its ugliness, betrayed a dream as poetical as, in other men, the longing to go to Venice or to keep ballet dancers" (III:870-871), Holleran observes in Nights that the community of "Point O' Woods, a town restricted to members of a corporation which [some] said excluded not only homosexuals but Jews" represents, with all its ugly implications, "a fantasy as extreme as any I encountered at the baths," where desires like Charlus's are closer to the norm than the exception. This recognition stimulates in the narrator Paul the sort of momentary identification with someone of the "other" sexuality that Proust wants to make possible (by making it seem impossible) from the "normal," heterosexual side:

> I speculated what it would be like to be the head of a family, as if with that all my problems would drop away, when in fact they would have merely been replaced by another set. I would not have worried about the size of my penis, the restrictions of age, the difficulty of finding love; I would have worried about mortgages, tuition, my youngest daughter's asthma, my competition at Shearson Loeb Rhoades. And death would still preside over everything (Nights, pp.179-180).

By making escape from a "set" of problems comparable to those assigned to the homosexual lot in a heterosexist society seem as impossible as Proust reassures his (heterosexual) readers unwitting entrapment within that lot is, by defining the nature of

those problems to be as "interchangeable" as Proust says their externally observable symptoms are "incomprehensible," Holleran achieves a universality which transcends, yet does not deny the particularity of gay experience: We are all condemned, in the study hall of life where the silent teacher Death presides, to struggle with problem-sets that are equally insoluble, different as the subjects generating the problems may be.

White takes a different route to what amounts to the same goal. In the manner of Proust when he argues that "[t]he writer must not be indignant if the invert who reads his book gives to his heroines a masculine countenance" because "[i]n reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self" (III:948-949), White interrupts his Story to tell his readers how he wants them to read it:

> I say all this by way of hoping that the lies I've made up to get from one poor truth to another may mean something--may even mean something most particular to you, my eccentric, patient, scrupulous reader, willing to make so much of so little, more patient and respectful of life, of a life, than the author you're allowing for a moment to exist yet again (Story, p.84).

White, like Proust, implies that universality springs from the act of reading itself. Whether the "poor truths" are autobiographical facts or generalizations cultured from the substance of the unwinding narrative, pearls of wisdom strung along its thread (White's wording suggests both at once), they and the "lies" connecting them must be enriched by the reader's experience before they can truly "mean something," before the author can exist as an author at all. The extent to which the reader is patient and scrupulous enough to mold the author's meaning to the contours of

her own eccentric experience--the extent to which she can use the text to read herself--determines how "universal" the text will appear to her. Inasmuch as it was written by a gay man about gay characters, it remains an expression of the homosexual subject, but one compatible with any other subjectivities capable of reading it and translating it into their own terms. Of course, if White is correct, he need not have mentioned this process; it would inevitably occur, or not, for each reader, according to her eccentricities. But he does mention it, lest his claim to universality, and hence his texts, go unnoticed.

The second article of the treaty narratively ratified by all three authors to allow the homosexual and "universal" subjects to coexist peacefully--to remain true to their own subjectivity without abandoning the uniform objectivity the canon demands--consists of an attempted adherence (however incoherent) to some form of the classic narrative structure recapitulating subject-formation, the Bildungsroman[38]. Proust manages to adhere very closely to it, far as many of his revolutionary conclusions drawn along the way deviate from its premises. Even though his analysis of all human activity, especially his defenses of homosexuality, sadomasochism and all other such

[38] This narrative structure is routinely summarized, as it is (to cite a typical, rather than authoritative source) in W.F. Thrall, A. Hibbard and C.H. Holman's Handbook to Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, 1960), as one "which recounts the [development] of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and 'the art of living'" (p.31). Its foundational prototype is Goethe's Wilhelm Meister; but perhaps the most salient exemplar for the gay male writer, who must similarly accomodate the structure to the development of a protagonist traditionally categorized as "other," is Brontë's Jane Eyre.

"incomprehensible" aberrations, rests on his radically solipsistic claim that "an objective fact, an image, differs according to the internal state in which we approach it" (III:528), he does not thereby renounce his own claim to objectivity, but proceeds, without reservation, at great length, with unshaken confidence and authority to explain the Truth About Everything, not only as if his own internal state were uncolored by many (if not all) of the aberrations for which he advocates tolerance, but as if his were the sole viewpoint unencumbered by any distorting internal state at all. Similarly, his analysis of subjectivity completely undermines the continuity and logical progression of self-formation dramatized in the Bildungsroman, with one comparatively feeble (but all-important) caveat:

> We exist only by virtue of what we possess, we possess only what is really present to us, and many of our memories, our moods, our ideas sail away on a voyage of their own until they are lost to sight. Then we can no longer take them into account in the total which is our personality. But they know of secret paths by which to return to us (III:497).

