



## Edmund White

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### Author Profile

Edmund White is best known for two works, *A Boy's Own Story* and *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*. These books are part fiction and part autobiography, and they tell the story of a boy growing up in the 1940's and 1950's, fighting the self-hatred and guilt imposed on him by society because he is homosexual. These books culminate in the Stonewall Inn riots which took place in New York City in 1969. White himself was actually present at this event, which has gained historical significance as the first time that gay people, when faced with arrest during a bar raid, took a stand and fought for the right to be openly homosexual.

White came out as an openly gay writer when he signed his name as coauthor of *The Joy of Gay Sex* (1977), a sex guide that claimed for homosexuals the same right as heterosexuals to a fulfilling sex life. In *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America* (1980), White showed the varieties of gay experience in fifteen major cities, thus countering society's narrow stereotype of "the homosexual." White's fiction and nonfiction tend to be sociological, tracing the often destructive influence of social conventions and prejudices upon character.

In addition to practicing the art of fiction, White has taught creative writing at major universities. White's meditations on gay life and writing are collected in *The Burning Library*. White notes that gay writers often have two audiences: a heterosexual readership who may need to be convinced that homosexuality is not a sickness, a crime, or a sin; and a gay readership, who may look for sensuous descriptions of the male body to confirm their sexual identity.

White has also written on the difficult but important subject of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in two short-story collections, *The Darker Proof* (1988) and *Skinned Alive*. Believing that AIDS has too often been discussed only by heterosexuals interested in it as a medical condition, White, who is himself HIV-positive, tries in his stories to show the human side of those suffering from this disease.

### Suggested Readings

Bergman, David. *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

White, Edmund. "An Interview with Edmund White." Interview by Kay Bonetti. *Missouri Review* 13 (1990): 89-110.

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