



The Married Man

Edmund White

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In Edmund White's most moving novel yet, an American living in Paris finds his life transformed by an unexpected love affair.

Austin Smith is pushing fifty, loveless and drifting, until one day he meets Julien, a much younger, married Frenchman. In the beginning, the lovers' only impediments are the comic clashes of culture, age, and temperament. Before long, however, the past begins to catch up with them. In a desperate quest to save health and happiness, they move from Venice to Key West, from Montreal in the snow to Providence in the rain. But it is amid the bleak, baking sands of the Sahara that their love is pushed to its ultimate crisis.

The Married Man Details

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Bill says

I've read other books featuring a May- September romance, so I wasn't expecting much as far as that plot element went. What made this one so fascinating were the supporting characters, the friends of each of the men, and their interactions with the partner. But what really won me over was the author's obvious love for France. Though much of the story takes place elsewhere, Paris is never out of mind. I loved how White would often use a phrase, and then include the French translation. I could almost hear it being spoken as I read it. As for the ending, after the men try to get every last bit out of life in the time they have together, it wasn't hard to see what was coming. But even then, what Austin learns about Julien was a revelation.

Kate says

This was a strange book. Edmund White doesn't bother trying to create likable characters, nor does he stray away from taboos or any depiction of gay men that might be condemned as stereotypical or kinky. I like that about him; he's never PC. The way these characters wandered around, travelling, while one was dying from AIDS I found oddly compelling. This is not a "fun" read, nor is it conventional by any means. It's bizarre and troubling, and I generally kept wanting to turn the page.

Kent Kahn says

As a gay millennial man, I think it is very important to read and be connected to the history our culture. The AIDS epidemic is one that my generation often are not knowledgeable about. We take for granted the carefree lifestyle that we are accustomed to nowadays. I am also a scientist and reading novels like this remind me how far we have come in just decades and how much further we have to go.

White does a formidable job in transporting me to a time that I only learn about in school. He makes me feel the pain and fear that gay men lived during this dark time.

Austin was socially privileged. He had access to Parisian elite social networks yet I felt his loneliness whilst reading this book. His friends leaving him one by one. Although he still had a number of heterosexual acquaintances, his gay friends whom he shared a different part of his life, disappeared slowly.

Austin was also wealthy and privileged compared to your average man. Yet I also experienced his helplessness. Amidst his resources, none can be used to save the ones he loved the most.

For most parts of the novel I tried to read through it slowly because I simply wanted the moment to last. I felt a warm and cozy aura whilst reading this book even though we were talking about AIDS. I attribute this to his descriptive style of writing. This same writing however made me want to fast forward through some parts of the novel that were overly descriptive.

One of the best novels I have read so far. Thank you White for this journey.

Glenn Sumi says

Edmund White follows up his acclaimed autobiographical trilogy (*A Boy's Own Story*, *The Beautiful Room Is Empty*, *The Farewell Symphony*) with *The Married Man*, a richly textured novel about love, sex and mortality.

A sort of gay response to Thomas Mann's *Death In Venice*, the book opens breezily enough with a pickup scene in a Parisian gym, where the middle-aged American furniture scholar Austin meets the younger, and married, French architect Julien. The two exchange numbers, and before long they're embarked on a love affair that takes them through chatty dinner parties, an amicable divorce, and then, when AIDS rears its head, some abrupt changes of locale and sentiment.

White's working on an ambitious Jamesian canvas here, introducing us to half a dozen cultures in just over 300 pages. And he succeeds. The prose is poetic yet controlled, erotic and sensuous. Think Proust on poppers.

Austin can't enter a room without White describing, in a gently ironic way, the room's contents and, especially, its people. Sometimes irony gives way to satire, as when Austin moves back to the States after a long absence and encounters early-90s-style academic political correctness.

If the multiple shifts in geography confuse and seem like a novelist's stratagem to write off expensive trips to Cancun, Key West, Venice, Rome and Marrakesh – I'm not exaggerating – they do eventually capture the characters' restless search for lost time.

