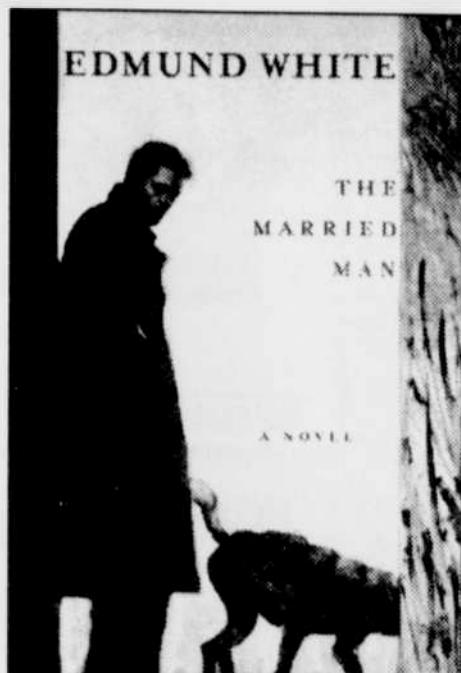


## Altar-native lifestyles

Candid writers reveal what happens when people walk down the aisle before strolling out of the closet

**THE MARRIED MAN**  
by Edmund White.  
Alfred A. Knopf, 2000;  
\$25 hardcover.



Austin Smith, a middle-aged American living in Paris, meets a young married French man named Julien. A complex relationship blossoms. Austin, who is HIV-positive in a time before the latest anti-viral therapies, believes he has found the man who will care for him as his disease progresses and consumes him. But Austin is wrong.

It has been the habit of many 20th century fiction writers to deny autobiographic content in their novels. Hemingway jumped through fiery verbal hoops in his protestations against his characters and situations being "the truth," even as his publisher scrambled to protect himself from libel. Others shunned the structures of narrative and character altogether in an effort to erase biographical comparisons.

Edmund White is not, to our eternal benefit, like most 20th century fiction writers. His writing is unabashedly autobiographical. Each new tale is a glimpse into his own private life, only thinly veiled with the light gauze of exaggeration, a lace of humor and a creative weave of chronology. By thus embracing the self-revelatory aspect of his fiction, White "outs" fiction and the gay experience for readers of all orientations. Here before us is the truth in its beautiful, complicated, angry, silly, mournful fullness.

*The Married Man* largely is based on the relationship between White and his young married French lover, Hubert Sorin, with whom he lived for six years. Names, faces and situations have been altered with White's usual elegant, sly and compassionate imagination.

This novel is revelatory, elegiac and a damn good read. One cannot escape the simple truth that *The Married Man* reveals in excruciating detail the day-to-day hope and trial of loving someone dying from AIDS. Yet the novel is not depressing; instead, it manages to guide us through pain and disappointment into a peaceful hope.

This book is about living as much as it is about dying. It is filled with insight into the aging gay persona, into the way we live and the way we die and, most significantly, into the way we love each other. The novel speaks with experiential bravado on the utter bewilderment of sex in all its befuddled, fumbling glory: candid episodes involving everything from masturbation to anonymous cruising to "kept" relationships to the vindictive way we withhold sex from those we love most.

White miraculously possesses simultaneously two seemingly ambivalent qualities: candor and style. Beneath the specifics of plot, character and language, he has given us, through the years, an honest and intelligent view of gay life in our times.

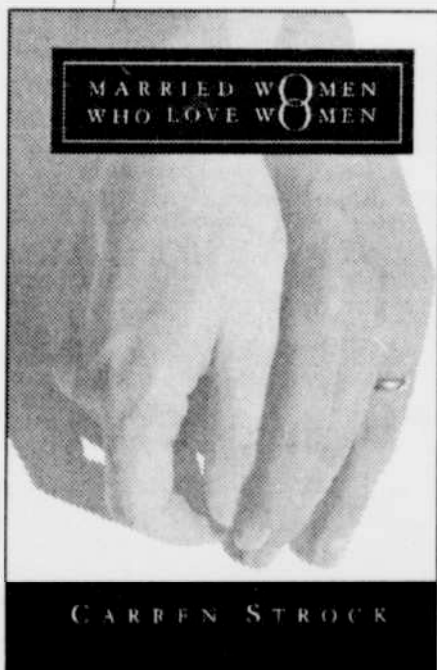
*The Married Man* proves White still has the talent to enlighten us all. —Glenn Williams

**MARRIED WOMEN WHO LOVE WOMEN**  
by Carren Strock. Alyson Publications, 2000; \$12.95 softcover.

Sexual identity never ceases to have its permutations! What happens when a woman, after 25 years of heterosexual marriage, falls in love with her best female friend? What if she comes to identify as lesbian but doesn't choose to leave her marriage?

That's what happened to writer and educator Carren Strock. So earth-shattering was the experience and the ensuing personal journey, she wrote a book about it. Coupled with her own story, Strock interviewed more than 100 married women who love women from across the country. She brings to light the unique challenges that married bisexual and lesbian women face: from first awareness to coming out to sexual joy.

Newly out in paperback, *Married Women Who Love Women* is a primer on coming out, feminism and contemporary lesbian politics and culture. For the married woman who just is discovering her homosexual feelings, or for married lesbian women who have felt isolated for years, this book will be an essential—and welcome—entryway to self-awareness and community.



The personal revelations are the heart of Strock's book. Readers alternately will be moved and challenged by the variety of perspectives and choices her interviewees have made in their lives. Not only

do many married women who love women (MWLWs, as Strock has self-helpfully dubbed them) experience a renegotiation of their sexuality, their notions of marriage are challenged as well.

Some women find ways of accommodating their seemingly disparate needs. Rosalie lives and sleeps with her husband, Jack, and spends time with her female lover, who lives next door. They consider one another family now.

Many of the women choose to stay in their marriages, although not all as happily as Rosalie. For others, discovery of their homosexuality leads to the dissolution of their marriages.

Although Strock's analysis and synthesis of lesbian sexuality can be a bit preachy and simplistic at times, she has written an important book that can help other married lesbian and bisexual women feel less isolated and live fuller lives. —Meg Daly

■ GLENN WILLIAMS writes poetry, prose, plays, periodica and porn in Portland.

MEG DALY is co-editor of the anthology *Letters of Intent: Women Cross the Generations to Talk About Family, Work, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism*. She is unmarried and has loved both women and men; you may write to her at [megdaly@europa.com](mailto:megdaly@europa.com).

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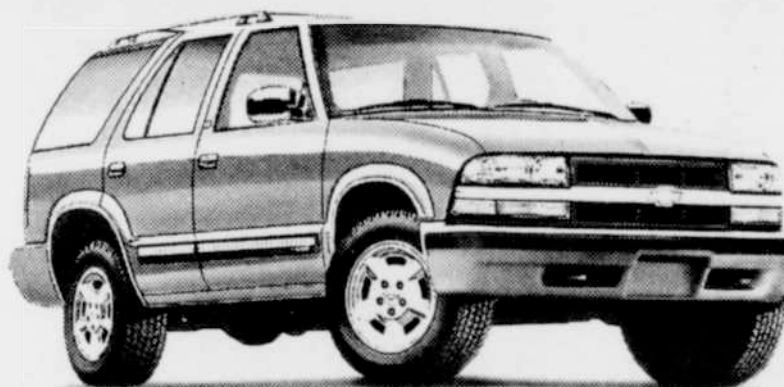
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