The only antidote to this "fragmentary and continuous death that insinuates itself throughout the whole course of our life, detaching from us at each moment a shred of ourself" (I:722) and perpetually bringing about "a change...which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person" (III:499) is the haphazard, unpredictable, uncontrollable phenomenon of involuntary memory, during which a past self fleetingly steals along the secret path of a common physical sensation to intersect momentarily with the present self. Yet by enshrining this elusive phenomenon, this one precious teacupful remaining from the once

oceanic unity of the self, as the well-spring of his entire narrative, Proust manages--or, according to a more skeptical interpretation also permitted by the text, almost manages--to rehabilitate the project of the Bildungsroman nonetheless. For the whole novel thus becomes the story of how its teller, and hence the story itself, came to be--how the stimulus of involuntary memory made possible the reconstruction of his self which reveals, yet paradoxically at the same time transcends, its inevitable, continual deconstruction. When, at the very end of Time Regained, the narrator's envisioning of the possibility of such a monumental narrative coincides with his completion of it, human potential resolves into human accomplishment, individual subjectivity merges unproblematically into universal objectivity in precisely the manner the Bildungsroman formula dictates, and the reader is reassured that, "even if the results were [i.e. have been] to make them [i.e. us] resemble monsters" (III:1107), their achievement proves the moral of every story conforming to that formula:

> [N]either our greatest fears nor our greatest hopes are beyond the limits of our strength--we are able in the end both to dominate the first and to achieve the second (III:1091).

But the reader is also left in the end to wonder whether the "we" who are able to dominate is the same "we" who feared and hoped--and indeed whether the successive replacement of one with the other isn't all that makes this "achievement" possible--in which case this seeming affirmation of the developing, unified, fulfillable self is (also? instead?) a negation of it.

Each of the four contemporary novels under consideration is

structured around an equally conflicted incorporation of the Bildungsroman formula. Both Holleran's Dancer and White's Nocturnes, the earlier pair of the four, frame narratives outlining the development of a homosexual subject within a (real or imagined) exchange between two gay men, one of whom "gives" his narrative to the other. In Dancer the author, still caught up in the whirlwind life of the gay "circuit," sends his friend, who has left the circuit to enter rural seclusion, the story of two similar friends, one (Sutherland) who remains (or will remain) there until the bitter end, the other (Malone) who also chooses to leave it behind. Malone is given a full life-history outlining his development from religiously devout child to frustrated, closeted young executive to disillusioned "doomed queen;" Sutherland is given only the vivid persona of the latter, remaining staticly archetypal throughout. But the restoration, through Malone, of the successive selves culminating in a willing absorption into the seemingly ageless, originless stereotype represented through Sutherland--the development of a comprehensible subjectivity for the "incomprehensible" doomed queen--seductive as it is, ends inconclusively, just where the Bildungsroman formula would have it be most conclusive, with the sudden death and mysterious disappearance of its two protagonists. In the final letter closing the novel, the author's friend refuses to speculate about the central protagonist's fate:

> Malone has disappeared, true, and we have no idea where he is or what he is doing (as if that would tell us what to do and where to go, when in fact we must find the answers in ourselves)...(Dancer, p.248)

...as Holleran evidently would have all other readers of Malone

and Sutherland's story do, rather than follow their example.

In Nocturnes the narrator addresses a lost lover in an effort to construct from memory the understanding of him he lacked during their affair:

> Like Isis, I fly up and down this long river, my brother, searching for the parts of your broken body that I might piece it together again (p.57).

But these parts, he finds, are inextricably entwined with his own past, are as much parts of himself as of his lover. As the boundary between the two blurs--as the lover's character becomes ever more obviously a subset of the narrator's, contained as the one is entirely within the other--his narrative becomes as much the reconstruction of his own identity, in the manner of Proust, as of his former lover's. "I was lying in bed reading the biography of a great man whose genius deserted him," he mentions casually at one point, only to add suddenly at the end of a later, (until then) unrelated paragraph, "The genius who deserted me was you" (Nocturnes, p.11). The narrator rediscovers his genius, in both senses playfully trading places here, as his narrative progresses, but he cannot reach his hoped-for understanding of his lover or himself; for, even though what remains of his lover exists entirely within him, and hence the "you" he addresses is but a projection of the "I" through which he speaks, he cannot resolve them into one another, cannot integrate the subpart into the whole containing it, and at the novel's close is left

> "...arms folded in resignation before the maddening vision of a man or god who has died, gone away or never existed save in the tense, opaque presences of those things and people, who, by virtue of claiming attention but denying the understanding, of demanding love at the cost of rewarding sympathy, must be addressed as

> 'You.'" And indeed, after I have risen from the stone step that left its icy wet imprint on my skin and have resumed my prowl, the fronts of some houses congenially proclaim they are on my side, open to inspection, tolerant of what they see--they are all "I's" that speak to my experience, whereas other houses--incomprehensible, disturbing, yet brimming over with mysterious invitations to happiness or pain--they must be called "You" (Nocturnes, p.147).