Essentially, the novel is a gay love story, not just between Austin and man-with-a-past Julien but between Austin and his small circle of ex-lovers and friends, male and female. It's about the mystery and transience of life and love. It's about living fully in the present.

What's most refreshing, though, is that White, who just turned 60, never apologizes for the age and erudition of his characters.

As Virginia Woolf once wrote about *Middlemarch*, this is a novel for grown-ups.

David Clement says

This book is beautifully written.

The themes contained within (shame, love, guilt, duty) are the ingredients to many great tales of doomed romance. However, the fact that the relationships are conducted under an ever creeping shadow of HIV and AIDS lends this book a desperate and claustrophobic feel. That said, White never allows the story to become morose and moves it along at good pace, never outstaying its welcome in any one location.

The characterisation is impeccable and wholly believable and while the more descriptive elements of the disease's ravages are graphically portrayed, White never allows the characters to lose their dignity.

The vividly described locations further enhance the beauty and tragedy of the story.

Definitely 5/5.

Linda Dahl says

This book was "beautifully written," in an old-fashioned way. Full of snobbery, slovenliness and mysteriously always having enough money to live well though seldom working, the main character Austen is also kind, humble and alive to the terrors of giving yourself to love.

That this book was a love affair from a gay male sensibility fascinated and yes, repelled me, female, straight, often, but it won me with its ribbony story of people caught among the roles they want, need and have to assume. Dying assumes its important role in this book.

Edmund White is an author I am going to read more of. He is almost as good as it gets.

Charmless says

The looming tragedy that I felt the whole time that I was reading this book is the only reason why I'm not giving it a five-star rating. I was expecting this book to be a bit melodramatic because of the subject matter (AIDS and a lover dying) but it's really more of a realist's perfect tragic love story.

White is an exquisite writer but I was so overwhelmed with sadness by the time I finished this book that I feel as if I need to lash out at the story's tragedy by blindly removing a perfect star from its rating to make myself feel better.

Most of the time, when I read one of the author's books, I usually just feel like I'm watching a beautiful film because of the very lyrical nature of White's prose. However, this time around, I felt as if I was part of the film crew, inevitably being transported to each and every scene, from the romance in Paris to the tragedy in Morocco, and every place in between, with the hopeful journey from the "Paradise Island" of the Keys featuring a new young God in the main character Austin's life wrapping the story.

In the early part of my reading, I thought the title referred to Julien (the lover) being married, heterosexually married. However, by the time I finished, it was then that I realized that the author was most probably referring to the general idea of what it is to be a married man; the ideal married man, the ideal husband who loves and cares for his partner no matter what, and in whom, even a young God can find solace and comfort.

If only we could all be such a man!

Nicholas says

Beautifully descriptive although I feel like it's much too long. At times I felt I was reading just to get it over with.

Wendell Hennan says

Much like life, the story starts out, every line filled with beautiful descriptions of scenes and emotions and steadily declines into the despair of two men infected with AIDS. Austin, an American in his fifties meets a much younger married man and their meeting evolves into a life long relationship, ending with Julien's death on their last travels in Morocco. Edmund White is a masterful writer, describing both surroundings and feelings and emotions with symphonic clarity. A beautiful albeit sad story.

Hjwoodward says

My overwhelming takeaway from this book is the protagonist's kindness: notwithstanding his flaws. Austin is a faulty human being (For example he is hesitant to tell prospective lovers of his HIV status. You understand that of course, most of the time they would duck immediately! The fact that he has sex - albeit protected sex - with the married man - and has NOT told him he is HIV positive is dreadful. But White's writing is so powerful you understand ... and forgive, sort of). The story begins where Austin meets a man twenty years younger than he in a gym. He helps him with his weights and the man scrutinises him as he thanks him. Austin knows himself well. At forty-nine he is flattered by the man's long look. He is completely aware of the fact that he is the kind of man who needs constant "transfusions of interest and affection". He then leaves it to Julien (the married man) to contact him if he chooses and, well, he does. You get the feeling Austin goes for what he can get (even if they are just a few crumbs from a married person's table!) but it comes as a bit of a shock to you as the reader as well as to Austin when Julien finally leaves his wife and moves in with him. Tragically, Julien develops AIDS and - although it is possible he didn't get the virus from Austin - Austin takes care of him through the years while the disease takes its inevitable toll. The fact that Austin is nursing a former lover through the same disease simply underlines the fact that Austin is a kind and caring human being. Both these chaps are not easy companions and the situation is practically intolerable many times. The detail is beautiful and excruciating. I couldn't put the book down. Edmund White has a way of drawing you in to his world whether the country is France, America or Morocco and you are totally aware of the differences and the beauties of each.

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Nicola says

The premise of *The Married Man* sounded Alan-Hollinghurst-ish enough to ring my bell: aging gay writer, Austin -- an American living in Paris -- falls in love with a charmingly-earnest younger man, Julien, who still seems caught up in his soon-to-be-ex-wife, Christine.

The ingredients of a pleasing yarn are all there: Edmund White is frank about sexuality and inquisitive about the oddities of Parisian society, and the off-kilter love story of Austin and Julien should be enough to glue the novel together.

Unfortunately, it's really, really not.

White writes well, but I found his narrative tiringly digressive. He can't seem to focus his attention long

enough to really make the reader care about Austin and Julien.

Though there is real horror inherent in the novel -- the protagonist is HIV-positive -- I couldn't shake the feeling that it just seemed to be yet another novel about rich white dudes and their "problems". (White takes great pains to tell the reader that Austin lives hand-to-mouth, while also describing his lovely Parisian apartment; the gourmet dinners he cooks; the charming travel breaks he takes; along with his unstrenuous job. Gee, life's tough.)

Maybe White manages to bring *The Married Man* to a compelling conclusion, but I simply couldn't be bothered to read past page 80.

Len says

An often beautiful and also sad commentary on gay men in the early days of AIDS. Though one of our "tribe's" best-known authors, this is the first Edmund White book I've read, and I'm actually quite torn by it. His writing is fantastic, no question, and he can conjure Morocco, Paris, Providence or Key West so much that you could close your eyes and feel that you're there. The part that leaves me torn is the often superficial, childlike way in which he portrays gay men, and I don't know if it is because that is not the way that I want people to think we are, or because that is not the way that I want people to know that we sometimes are. At times when my gut reaction was "oh, that's so over the top", a few moments later I might recall some situation or someone I have known, and went "oh, wait a second". Certainly, if not mostly for gay men, a thought provoking take on who we are, who we have been, what our relationships look like, and all that we have been through.

Dan says

Our preeminent gay author delivers a heartbreakingly account of life - and, ultimately, death - with AIDS for a group of modern-day expat friends splitting their time between Paris and the States. While at times White's treatment seems aloof, deferring to the supposed superiority of French culture and European manners, his approach is a calculated one, lulling the reading into a beautiful - the man has an absolute gift for description - and genteel world before unharnessing the fatal blow. White shows the ephemerality of queer life here, the blanket rejection by the straight world and the subsequent necessity to create these inter-generational, inter-class connections that earlier felt rarified and pretension. A master stylist.

If you liked this, make sure to follow me on Goodreads for more reviews!

Josh says

White's later novel is much more emotionally accessible than *A Boy's Own Story*. I was touched several times by his insights into the feelings of a gay man regarding love. I do wish White hadn't ended the book the way he did, though. I feel like he avoided the emotionality of Julien's death. The rest of the book was markedly more moving than *Story*, so it's a bit disappointing to see him revert to showing his protagonist's denial of the grief rather than the grief itself. All the same, it was a very good read and much better than the other two books of his I've read. I was engaged most of the time. And the sadness White has endured as a

survivor of the 80s AIDS crisis came across. A new vulnerability emerged. Maybe some day he'll drive it totally home. But then maybe the message within his writing is that someone having survived all he has is by necessity emotionally constrained.

Marguerite says

Maybe the most honest depiction of a gay, HIV-positive couple I've seen. Despite the compelling topic, it managed to bore me. Edmund White's writing is lovely. I appreciated the expatriate American point of view, too. But less -- party chat, travelogue, dialogue with the mirror -- would have been more.