Thus the "I" and "you" of the narrative are no mere rhetorical contrivances, but represent a real, impenetrable barrier within the narrating self that is unavoidably mirrored in its perceptions, projected onto the world it perceives, preventing either self or world from being a transparent, organic whole, and thereby rendering any integration between the two beside the point.

The two later, more autobiographical novels come closer to fulfilling the Bildungsroman formula, but still fall ambiguously short of it. While the narrator of each relates his struggle toward a new, more unified self able to accept his homosexuality and reconcile it with all other aspects of his life, neither narrative includes the actual achievement of this goal, and both leave the reader in doubt about the narrator's ability to achieve it ever. In Story White builds his narrator's scattered reminiscences to a Climactic Moment, a rite of passage marking the threshold between childhood and adulthood, innocence and initiation; but, for the reader as well as the narrator, its validity is as equivocal as its occurrence is contrived:

> I who was always conscious of the formlessness of real life now saw it imitate art, though the meaning of this action, which was surely turning out to be tragic, escaped me (Story, p.213).

Even before his betrayal of Mr. Beattie, the narrator senses that

his motivation stems from an impulse to imitate a scenario regardless of its probably regrettable consequences (as perhaps White himself sensed about his own motivation for composing this scene). Once its meaning does catch up with him, his suspicion of impending tragedy is confirmed, if suppressed:

> I who had so little power--whose triumphs had all been the minor victories of children and women, that is, merely verbal victories of irony and attitude--I had at last drunk deep from the adult fountain of sex (p.217).

What he tastes from this "adult fountain" for the first time is not literally "sex," which he has already had with several other males, including one adult hustler (cf. p.57), but the power of homophobia pregnant within sex between men, and the thrill of wielding it like a "real man" for once instead of being victimized by it. His victory re-enacts on another his own defeat; and since, just before it occurs, he has already confessed "how much I [later] repented what I'd done to him" (p.215), it rings disappointingly bitter and hollow, not triumphant, on the reader's expectant ear, which has been prepared by all the formulaic signals for something grander and more self-affirming.

Holleran concludes Nights on an equally inconclusive, if not quite as dissonantly cynical, chord. Having developed, like his predecessor Malone, from an introverted, bookish, devoutly Catholic boy into a gay man torn between the two worlds represented by the letter-writers in Dancer, the frenetic gay social scene of New York City and the comforting yet confining cloister of his parents' home in the rural South, the narrator Paul becomes convinced as he approaches middle age that he must free himself from his compulsive oscillation between these

worlds, and closes his narrative with an Easter resolution to resurrect from his past a new, independent, more unified personality:

> As I sat there in my silent room I saw these memories would be with me forever, that wherever they were, I was: some part of me. But the life I must begin was my own--a separate person's. This was difficult. For I realized that so much memory and desire swirl about in the hearts of men on this planet that, just as we can look at Neptune and say it is covered with liquid nitrogen, or Venus and see a mantle of hydrochloric acid, so it seemed to me that were one to look at Earth from afar one would say it is covered completely in Ignorance (Nights, pp.239-240).

This sudden, telescoping ascent from the narrator's subjectivity into the stratosphere of dizzying objectivity, while in line with the Bildungsroman trajectory toward a stable, all-encompassing self-world relation, launches the narrative past any possible achievement of it, leaving narrator and reader alike adrift in an atmosphere too thin to breathe, too insubstantial to carry the sound of any further confirmation of it, or even to support a realistic expectation that it will ever occur. Nor has it occurred, in Holleran's own estimation, in either his characters' lives or his own:

> It's curious. I realize both my books have the same quality: I'm always writing books as if I'm saying goodbye to something. And then I don't go away. In Dancer, Malone swims off and the people who are writing the letters move to the country. And in [Nights], the narrator comes full circle and realizes all this is over and he must start his own life now. It's a curious psychological ritual I go through, because I always stay where I was. I say goodbye to the life and then remain[39].

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[39] William Goldstein, "PW Interviews: Andrew Holleran," op. cit., p.73 (including portions restored from the unpublished transcript, p.8). The comment about the letter-writers in Dancer reflects perhaps an original intention later revised; in the novel as it is published one has already moved to the country and

And what he remains is separate, unintegrated, a gay man irreconcilable with heterosexist society who, though tempted, cannot in the event bring himself to deprecate or nullify his difference in the name of universality, who will not say goodbye--difficult as it is to remain--to the only life he loves, the only life that lets him love.

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the other remains in the city without indicating any desire to leave.